

# Reviews



**BEGINNINGS: KEYS THAT OPEN THE GOSPELS**, by Morna D. Hooker. Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press, 1997. Pp. 97. \$12.00.

Here's a volume that I'll be taking off my shelf every November in preparation for the upcoming lectionary cycle. Dr. Hooker's offering is like a refresher course on the gospels. The thesis of the book (originally a four-part lecture at the University of Victoria) is simple: while the story told by the evangelists is very similar, their introductions are unique and different. Each of the four gospel writers "provided us with an introduction that stressed the particular theological themes that *he* considered important, and the ideas that he wants us to look out for as we read the rest of his book" (43).

Organized into four brief chapters (only twenty pages each), Dr. Hooker uses form- and narrative-critical tools to describe each gospel's introduction as a "key":

1. A Dramatic Key: Mark 1:1-13
2. A Prophetic Key: Matthew 1-2
3. A Spiritual Key: Luke 1-2
4. A Glorious Key: John 1:1-18

Dr. Hooker shows how Mark's gospel employs dramatic irony: the events of the story, not comprehended by the participants, are comprehended by the reader/audience because of information given before the action started, in the introduction.

How many of us skip Matthew's introduction—the genealogy of Jesus—to get to the birth narrative? Yet in this apparently boring list, Dr. Hooker finds important clues to Matthew's purpose: establishing Jesus' origin, or genesis. She notes that the material that follows the genealogy, entitled "the birth of Jesus the Messiah," is not

about the birth of Jesus as much as it's about Mary and the Holy Spirit. The author notes:

Matthew holds together two ideas that seem to us to be contradictory: on the one hand his descent (through Joseph) from the royal line; on the other, his conception through the Holy Spirit. And both tell us about Jesus' "origin." (30)

From the start, Matthew is careful to show Jesus as the fulfillment of prophecy, through both human and divine legacy.

Luke's gospel has been said to have not one introduction, but four (1:1; 1:5; 3:1; 4:14). But in each introduction, writes Dr. Hooker, Luke carefully demonstrates the reliability of his account by referring, implicitly or by reference, to the Hebrew scriptures.

I found the author's treatment of John especially helpful. The beginning of the prologue is a midrash on Genesis 1:1-5—not a novel comparison for most preachers. But Dr. Hooker asserts that the prologue ends with an exposition of Exodus 33, when Moses on Mount Sinai asks God to show him his glory, his character, his face. For a man to behold God's glory would mean death. But Moses comes down the mountain with some evidence of God's character: stone tablets inscribed with commandments.

Having remembered that story, we discover a greater event in John's prologue: "And the Word became flesh, and made his home among us, and *we have seen his glory...*" In Jesus, we have not the reflected glory of God, not the reported words of God, but "the Word made flesh," God's glory among us.

If I were teaching a college or seminary course on scriptural interpretation, I would consider using this book as a supplement

tary text because it provides the student of scripture with four examples of how critical skills ought to serve our reading of the text. Not only does the book offer examples, Dr. Hooker also packs short interpretive lessons into her lectures/chapters. For example, her treatment of Matthew 1:23:

All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:  
 “Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,  
 and they shall name him  
 Emmanuel,”  
 which means, “God is with us.”

Scholars no longer see the Isaiah reference as predictive prophecy, but rather as a word of comfort to Isaiah’s contemporaries. So Matthew has ignored the original context, offering the verse as a proof-text for the Messiah. Dr. Hooker:

This way of handing the text of the Old Testament is likely to make scholars blanch....But what Matthew does with this particular text is the kind of thing that spiritual men and women, Jews and Christians, and visionaries such as poets and painters, have always done with the text: they see new meanings in it, and realize its relevance to difference situations.... There is a very important theological principle here: on the one hand, you can treat Isaiah’s words as referring to one event only...on the other, you can say that behind Isaiah’s words is the conviction that God is a God who saves his people again and again and will be with them throughout history. (33-34)

The author also inserts reflections on the complexity of messianic expectations (38), the danger of tampering with translations (27), and the authenticity vs. the historicity of Jesus’ words (75). The book could be used as a text by instructors.

But mostly, preachers could benefit from an annual review of this book. The lectionary both serves and trips up sermon writers; though it does force us to work through a gospel, it can lull us into treating that gospel like a series of episodes. Careful

attention to a gospel’s beginnings during Advent sermons will help the preacher and the hearer stay in tune with that gospel’s particular message throughout the year.

