

Letter 14: 18 March 1518, Weinsberg, Johannes Oecolampadius to Capito

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[Summary]: Capito has reported that certain people are criticizing Oecolampadius' preaching on three counts: he is not entertaining; he is not severe enough; and he fails to take his departure from a biblical text, as the rules of preaching demand. Oecolampadius defends himself at length against the first accusation. He condemns the *risus paschalis*, the custom of delivering a humorous sermon at Easter, which often involves inappropriate practical jokes. He does not object to wit but doubts that the common people will understand subtle jokes. He also does not approve of priests being theatrical and scurrilous. Perhaps the people find it entertaining, but one must not use popular taste as a standard for evaluating the quality of a sermon. Joking does not earn a preacher respect; it earns him ridicule. Erasmus has expressed that very well in his *Folly* who is not foolish at all. Some people are critical of his wit. Why are they not critical instead of the filthy jokes of Poggio Bracchiolini, whose *Facetiae* are used by some preachers as source material? To support his views on humour in sermons, Oecolampadius quotes extensively from Scripture, classical literature and patristic writings. In view of such weighty testimony, Oecolampadius' critics must take care not to be considered heretics. He shares Johann Geiler von Keysersberg's opinion on the *risus paschalis* and quotes his critical remarks. He then briefly answers the other two accusations brought against him. He does not want to be severe because the preacher should not be a tyrant; and he does not accept the rule that the preacher must begin with a specific biblical text. Sometimes it may be better to explain the import of a whole epistle than to spend an hour analysing a few words. He invites Capito to share with him his thoughts on the subject.