



**JESUS THROUGH THE CENTURIES: HIS PLACE IN THE HISTORY OF CULTURE**,  
by Jaroslav Pelikan. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985. Pp. 270. \$22.50.

The distinguished Sterling Professor of History at Yale University has produced a rare gem. It is a book which he thinks he has always wanted to write. Many readers will think it is a book they have always wanted to read. They will not be disappointed. Written in a lean but inviting style and elegantly crafted by Yale University Press, the book is a total delight. It is difficult to imagine anyone beginning to read and failing to finish it or, having read it once, not coming back to it.

Pelikan states his basic conviction in the first sentence of the introduction.

Regardless of what anyone may personally think or believe about him, Jesus of Nazareth has been the dominant figure in the history of Western culture for almost twenty centuries. If it were possible, with some sort of supermagnet, to pull up out of that history every scrap of metal bearing at least a trace of his name, how much would be left?

The focus of this study is Jesus rather than Christianity or Church, theology or Christology, or even the Gospel. When the story has been told, Pelikan concludes and the reader will agree that there is more in him than is dreamt in the philosophy and Christology of the theologians (232-33). However convinced one may be that Jesus can be captured in a doctrine or a formula, a phrase or a word, it is difficult to imagine walking through this portrait gallery and announcing, while examining a particular one, that it is correct and that all the others are false.

In his preparation for these public lectures at Yale (the William Clyde DeVane Lectures), Professor Pelikan made the bold decision to assign titles for Jesus to specific centuries and to explore how the cultural and ecclesiastical life of a period actually coalesced around that title and the image to which it pointed. There are eighteen chapters, each an elaboration of a perspective on Jesus and each covering a specific period in Western cultural history. The eighteen chapters are: The Rabbi; The Turning Point of History; The Light of the Gentiles; The King of Kings; The Cosmic Christ; The Son of Man; The True Image; Christ Crucified; The Monk Who Rules the World; The Bridegroom of the Soul; The Divine and Human Model; The Universal Man; The Mirror of the Eternal; The Prince of Peace; The Teacher of Common Sense; The Poet of the Spirit; The Liberator; The Man Who Belongs to the World. Each chapter begins with a New Testament passage, demonstrating that each portrait is rooted in the scriptures. There is a different cross at the beginning of each chapter and there are eighteen striking pictorial illustrations. Some of the images are stronger than others. Yet the author does a remarkable job of demonstrating the validity of the characterizations and of pointing to the overlapping of periods. When a perspective fades and later reappears, the reader is informed about it. There are

broad strokes here, but it is finally the exquisite details that bring the greatest pleasure.

Most beautiful things are to be enjoyed rather than used. But the use of this book will only enhance its beauty. And it can be used in at least several ways.

It can be read most obviously as a guide through twenty centuries of Western history, focused on various images of the man Jesus. For anyone who thinks that Jesus constitutes the continuity in Christian history rather than, for instance, some Pauline soteriological formula, the book is a reminder of the many ways that the images are expressed in musical, literary, pictorial, and political as well as theological modes.

But the book can also be read theologically and this should be no surprise. One should expect to learn a great deal about the history of Christian thought from any book by Jaroslav Pelikan.

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Not to be overlooked is the great value of this book for preaching. Used as a desk reference volume, it could help to focus any text on Jesus and to fill in the colors and the shadings and the textures of that particular way of presenting him. The material is so varied and so interesting that sermons could be enriched over a considerable period of time by making a habit of consulting it regularly.

Careful readers will have question marks in their margins from time to time. Most of these will indicate places for interesting, but intramural, scholarly debate. The one major exception is the chapter on The Liberator. The principal examples are taken to be the Epistle to the Galatians, Abraham Lincoln, Gandhi, and Martin Luther King. Apart from one reference to Casalis and one quotation from Gutiérrez, there is in this chapter no recognition whatever that "Liberation Theology" even exists as a contemporary phenomenon. It is an omission difficult to explain in a book published in 1985.

Yet this volume is a treasure. It is a gem with many facets. Buy it. You will enjoy it, and use it, for many years.

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**PROTECTING THE VULNERABLE**, by Robert E. Goodin. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985. Pp. 207. \$25.00.

Recently, a Minnesota legislator quoted by the *Minneapolis Star and Tribune* defended his vote to cut welfare benefits to dependent women and children significantly by saying, "I would not have voted for the 30 percent [cut] if it were the final bill...you just can't do that to people and expect them to survive." That unintentionally ironic statement captures a key moral problem in contemporary American political and social life: we cannot decide for whom we are responsible and what that responsibility calls us to do. The legislator recognized a conflict between the needs of these vulnerable people and the desires of his constituency, but he apparently did not have any intellectual framework which would help him to resolve this moral conflict and act on his choice rationally.