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**MATTHEW’S NARRATIVE USE OF GALILEE IN THE MULTICULTURAL AND MISSIOLOGICAL JOURNEYS OF JESUS**, by Paul Hertig. Mellen Biblical Press Series 46. Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 1998. Pp. ix + 189. \$89.95.

Geographical and topographical references within biblical literature have long been recognized as more than places on the map that give particularity to events narrated or to images recalled. References to mountains, seas, plains, the wilderness, and more carry symbolic meanings. Jerusalem is more than an urban center of commerce and habitation, and Galilee is more than a region. The symbolic and theological significance of such places has been underscored in twentieth century New Testament studies by such persons as Ernst Lohmeyer (*Galiläa und Jerusalem*, 1936) and Robert H. Lightfoot (*Locality and Doctrine in the Gospels*, 1937) whose works, incidentally, receive no notice in this work.

The author of this book fastens his interest upon Galilee. The evangelist Matthew locates the beginning of Jesus’ ministry there (4:13-16), the end of his ministry (28:16-20), and many of Jesus’ activities in between. As in the case of earlier scholarship, Hertig recognizes that Galilee is not simply a geographical reference marking the area in which a major portion of Jesus’ ministry took place. Instead the term is loaded with symbolic meaning. It symbolizes, for Matthew and his readers, the “gateway” to mission. The very word ‘Galilee’ is an indicator of a missiological theme running through the gospel.

The method of working in this study is to examine three “horizons” of the evangelist

Matthew and then three “horizons” of the church of today. It is the author’s conviction that a study of the first set of three horizons can provide a strategy for carrying out the second set of three.

The first set of horizons, of which the evangelist Matthew was aware, are the biblical [i.e., Old Testament] text concerning Galilee (Isaiah 9:1-2, which Matthew quotes at 4:15-16), contemporary Judaism, and the missionary nature of the church. These three horizons are explained as follows: (1) Matthew portrays Jesus as beginning his ministry in Galilee, a land of mixed population—multicultural, multiethnic, and marginalized. (2) Matthew and his community are aware of contemporary Judaism, primarily Pharisaic, which is hostile toward the people of Galilee and the Matthean community. (3) The evangelist Matthew seeks to “bridge” the two horizons. He writes his gospel to “firmly plant Jewish-Christianity in the soil of Judaism for the sake of the Jews while at the same time exhibiting the universal qualities of Jewish-Christianity and transcending time and place for the sake of the Gentiles” (57).

The second set of three horizons, of which the interpreter of today is aware, are the biblical context [i.e., Matthew’s context], the present context, and the missiological context. These are identified in this way: (1) the great commission in Galilee, with which the Matthean text ends and of which the author provides a detailed exegesis; (2) the church of today, which has retreated from its mission mandate; and (3) the mission of God in diverse contexts within the world, primarily among the marginalized.

The author concludes with some suggestions on how to mobilize congregations for mission. These include partnerships between congregations of different classes and ethnic groups, sharing of buildings and resources, joint mission projects, and similar activities.

The strengths of the book lie in two areas that deserve mention. First, the author’s

exegetical work on Matthew 4:14-16 (the beginning of Jesus’ ministry in Galilee, citing Isa 9:1-2) and on the great commission (28:16-20) is done well, stimulating the reader’s reflection on key passages in the gospel. Second, his descriptive work and call for mission among the marginalized of the world is engaging and important.

What is less well done is the author’s attempt at devising a hermeneutical perspective that takes the reader beyond conventional biblical study and consequent reflection upon the significance of the Matthean texts under study. His use of the metaphor of “horizons,” his assigning them meanings in the way he chooses, and the certainty that the one set of horizons can provide the strategy for the other seems to impede the discussion rather than help carry it along. It is also questionable whether the evangelist Matthew actually tried to bring about reconciliation or build “bridges” between Judaism and the Christian community of which he was a part. That claim, so often made in the book (57, 62, 65, 80, 173), goes beyond exegesis and can be disputed by reference to various passages (cf. 23:1-39 as a start) and much of contemporary Matthean scholarship.

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**PAUL: THE MAN AND THE MYTH**, by Calvin J. Roetzel. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina, 1998. Pp. 269.