While a mainstay of the Democratic-Republican debate had been over the responsibility of government to the vulnerable, the problem takes on ominous new shapes this year. Example: we in the Western world have been literally forced by the media to witness a massive famine in Africa, and yet we seem unwilling or unable to muster clearly available resources to respond to the disaster. Example: Congressional leaders have eagerly embraced the Gramm-Rudman-Hollings law so that they can avoid making hard choices among increased taxes, defense, and domestic spending. As a heteroreligious, multiethical society, we seem unable to find an inclusive secular language or theory which can help us work toward a consensus on the nature of our individual and collective duties toward those who cannot care for themselves. So the tension between religious and secular communities erupts in odd forms, such as in prosecution of hard-working, patriotic churchgoers who harbor Central American refugees.

Goodin's book is a very helpful new approach to this dilemma about responsibility. He begins with popular liberal philosophy, which derives responsibility from individual commitment and choice. This voluntaristic model suggests, for instance, that we have moral duties to our family members because we have promised them our care, or that we are bound to keep our contracts because we have chosen to undertake them. Most legal duties are also premised on the assumption that we have no responsibility to help anyone unless we have freely committed ourselves to do so, although we may not affirmatively act to harm either the stranger or the friend. The most frequently used legal paradigm for this precept is the drowning child: the law does not impose a duty on any stranger to rescue her, though a parent who fails to act may be held responsible, and the stranger who does choose to save her must act with reasonable care.

Goodin suggests that the voluntarist's theory is unsatisfactory either to explain common moral and legal duties or to justify them. He proposes that we can best understand moral duties to others by focusing on their vulnerability to us, that is, their susceptibility to harm from our

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action or inaction, rather than on our own choice to assume responsibility for them. This vulnerability model, he declares, best explains why a parent is responsible for an unplanned child, or a child feels obligated to provide for even a dissolute parent in his old age. Goodin catalogues a number of other well-recognized moral/legal duties which cannot be completely explained by the voluntaristic model: legal doctrines such as promissory estoppel; employers' responsibilities to employees; consumer protection laws; professional ethical duties; and responsibilities to our friends and benefactors. If we embrace the vulnerability principle, for instance, we can understand why a pastor may be morally obligated to care for those beyond her immediate parish, or even be called to aid the parishioner to a greater extent than she would otherwise choose to do.

Goodin's book does not limit itself to moral duties arising from one-to-one relationships. He suggests that because others are vulnerable to collective actions or failures to act, our responsibilities do not end when we act individually to alleviate some needs, e.g., by giving money to the local food bank to assuage a poor man's hunger. If we see a vulnerability, such as a famine, to which only collective action can respond, we are individually responsible to do our best to see that such collective action is both organized and implemented, and to do our part to carry out the plan. Thus, a person who responds to the African famine by sending money may well have failed to discharge his moral duty, if he can also work effectively with others, either

privately or publicly, to ensure that the famine is alleviated, e.g., by government aid. Goodin thus understands moral responsibility to be a public matter: we cannot escape involvement in social and political movements which affect others, and still claim to live moral lives.

Despite his cogent analysis, Goodin cannot and does not solve apparently intractable problems which remain, even for those who accept his theory. While he suggests some factors we can consider in making choices among competing claims for our resources, the problem of deciding whose claims have priorities in our lives, or what we must do to respond to those claims, remains. Thus, his book takes us only part of the way in deciding whether we should feed the child in Africa rather than sending our own children to a good private school. Moreover, Goodin only briefly takes up other significant moral distinctions which he must collapse for his theory to succeed fully. For instance, Goodin discusses but does not completely overcome the traditional moral distinction between refusing to help another person in peril and affirmatively acting to harm him. Moreover, Goodin dismisses the conservative's claim that she is not responsible to help those who have "gotten themselves into trouble" very quickly, and primarily with pragmatic arguments. That claim also implicates the problem of paternalism, which arises when we help the vulnerable by protecting them. Again, Goodin begins but does not finish a response to that problem. Finally, Goodin's argument that we are equally responsible to those vulnerable to us because we have the resources to help and those who are vulnerable to us because of what we have said and done (e.g., spouses, children, clients) is not as convincing as it might be.

These deficiencies are caused, in part, because of the vast field which Goodin attempts to cover. He is not content to range over a wide area of moral/legal examples to show how his theory explains moral duties better than the voluntarist's. He also undertakes to apply his theory to a host of issues currently central to ethical discourse, including animal rights, environmental protection, intergenerational responsibilities, duties of foreign assistance, and domestic aid programs.

Even though Goodin attempts to cover too much, his book is a needed reinterpretation of traditional secular moral doctrine in the United States. He provides us with fresh language to discuss our responsibilities to the vulnerable in an emerging world of finite resources.

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**UNDERSTANDING RABBINIC MIDRASH**, by Gary G. Porton. Hoboken, NJ: KTAV, 1985. Pp. 232. \$11.95.

As recently as three decades ago, Jewish interpretation of the Scriptures as practiced in the early centuries of the Common Era remained largely within the realm of mystery, inaccessible to all but a few initiates. Though the Germans Hermann Strack and Paul Billerbeck had prepared a "commentary" on the New Testament from rabbinic writings, their collection of material was never translated into English, and most New Testament scholars with any interest in Jewish tradition relied on their collections and translations rather than on primary material in Hebrew and Aramaic. Critical editions of major works like the *Mekilta*, the standard rabbinic

commentary on Exodus, were out of print almost as much as in print. Virtually none of the targumic material (Aramaic translations of the Hebrew OT, prepared for reading in synagogue worship and later written down when the translations had been regularized) was available, whether in critical editions or translation. Students of the scriptures studied either Old Testament or New Testament, with little sense of what was occurring in Jewish communities between the testaments or contemporary with the fledgling Christian movement. George Foot Moore's classic, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era*, was prepared to redress what he considered to be a serious imbalance among interpreters who knew little about Judaism yet regularly employed the rather contemptuous term "late Judaism" to refer to the religion of Jesus' contemporaries (suggesting that the religion of Ancient Israel had gone sour)—while in fact what we call "orthodox" or "normative" Judaism was only being born.

Things have changed. Beginning with the discovery and publication of the Dead Sea Scrolls, students of first-century Judaism and Christianity have taken increasing interest in a world newly discovered. Now anyone interested in scriptural interpretation—or "midrash" (from the Hebrew which means "interpret")—can choose from a wide variety of first-rate studies. The enormous growth of secondary literature, however, means the novice *must* now choose from a bewildering variety of studies which promise to unlock the mysteries of first-century hermeneutics. Some guidance is thus helpful.

One of the latest volumes to appear is the fine study by Gary Porton, a young scholar who studied with Jacob Neusner and would consider himself a member of the "Neusner School." Jacob Neusner, the controversial and extraordinarily productive professor of Jewish Studies at Brown University, has set himself the task of writing a new history of Judaism in the first centuries of this era. He has gathered a talented group of students to assist in the project, among whom Porton is one of the most promising. His thesis project involved the study of traditions attributed to Rabbi Ishmael. His latest work aims at introducing readers to the world of midrash.

Porton's study intends to focus on actual exposition of texts rather than on more abstract analysis of the ways of midrash, due in large measure to his insistence that "midrash" must be understood as "statements, comments, or remarks that are juxtaposed to the accepted authoritative Jewish Scriptures" (4). He includes selections from commentaries on the books of the Pentateuch, illustrating his point that rabbinic Judaism was Torah-centered. The selections are chosen to offer a glimpse of different types of interpretive comments and collections as well as a wide variety of interpretive techniques. Each section includes comments about the work from which the selection is taken, a translation of the selection (it is unfortunate that the Hebrew original was not included), an analysis of the comments, and a summarizing conclusion.

One of the major differences between Porton's work and that of many others is that it is not primarily interested in providing material useful for the study of the New Testament and early Christianity. It seeks to elucidate primary features of rabbinic Judaism, a distinct phenomenon in the history of Israel created by sages in the decades and centuries following the destruction of the Second Temple. While not denying links with prior tradition in post-biblical Judaism, Porton is most interested in rabbinic Judaism itself. In

agreement with his teacher, he views the classic commentaries on the books of the Torah as reflections of a special mentality. His study seeks to shed light on the mechanisms and the overall

conception of these commentaries and, hence, on the religion of the rabbinic sages.

One implication is that much of what Porton analyzes will seem marginally relevant to those who study the New Testament. Interpretation of the scriptures for the purpose of establishing legal regulations, for example, is quite foreign to the New Testament. There is little evidence in early Christian writings of a desire to rationalize the scriptures, solving every apparent problem or answering every apparent question, as can be observed in the rabbinic corpus. Of most interest will be haggadic midrash—the sorts of traditions preserved in the commentary on Genesis. Studies like those of Judah Goldin (*Song at the Sea*) or Shalom Spiegel (*The Last Trial*) or of Geza Vermes (*Post-Biblical Jewish Studies* and his various works on Qumran) may have more immediate application.