Roetzel sets out to paint a portrait of Paul. In so doing he questions some of the major presuppositions that have informed an understanding of Paul. For example, he is not convinced Paul was a Roman citizen or that his formative years were spent in Jerusalem studying under Gamaliel II. He notes that Paul’s identity in Judaism was central throughout his life; however, Roetzel sees Paul more on the margins of his Jewishness. As a strict monotheist, Paul was

brought into conflict with his peers through his focus on the gentile mission and the reality of life “in Christ.”

This is the basic canvas on which Roetzel works and the presuppositions from which his portrait of a human Paul emerges. The palette from which he works draws upon the so-called seven genuine letters of Paul (1 Thess, 1 Cor, 2 Cor, Gal, Phil, Phile, and Rom). Of lesser significance for reconstructing the portrait of Paul’s life is Acts. Where Acts does not reflect Lucan theology and does not contradict Paul’s letters, it is drawn upon as reliable. The portrait of Paul emerges in this volume over six chapters.

Chapter One, The Early Paul, deals with the city of Paul’s birth, Tarsus, and its importance in the ancient world. Roetzel details its rich cultural environment, relationship to Rome, and Jewish presence. As a member of a diaspora Jewish association in Tarsus, it is unlikely that Paul was a Roman citizen; his identity was in the working class. As a student of the Septuagint, Paul became skilled in methods of its interpretation. The Christophany experience of Paul caused him to reevaluate his pharisaic understanding of the Holiness Code, Torah, and inclusion of the gentiles in the Messianic Age.

Chapter Two, The Apostle to the Gentiles, reviews Paul’s call and the role and marks of an apostle in the early church. In drawing on the seven letters and Acts, a portrait of Paul as apostle emerges as the founder of churches, a suffering apostle (focusing on a *theologia crucis*), a miracle worker, and a preacher.

In Chapter Three, The Letter Writer, Roetzel provides an informative word on the way in which these letters not only portray Paul’s person and mission, but also the way in which Paul’s responses provide the content of the gospel. The legacy of letter writing, the function of the letter, and the form of the letter (salutation, thanksgiving, body, closing), are insightful sections of this chapter.

In Chapter Four, The Theologizer, Roetzel deals with Paul’s interactive process with 1 Thessalonians, 1 Corinthians, and Ro-

mans (with excurses on Galatians and 2 Corinthians, works that cannot be precisely dated). In each context, Roetzel focuses on Paul's view of God's election of his converts and their identity as Jesus' people. Working with a verbal expression, "theologizer," rather than a noun, theologian, Roetzel states that the "primary aim of this chapter is to disturb the previous synthesis in order to better appreciate the vitality and dynamism of his theologizing" (94).

The Model Ascetic, Chapter Five, is not an area that is treated with any depth in works on Paul. Roetzel notes that asceticism is frequently thought of in negative terms and the ascetic piety of Paul's time undervalued. The emerging portrait of Paul draws upon these themes. In tracing the foreground of Paul's asceticism, Roetzel draws upon ascetic truth in the Hebrew Bible, Greek philosophy, Hellenistic tradition, diaspora Judaism, Qumran, Pseudepigrapha, and early Christian life. Asserting that Paul could have drawn on these many strands, Paul's life is portrayed as celibate and his view of celibacy as a charismatic gift; however, Paul's appeal is not to his celibacy but Jesus' crucifixion as the model of self-denial.

The concluding chapter, The Mythic Apostle, reflects Roetzel's response to creating a portrait of Paul apart from the Reformation lens of seeing Paul as the great theologian of the early church. Noting that "Paul played almost no role at all in the late first and entire second century" (153), Roetzel indicates that the apostolic legends of this period portrayed Paul rather as "the quintessential celibate, as a powerful miracle worker and martyr" (156). Response to each of these identities is the focus of this chapter.

The volume is well-documented, well-written, and fresh in its approach to creating a portrait of the person Paul. In this work, Roetzel has held together the tension of Paul's humanity and the identity of his life "in Christ." Roetzel concludes: "The theological Paul who is most often pre-

sented to us without the human dimensions is docetic. And a human Paul without a theological dimension is a caricature" (177).

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**FOR OUR SALVATION: TWO APPROACHES TO THE WORK OF CHRIST**, by Geoffrey Wainwright.  
Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997. Pp. xi + 186. \$18.00 (paper).

Some *loci* in Christian dogmatics feature many turns and much traffic. Christology perhaps features the most traveled roads and knotty intersections. Geoffrey Wainwright's slender volume leads to many vistas not usually seen by discussions of the work of Christ. However, it misses an indispensable part of Christ's work.

This book combines two lectures. In its liturgical and biblical avenues, "Senses of the Word" elaborates the manner in which Christ addresses us. "The Threefold Office" argues that the office of priest, prophet, and king plays a role in many other areas of dogmatics.

The ground Wainwright covers cannot help but impress the reader. He will discuss patristic theology and then move quickly to the hymnody of his own tradition, deftly traversing both western and eastern theology. At times, the avenues are only hinted at instead of explored. This, of course, represents the limitation of the extended paper or public lecture.

In the first essay, Wainwright sets out his goals: "We shall identify the Word; we shall examine the event of the Word's becoming flesh; and we shall unfold the consequences that this given mode of God's redemptive self-communication to us has for our response as embodied creatures called to share the life of God" (4). His essay involves considerations of all kinds, and has always in mind a clear liturgical practice (83).

Of the liturgical language available on the shelf of western theology there is no better maxim than Augustine's: sacraments are "visible words." Augustine summarizes for us that no proclamation of the gospel is purely aural and none that is absolutely silent. Wainwright adds to this that God comes to us through all senses, not just sight and hearing. "Since embodiment belongs to our very nature as human beings, it is natural that our Creator should address us by way of our physical senses" (16).

This occurs under the singular auspices of the word of God. Wainwright does not abandon Augustine's principle. He has a lengthy examination of "the Word made flesh" (4-19). Though dense in biblical quotation—one page seems to be a modern catena of scripture—it also shows a full ticket of patristic and modern ecumenical consideration. With the word of God, Wainwright makes sure to note that preaching is a part of the work of Christ. Wainwright will not shirk his tradition: "the preaching of the Word of God is the Word of God" (27).

The remainder of the senses are a catalogue of information on iconography, the role of incense and oils in prayer and chrismation, in addition to many other things. In each instance, Wainwright draws lines from the work of Christ to a particular liturgical piece: "Just as the written Gospels present in the church a verbal portrait of the incarnate, crucified, and risen Christ, so the icons of the church bear visual testimony to his living presence and continuing work" (48). Wainwright stresses that all the senses are addressed in the work of Christ.

At root, this first essay impresses upon the reader time and again that "the particular 'performative words' of the liturgy depend on the Word made flesh and on his continuing address to a faithful community." It may be hoped that such connections as can be drawn will bring liturgy and the work of Christ closer together in our thinking (83).

The discussion of the threefold office of Christ in the second essay holds additional liturgical value. Wainwright aims for them to regain a "vital place in worship" (178). He therefore elaborates the office of prophet, priest, and king from its flowering in Calvin and in ecumenical theology. Additionally, the theme has played an important role in Roman dogmatics and in western hymnody generally. Such hymns are quoted often. In conjunction with each office, he shows that they relate to other *loci*, such as baptism and ecclesiology, supporting the relation of all parts of dogmatics.

The essay argues that the offices recover vital parts of the work of Christ in a manner that is appropriate to the many conditions moderns face (179). In this, "office" and "title" language can be valuable in christology, to suggest that Christ's work is not willy-nilly planning on the part of God. However, the use of these offices obscures the centrality of the cross and resurrection. These are notably absent from the offices, even the priestly office, where Christ's death would normally find some role (158). Wainwright perhaps anticipates these objections: "Lutherans have always focused more narrowly on the person and death of Christ" (105, n. 14). His essay would address the concerns of death and life better if it *were* so narrow. Another fascinating note: Wainwright cites hymns as often as he uses any church father. He notes that he learned the conclusions of Chalcedon in hymns long before ever reading the word "*theotokos*" (85). This attributes value to hymns as a source of theology in a way not normally embraced by systematicians.

This book will provide an impetus for reflection on the various connections between liturgical action and the work of Christ as well as the close relation of the various *loci* of christology, ecclesiology, and other parts of dogmatics. Wainwright aims simply for American Protestants to appropriate more of patristic theology (119). At the least, his volume accomplishes this. Though it is a virtual florilegium of history,

scripture, and theology, a diligent reader will not find Wainwright's book labyrinthine. It may even tempt readers to consider the liturgy in its fullness to identify Christ in his work for us. The chalky letters of "E-S-T" on the table may demand this.