Porton's book is important for students of early Christianity as well, however, for several reasons. First, it offers very helpful insights into the mechanisms and mind-set of scriptural interpretation as it was practiced almost to the time of the Reformation. Second, the work includes very useful collections of material—names of important rabbis and rabbinic works, a glossary of terms, introductory comments about the most important rabbinic commentaries. Third, and perhaps most important, the study serves as a reminder that post-biblical Judaism was not simply the seed-bed from which Christianity was to grow. Rabbinic Judaism was in its own way as creative an appropriation of a scriptural heritage as early Christianity. It has continued to be a potent religious force in the ensuing centuries, and without some sense of what the rabbis achieved it is impossible to understand modern Judaism. Our appreciation of the distinctive features of early Christianity requires more responsible attention to the emergence of a parallel response from within the Jewish community to the dramatic events in the first and second century of our era. Gone forever are the days when some caricature of “the Rabbis” can serve as a foil for students of early Christianity.

Porton's study is a work intended to be helpful to non-experts. It is written by a scholar with solid credentials and is to be commended to non-experts who wish to know something about the mysteries of midrash.

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**THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF VIRTUE**, by Gilbert C. Meilaender. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1984. Pp. 191. \$16.95.

Gilbert Meilaender has done an interesting and intriguing job of combining in his ethical theory several strands of tradition which reach as far back as Plato and Luther, and more recently to Josef Pieper.

At the center of his thought is virtue. Virtues, he argues, are not simply dispositions to act in certain ways, nor are they just skills. They are, rather, traits of character, which do not just equip us to do certain things. Virtues influence how we perceive reality itself. “To see this is to understand why vision is likely to be a central theme in any ethic of virtue. Our virtues do not simply fit us for life; they help shape life” (11).

The goal of moral education, Meilaender argues, is not only clarity of thought regarding ethical questions. Moral education which only stimulates the intellect is insufficient. Moreover,

the inheritance of relativist ethics allows us to give sophisticated excuses for our treachery. This is also the pitfall into which values clarification falls. These ethical theories overlook the fact that in the moral life the enemy is the “fat relentless ego” (76). “To spend a lifetime stimulating intellects [or, one might add, in clarifying our values] loosely attached to uninstructed consciences is avocation that ought to have little appeal” (84).

Referring to Plato, Meilaender argues that only those who have been shaped by doing good will be in a position to know what the good is. Therefore, “moral education must interest itself at least as

much in our dispositions, habits, and traits of character as in our reasoning” (91).

In Chapter Five, Meilaender relates the ethics of virtue to Luther’s thought. This is where one would expect the sparks to fly, since in his Romans commentary Luther places himself over against the entire exegetical tradition which spoke of an exodus from faults to virtues and established in its place the exodus from virtues to grace (*LW 25*, 136). According to Luther, our whole disposition needs to be stripped down so that we not only are afraid of our faults, but also of our virtues.

Meilaender struggles in this chapter, as he rightfully should. Acknowledging that for Luther character depends not on self-mastery, but on perfect passivity toward God, he asks why we should worry about virtue and character if they are not an achievement.

He makes a distinction in Luther’s language about virtue between what he calls substantive virtue—virtue as a trait of character which can be developed through habitual behavior—and relational virtue—virtue understood as God’s alien righteousness. He does not find any connection between the two. Drawing on the work of Stanley Hauerwas, Meilaender concludes that “the actual shape of our life has no significance for our virtue” (121). This is what Hauerwas calls “the Protestant concern.”

That is to say, we are left with the imperative that we should make ethical progress toward virtue, while acknowledging simultaneously that it will never make us what we want to be. Luther’s ethical theory, Meilaender argues, “leaves unexplained the link between strenuous educational efforts to inculcate virtue and the claim that these efforts are entirely unable to bring about the fundamental transformation that is needed” (124). Luther’s position, it would seem, hamstrings ethical practice.

The result is that the goal of ethical life—true virtue—is so lofty and unattainable that it can only call into question the worth of “the everyday methods of habituation” which we might undertake.

What is missing in this analysis, it seems to me, is that central aspect of Luther’s theology, the *theologia crucis*, according to which faith is the death of the old nature and the rebirth of the new. The Christian life is not an attempt to reach an unattainable goal called virtue. True virtue has been given us as a gift and daily life becomes a continual putting to death of the old nature through repentance and a continual coming into being of the new nature which lives by faith and which comes to expression in tangible works of love.