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**AFTER OUR LIKENESS: THE CHURCH AS THE IMAGE OF THE TRINITY**, by Miroslav Volf. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998. Pp. 314. \$28.00.

The question of ecclesiology is perhaps *the* burning issue in current ecumenical conversations. What makes a church a church? There are two basic responses to this question. On one hand there are those who say that the church achieves its identity in the local congregation; on other hand there are those who maintain that the church's identity is established in a common (ordained) ministry. Miroslav Volf, speaking from a Free Church background, falls on the side of those who hold to the former position.

Volf's objective "is an ecumenical ecclesiology—not in the sense of a construct that draws on all traditions but is rooted in none, but in the sense that all the great themes of this unmistakably Protestant ecclesiological melody are enriched by Catholic and Orthodox voices" (xi). To this end he engages in dialogue with the theologies of Karl Ratzinger and John Zizioulas who argue that the church's identity (and unity) is established in a common (ordained) ministry.

Volf does not explicitly state it in the introduction, but clearly the burning issues have to do with the nature of authority, ministry, and charisma. His desire, he says, is to place the "cry of the Free Churches—'We are the church'—into a trinitarian framework and [to elevate] it to the status of an ecclesiological program, and [to do so] in dialogue with Catholic and Orthodox ecclesiologies" (11). The question is clearly

that of the location of the church and of power and authority in the church. Is the church in Rome or Constantinople? Or are we as individual believers the church? Is the location of authority in the ordained ministry? Or in the gathered community? Volf contends that this is not merely a matter of dotting i's and crossing t's: "The ecclesiological dispute concerning the church as community is therefore simultaneously a missiological dispute concerning the correct way in which the communal form of Christian faith today is to be lived authentically and transmitted effectively" (11). He maintains that more than one ecclesiological model can be legitimate. This belief in the legitimacy of a plurality of ecclesiological models is important. He writes, "I wish to demonstrate...that a Free Church ecclesiology can be dogmatically legitimate, can be commensurate with contemporary societies, and, for that reason and under certain conditions, can prove to be superior to other ecclesiologies" (22). Nonetheless, Volf knows that even if the Free Church ecclesiology is the best in this time and in this place, he can benefit from the long tradition of the Orthodox and Catholic ecclesiologies which seek to protect the integrity of the content of the church's faith. For this reason, he has chosen Ratzinger and Zizioulas as dialogue partners since they represent the mainstream of their traditions.

After examining the ecclesiologies of Zizioulas and Ratzinger, Volf moves ahead with his own proposal. First he addresses the question of what makes the church the church. Volf understands the church as "the mutual personal indwelling of the triune God and of his glorified people" (128). Volf builds upon Matt 18:20 and asserts that a congregation (a gathering of believers) is the entire body of Christ proleptically realized in that place (138). The church is constituted by the faith and life of those who gather in Christ's name. For this reason, the means of grace—the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist—are essential to the church even while an ordained ministry is

not. Volf then turns to the question of the relationship between the individual and the community. First of all, it must be acknowledged that nobody comes to faith in a vacuum. The church—the community of faith—is the mother of faith as well as the product of faith (162). To know the content of faith is to know *and* love the church. An authentic and genuine knowledge of faith is impossible apart from love. Volf goes farther and asserts that faith leads humans into the divine *communio*. This entails that Christians are in community with all other Christians (173). This community that is both earthly and divine is a community of love in which the distinctions between family and friends are collapsed: “The church is the fellowship of siblings who are friends, and the fellowship of friends who are siblings” (181). The Spirit is the source of this love that unites. Volf thus establishes the unity of the church in its very plurality (189).

Volf seeks to propose a non-individualistic evangelical ecclesiology. The basis for this ecclesiology is baptism. Because baptism is a trinitarian event, the Trinity is determinative for the church (195). Christians can only be Christians in community just as the divine persons “cannot live in isolation from one another” (206). If the Trinity can be used to undermine the individualism of the Free Church individualistic ecclesiologies, it can also be used to reject more hierarchical ecclesiologies that seek to subjugate individuals to the will of one person whether it be a pope, a bishop, or a patriarch (217). All Christians, Volf says, “have charismata, Christ is acting through all members of the church, and not merely through its officeholders” (228). All members of the church have a common responsibility for the life of the church. Those members who have the gifts necessary for the ordained ministry (a provisional charism as all charismata are) have the responsibility of ensuring that Jesus Christ is confessed and that the sacraments are celebrated (248). They act on behalf of the church *and* of “the name of Christ” (247). Volf’s argument is that the

church is ultimately a democracy in which power resides in the community of individual believers. At the same time it is a democracy which cannot ignore the benefits of an ordained (ordered) ministry. His perspective as a member of a church that sees the primary identity of the church not in the ordained ministry but in the believers is crucial and therefore needs to be heard. This is a book that ought not to be ignored. Those denominations that emphasize the individual need to hear Volf’s admonition that an ordered ministry is essential to the proper exercise of the gifts of the body of Christ. Those denominations that emphasize the ordained ministry need to hear Volf’s challenge to open the gates of ministry to all who have the gifts for ministry. Especially members of these denominations, I think, need to hear his challenge.

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**MISSIONAL CHURCH: A VISION FOR THE SENDING OF THE CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA**, edited by Darrell L. Guder. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998. Pp. viii+280. \$26.00.

“What would an understanding of the church...look like if it were truly missional in design and definition?” (7)

With this basic question in mind, the authors of this volume, an ecumenical team of six noted missiologists associated with The Gospel and Our Culture Network, attempt to lay the foundation for a new vision of the church in North America. In their view, the problems besetting our churches are spiritual and theological in nature, and require a fundamental reorientation based on the mission of God, the notion that the church is the instrument and not the goal of mission, and a radical, inclusive, and transforming gospel message.

The authors stress that mission is, first of all, internal mission to the church. This is



especially true in North America where churches have tended to replicate the voluntary associations of individuals and rational organization which are characteristic of the culture in general. The result is that churches are expected to conform to the culturally-conditioned expectation that they serve as vendors of religious services and goods. The means of escaping this cultural captivity is to rethink our ecclesiology and then proceed to design suitable structures: "We must establish clearly the church's nature and ministry before we proceed to design organizational forms to concretize both in a specific cultural context. Unless we do so, we may fall subject to the illusion that managing the organization is equivalent to being the church" (72).

As this suggests, the authors call on churches to critically re-examine their place within the prevailing culture, and to provide an alternative based on conformity to the life, death, and resurrected power of Jesus Christ. The goal of the missional communities they envision is to provide the resources for "people to unlearn old patterns and learn new ways of living that reveal God's transforming and healing power" (152). Such a community would provide a witness to the world by "inviting questions, challenging assumptions and demonstrating a life not of the world" (117), and would serve as a clear sign of the coming reign of God.

In order to develop missional churches in the North American context, the authors suggest there are three fundamental challenges that must be confronted: (1) in a world characterized by autonomous selves, the churches must revive what it means to be communities of the reign of God, that is, they must "surrender the self-conception of the church as a voluntary association of individuals and live by the recognition that we are a communal body of Christ's followers"; (2) in a secular world of privatized religious faith, the churches must discover what it means to act faithfully on behalf of the reign of God within the public life of their society;

and (3) in a plural world of relativized perspectives and loyalties, the churches must learn to speak in "post-Christendom accents as confident yet humble messengers of the reign of God" (108-109).

The transformation of our churches into missional communities would force us to rethink our commonly held assumptions about the church, including what we mean by pastoral leadership. The authors call for a new paradigm of leadership which will be responsible for "re-forming a collection of consumer, needs-centered individuals to live by an alternative narrative" (200). This would involve moving away from the idea of a professionalized clergy with priestly and pedagogical skills, for, as the authors note, "In the marginalized, missional setting that lies ahead for the church in North America, the pastor-teacher model is insufficient" (214). Leaders in missional communities would, in contrast, focus on cultivating spiritual disciplines of a common life, learning, and mission within the community, and would invite others "to come and see that they too may participate" (209).

Re-thinking our ecclesiology also leads us to question other aspects of communal life, such as what is meant by "membership" in a local congregation. Since this term often implies a sense of completion and passive participation, it may not adequately reflect the more dynamic nature of mission and service required by changing circumstances. Such a shift would be based on an understanding of baptism as "general ordination to Christian service" that prepares the Christian for participation in a pilgrim people that is moving with Christ toward God's promised fulfillment: "The scriptural formation of the community should root deeply the sense of the community as strangers and aliens, people on the road toward the consummation of the kingdom" (246).