Meilaender approaches this view at the end of the chapter when he calls for what he terms “soulcraft,” i.e., the transformation of the person at the core, which can only be effected by God.

Chapter Seven brings us closer to Luther’s position, where Meilaender understands the

language of ethical obligation in terms of the analogy of love. Here he argues that gratitude is not simply an obligation, but is a willingness to remain forever in debt. He distinguishes two kinds of moral language, the language of obligation and entitlements or rights and the language of gifts and gratitude. “Either we should stop bemoaning the loss of community and common purpose in our society,” he writes, “or we should learn to talk not just the language of rights and duties but also the language of virtue [i.e., the language of the gifts and gratitudes]” (166).

He defines piety (*pietas*) as the bond between parent and child in which the parents’ gifts can never be repaid. Quoting Josef Pieper, he writes, “Man can never say to God: We are even” (167). Which is to say that the language of virtue or gratitude shatters our usual talk about duties and obligations. Understanding virtue as gratitude “may lead us, when we have done ‘all those things that are commanded,’ to say ‘we are unprofitable servants’ (Luke 17:10)” (167).

Meilaender poses a final question. If gifts create obligations of gratitude, does this in any way threaten the genuineness of the gifts? Do gifts, in other words, enslave us to the giver? His answer is that “giving which really liberates and receiving which is spontaneously grateful do not speak the language of obligation but of love” (172). It is true that it is our duty to give thanks to God. We ought to be grateful. “But it is also our delight, and no one whose life and character have

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been shaped by the story of this gift will imagine that obligation language is sufficient to depict our response” (174).

I found this book a delight to read. It poses many more questions about ethical theory and practice than are reflected in this review; e.g., can morality be taught? It is refreshing to see ethical theory findings its way out of its Babylonian Captivity to metaethics. While metaethics has helped immensely to clarify the language of ethics, it is not the whole of ethics. Professor Meilaender’s book is proof of that.

*The Theory and Practice of Virtue* is eminently readable, although the title might suggest otherwise. Moreover, it is interesting to see how the author goes about the constructive task of synthesizing several major historical threads of ethical theory, even if the synthesis is not always successful. Meilaender has posed the question for us of how we can go about speaking of virtue and character formation in the context of God’s election and prevenient grace.

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**THE BOOK OF JOB**, by Norman C. Habel. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985. Pp. 586. \$39.95.

Norman Habel has written an important addition to the literature on the biblical book of Job. What will most interest the scholarly community is the way in which he has applied methods of literary analysis to the interpretation of the book. He attempts to show how literary structures, imagery, motifs, and techniques are used to convey a unified message. He finds the meaning of the book in the interplay of literary design and theological ideas. He treats the book as a literary totality, even if there were various stages of oral and written development.

Habel uses a consistent format for the analysis of each major literary unit. He gives us his

own translation, followed by Textual Notes, Design (primarily literary matters) and Message in Context. The latter category includes comments on various contexts, such as within its unit, speeches by the same character or other characters, the book as a whole, biblical Wisdom literature, the Old Testament in general, and the Ancient Near East. This is certainly a comprehensive and ambitious task, and one can see why the book is nearly 600 pages.

Habel answers “yes” to his own question: “Is there a continuous narrative plot which underlies the book of Job and gives coherence to the text as a whole?” (25). Starting with this assumption, he then uses basic literary techniques of plot analysis “to expose the contours of that plot” (25). He thinks that both the “so-called” prologue and the book as a whole are poetic dialogue framed by narrative (26). He sees three movements to the plot. (1) 1:1-2:10. God afflicts the hero. So the prologue is not an independent story (whether one existed or not) but the first movement of a complex plot (29). (2) 2:11-31:40. The hero challenges God and the conflict is explored. (3) 32:1-42:17. God challenges the hero and the conflict is resolved. Each of these three movements has a formal introduction and closure (35).

Since Habel argues for the integrity of the book as a whole, he manages to fit into the narrative plot even those parts of Job which traditionally have been thought to be disjunctive—the prologue/epilogue, the wisdom poem (chapter 28), and the Elihu speeches (chapters 32-37). He sees Elihu not as an embarrassing anticlimax but rather as a logical development within the plot (32). Elihu provides an orthodox ending in the person of an earthly arbiter and would be a fitting conclusion to the book if not for Yahweh’s intervention (36). Chapter 28 is also part of the plot in its present position in the book (38-39). He, however, does some reshuffling of the speeches at the end of the third cycle in order to make better sense out of them (37). Consistent with his literary approach, he does not think that precise dating is all that important, though he leans toward a post-exilic date (42).