This brief description of themes to be found in this book cannot do justice to the large range of issues raised, for the task of creating a missional ecclesiology forces us to examine all of our assumptions about the

nature and practices of the church. This book is most valuable for the questions that it raises and for its attempt to provide a theological and biblical background for a new ecclesiological understanding. If you are looking for practical suggestions or concrete examples, you will not find them here. What you will find is a thorough critique of the church today and a call to re-examine it from a missional perspective. The difficult task of determining what all this means for pastors and lay people in local congregations still needs to be worked out, but one could not hope for a better starting place than this volume.

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**PERFORMING THE WORD: PREACHING AS THEATRE**, by Jana Childers. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998. Pp. 152. \$16.00.

Jana Childers teaches homiletics at San Francisco Theological Seminary and at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California. Immersed in this diverse environment, rich with the intermixture of academics, theology, and the arts, Dr. Childers has found fertile soil for her interest in exploring the similarities between preaching and theater. Theater is, she argues, the “closest cousin” (11) to preaching, and she builds her case from a thorough grounding in and experience with pulpit- and stage-craft. She is trained as an actress, director, pulpiter, and homiletician. Her work falls naturally within a range of recent books on the performative aspects of preaching (see Richard Ward, *Speaking From the Heart*, and Charles L. Bartow, *God’s Human Speech: A Practical Theology of Proclamation*). For preachers who want to explore ways to bring vitality to their sermon delivery and who are not afraid to consider the possibility that the art of preaching lies among the performing arts, this book will

be most useful. Childers not only helps the non-thespian to see the theoretical connections between preaching and drama but urges and guides us to gain practical experience in making our preaching dramatic and lively.

*Performing the Word* unfolds in six chapters. The first two are theoretical. Chapter one considers the question of preaching’s purpose. Childers sees preaching as a living, transforming event which has the negative potential of being dead (when theological language is not wedded to the language of creativity) or flat (from dealing with small issues) and the positive potential of being alive, even volcanic, in its ability to get inside people and move them. “The purpose of lively preaching,” Childers concludes, “might be described as facilitating openness: creating a space where the listeners can be open to change, shaping a moment when the congregation can say a yes or a no that comes from more than the cerebrum” (34). In the second chapter, the particularities of the relationship between theater and preaching are discussed. Especially helpful here, for preachers who are shy about the aesthetic dimensions of their craft, are Childers’ discussions of performance and creativity. She is honest about the typical response: “This is the stuff that embarrasses us and that seems—somehow—out of sync with the gospel” (48). But, she makes a winning argument for considering the aesthetic responsibility that is associated with the art of preaching.

The next three chapters of *Performing the Word* provide the practical means by which preachers can gain “Basic Training for Performance,” learn techniques for “Performing the Text” of scripture and sermon, and learn to bring to the pulpit aspects of “What Actors Know.” Here the reader is led to consider the problems and possibilities of vocal production, oral interpretation of texts, and dramatic technique. These chapters are filled with helpful suggestions and exercises that will enable the reader to practice techniques of performance.

The book concludes with a chapter on the relationship between worship and theater. Just before the curtain descends, the director in Childers steps forward and helps worship leaders to see how they can improve the performance of their public roles by attending to matters of dramatic movement (plot), liturgical movement (blocking), and the use of space and props.

*Performing the Word* is a highly readable and eminently practical resource for pastors and students who are seeking to bring life to their pulpit work. It is built upon a theoretical foundation but does not become either “dead” (theologically uncreative) or “flat” (without depth). Its greatest benefit will derive from the clear discussions of performance issues and the exercises that guide preachers to bring to their preaching the enlivening skills of actors and performing artists. There is an additional quality in Childers’ work that commends the book. Without discussing the issue of language and how its careful selection can make for lively preaching, Childers writes with imagination and uses strong, simple, evocative prose to poetic effect. Here she demonstrates another artistic aspect of preaching and her medium is its own persuasive message. The preacher and student will find in *Performing the Word* both a model for crafting effective language and for enlivening its delivery through use of the techniques of the theater.

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