Habel finds the meaning of the book of Job in the resolution of the conflict between Job and God, in which the integrity of both is confirmed (60ff). It is, however, an integrity that transcends mechanistic conformity to laws of reward and retribution (68).

Habel intends this book to be available to a wide range of readers. He has written it, he says, “to be eminently usable by students, teachers, and laypersons interested in Job, as well as by biblical scholars and literary critics” (9). That is a difficult task to set before an author. Up to a point, he succeeds. Surely, it is a book that will be of interest to the scholars. They will be curious to see how he has applied the techniques of literary analysis to the book of Job. My suspicion is that the book may be a bit overwhelming to many pastors and laypersons who may feel that Habel is telling them much more than they really want to know. Nevertheless, they will find the clarity of his exposition can help them in their detailed work with individual passages. There are many good theological insights along the way that should be of value to the preacher, teacher, and serious student.

For their own libraries, many may prefer an earlier more modest work by Habel—a book on *Job* for the Knox Preaching Guides series (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981). This little book is clear, concise, direct, and makes some good practical suggestions for the one who would preach from Job. It represents an earlier stage in his thought and is more traditional in its interpretation (e.g., setting apart the prose from the poetry). It is, of course, not a full scale

commentary and does not contain detailed treatment of most texts. Further, it does not show the full blossoming of his literary approach.

Habel's new commentary (in the Old Testament Library series) will be must reading for serious students of Job. It brings some important currents of contemporary biblical scholarship into the discussion of this complex and wonderful biblical book. It may be a bit overwhelming for the pastor or layperson who has a more casual interest in Job, though for the latter, it can also be read as a resource for insights on specific texts.

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**PREACHING CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE**, by William J. Carl, III. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984. Pp. 167. \$8.95 (paper).

Books on the theology of preaching and the preaching of theology appear with about the same regularity as books on liturgical preaching; normally, a couple of each category would be published each decade. Since Vatican II, however, the pace of publication of such homiletical books has been accelerated, especially on the theology of preaching and the preaching of theology. This is one of the most recent books on the preaching of theology, but its strength is in its comprehensiveness; it incorporates a theology of preaching and a concept of biblical and liturgical preaching as inherent to the preaching of theology.

Carl, presently serving as a parish pastor in Dallas, Texas, taught homiletics at the Duke University Divinity School for several years before returning to parish ministry. He brings the best of both seminary and parish to this volume. He demonstrates his working knowledge of the several areas of theology that comprise the content of contemporary theological curricula. He knows his theology and his theologians as well as he knows homiletics and famous preachers and homiletics. But he also reveals his knowledge of, and love for, parish ministry, especially pastoral care and doctrinal preaching. I suspect that Carl gave up the teaching of preaching because he enjoys preaching to people more than he does teaching homiletics in a seminary. While this book reflects his own theological formation as a young professor of homiletics, it also sets out the course of his theological preaching in the parish. He believes—with preachers like Henry Sloane Coffin and Paul Scherer—that every sermon must be biblical, doctrinal, evangelical, pastoral, liturgical, and, thus, be genuinely theological. The book supports this kind of theory and homiletical theology.

Carl contends that all preachers proclaim or teach some kind of doctrine in their preaching; he is interested that it

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should be sound doctrine, biblical theology at its best. He argues—and here he is close to H. Grady Davis—that sermons have three sources: the Scriptures, doctrines, and life itself. Not all sermons have the same beginning, but all should be based on Scripture and, especially, on the gospel; the majority should not only begin with a text, but should allow the text to speak to the people. In three of the chapters (Chapter 3, "Doctrine and the Bible"; Chapter 4, "Doctrine in

Sacrament, Season, and Creed"; and Chapter 5, "Doctrine and Culture"), Carl treats the development of sermons from these several perspectives as biblical/doctrinal preaching, confessional preaching, and anthropocentric preaching. Each chapter ends with a set of questions, suggestions, and a list of books for further reading.

Polemics, exegesis, hermeneutics, apologetics, and ethics are considered from the standpoint of doctrinal and theological preaching. He makes it clear that he knows the difference between a sermon and a lecture or essay, and that to be effective, doctrinal preaching must reach and speak to the people in the pews. To this end, he analyzes in some detail the structural approaches of Karl Barth, John Calvin, Jonathan Edwards, and James S. Stewart. Carl insists that the pastors' "theological language in the pulpit" (the content of Chapter 2) will reflect their theological interests, pastoral perception, and ability to communicate effectively. With Richard Jensen (*Teaching the Story*, Augsburg, 1980), he calls for variety in preaching styles based, primarily, on the purpose or function of the sermon, its setting, and the situation of the people. In an appendix, he offers a personal example of doctrinal preaching in the shape of a story sermon; its form is in sharp contrast to his other two examples, one by Martin Luther and the other by Bruce L. Robertson.

This book would make an excellent companion volume to Mark Ellingsen's *Doctrine and Word: Theology in the Pulpit* (John Knox, 1983), in which the author examines various Christian doctrines and gives some of his own sermons on these doctrines as examples and models. Carl's book complements Ellingsen's from a biblical, liturgical, confessional, and cultural basis. Both are important and helpful to the preacher who seeks to preach theologically and doctrinally today.

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**DAVID'S TRUTH IN ISRAEL'S IMAGINATION AND MEMORY**, by Walter Brueggemann. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985. Pp. 128. \$5.95 (paper).

In recent years Walter Brueggemann has produced several provocative and insightful studies of biblical texts. His observations are always fresh and frequently productive of subsequent theological reflection on the part of his readers. One reason for Brueggemann's appeal is his ability to integrate various approaches to biblical texts in illuminating yet non-technical ways. The volume under review continues this tradition.

One would be hard pressed to come up with two more disparate approaches to Old Testament study than the contemporary methods of sociological analysis and literary criticism. Sociological analysis, as practiced by George Mendenhall, Norman K. Gottwald, Robert R. Wilson and Paul D. Hanson seeks to understand Old Testament literature within the context of the cultural world in which it was written in order to remind us that biblical texts both reflect and express that social context. Literary criticism, at least as practiced by Phyllis Trible, David M. Gunn and David J. A. Clines approaches the text as text, on its own terms, without reference to social context. Brueggemann, who recognizes both the lack of interaction between these two approaches as well as the enormous potential they afford, claims his book is "an attempt to make use of both methods, without being enslaved to or committed to purity with either method" (10). In this endeavor he is quite successful.

But this book has a deeper concern which seeks to “take the Bible seriously on its own terms and to insist that every part of the text must be taken with theological seriousness...each literary account bears truth to which we must attend” (11). And Brueggemann attends to the various truths presented in the

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Davidic material with enviable sensitivity and theological acumen.

Chapter one, “The Trustful Truth of the Tribe” presents David’s Truth as the marginalized have discerned it: as the propagandistic survival literature of those who managed to stay alive though unsanctioned by the powers that exist. Three narratives in which David triumphs through the assistance of Yahweh make the point. In 1 Samuel 16 David is anointed despite Samuel’s better ideas. In 1 Samuel 17 David triumphs despite Goliath’s better arms, and in 1 Samuel 24 David becomes king despite Saul’s better credentials. Tribal truth revels uncritically in its hero.

Such is not the case in chapter two, “The Painful Truth of the Man” which presents David’s Truth in a critical “warts and all” fashion. Here, in the so-called “Succession Narrative” (2 Samuel 8-20 and 1 Kings 1-2) we see the inner David, the human being ensconced in the palace with an army, a bureaucracy, and a harem.

Chapter three, “The Sure Truth of the State” discusses the unambiguous truth of David as seen in the Royal Theology and Empire Building of 2 Samuel 15:6-8:18, especially chapters 7 and 8. Here the Solomonic interests of the state have had their say with regard to David’s Truth.

Chapter four, “The Hopeful Truth of the Assembly” explores the more overtly theological appropriation of David’s Truth as seen by the state in the exilic and post exilic period: Psalms 89, 132; Lamentations 3:21-27; Isaiah 55:3 and, most importantly, 1 Chronicles 10-29. After two chapters of investigations concerning David’s Truth as seen by those in power, Brueggemann (chiastically?) returns to David as seen by the marginalized (108).

An introduction and conclusion dealing with these themes, the ambiguity of truth and Brueggemann’s own perception of David artfully form an inclusio around the four canonical “portraits” of David and should be read before chapters one through four.

While one could quibble with the rather broad and generalized characterizations that have resulted with regard to these fairly extensive traditions, one can only applaud Brueggemann’s insistence that “each David must be honored, valued, and taken seriously on his own terms, each as a distinct rendering of this fascinating character” (112). Preachers in particular will appreciate Brueggemann’s well known skill in re-telling these “distinct renderings” in compelling, imaginative yet practical ways.

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**REINHOLD NIEBUHR: A BIOGRAPHY**, by Richard Wightman Fox. New York: Pantheon Books, 1985. Pp. 340. \$19.95.

A new biography of Reinhold Niebuhr is a splendid surprise to his many admirers, and

not least to some of us who were once his students. Reviews appeared almost instantly, astute reviewers praising the book as “definitive,” “elegant,” and “brilliant.” Fox’s research is both comprehensive and meticulous, and thus worthy of the high praise of reviewers.

While aware of the danger of “deification,” Fox traverses the roles of Niebuhr as son, student, pastor, preacher, prophet, husband, father, brother, and in his latter years as sufferer. Fox cites many laudatory responses to Niebuhr, but also the critiques offered by H. Richard Niebuhr, Robert Calhoun, and others. It is a pity therefore to learn that H. Richard destroyed the correspondence between the brothers since such sources might have been enlightening to us. Fox does succeed in informing us that Reinhold Niebuhr’s life was “full of grace and grief,” as Niebuhr himself depicted the human situation.

Niebuhr spoke on many issues and altered his thinking at times, but yet there was a unity in his “Biblical faith” which remained the source and criterion for his ethical and theological thinking. I’m not sure that Fox clearly enunciates this unity which Niebuhr drew from the Reformers, from Augustine, and initially from the Bible. Yet it was this biblical faith which led Niebuhr to attack “Liberalism” at the point of its optimistic humanism which failed to see that the basic human flaw

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“was not finitude, but sin, not ignorance but pretension.” His biblical faith also provided him the only answer to the human plight, namely the forgiving grace of God which declares humanity just while it is yet sinful. This implies that the meaning of human existence can never be disclosed through scientific and rational knowledge, but only through a transcendent perspective which is available only to faith and empowered only by love.

While hailing Niebuhr’s theological brilliance, Fox does not bypass the very “human” and often “modest” traits of Niebuhr. As a young Detroit pastor, Niebuhr walks past a house two or three times before he summons the courage to go in. Or his feeling “embarrassed” when hailed a “theologian.” Or his confession of inferiority in his scholarly profession. Or his poignant comments the last years of his life concerning his illness and weakness caused by a stroke. He commented to the reviewer who sought him out with regard to a paper, “I feel like a bird whose wings have been clipped.” Life was “full of grace and grief”!

Apart from Fox’s book the reviewer recalls some “Niebuhrisms.” He alluded to Karl Barth’s theology as “an airplane theology” which did not enlighten the foothills where we live so much of life. He once wondered if Mother’s Day might be the Protestant counterpart of the Roman Catholic worship of Mary. Or his beautiful description of Paul’s mood as he writes, “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain”—“The ultimate nonchalance of the Christian faith!”

Though one could quarrel at points, the book is nevertheless a very good one!

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**THE THOUGHT OF PAUL TILLICH**, ed. by James Luther Adams, Wilhelm Pauck, Roger Lincoln Shinn. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1985. Pp. 395. \$24.95.

August 20, 1986 is the one hundredth anniversary of the birth of Paul Tillich. He died October 26, 1965. His rival in theology, Karl Barth, was born in the same year. They were both pastors during the First World War—Barth as a village parson in Switzerland, Tillich as a chaplain in the Kaiser's army. Their influence continues to this day. As this volume of essays by seventeen Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish thinkers shows, there exists today no “school” of Tillichian theologians in the same sense as one might identify Barthians. Barth's influence is mostly confined to ecclesiastical theologians. That Tillich's impact has gone beyond the institution of the church and its seminaries can be seen by the circumstances surrounding the origin of this book.

The eminent physicist, Victor A. Weisskopf, while he was president of the prestigious American Academy of Arts and Sciences, approached James Luther Adams to assist in launching an Academy-sponsored project on the significance of Paul Tillich for the historical era following his career. The Academy secured a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities and called together a group of scholars who met in 1979 at New Harmony, Indiana, where Tillich's ashes are buried. Out of that meeting this volume of essays was planned and then published as an American Academy of Arts and Sciences Book.

The two opening articles by James Luther Adams and Wilhelm Pauck, both of whom were very close to Tillich, are biographical introductions which touch on aspects of Tillich's life, education and intellectual development that are crucial for understanding “the thought of Paul Tillich.” Many readers of *Word & World* would be interested to note Pauck's comment that Tillich was not only brought up in the Lutheran tradition but “his basic understanding of the Christian faith...was Lutheran.” I recall long arguments with a Unitarian colleague at Cornell University who wanted to claim that Tillich was closer to the theology of liberal Unitarians than any Lutherans he knew. Tillich created problems for any reader who looks for conventional theological vocabulary, Lutheran or otherwise. It was his conviction that all the old terms, doctrines, formulas and creeds had to be “deliteralized.” Shortly before his death he acknowledged the problem this raised for many people. He was aware of three

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groups and tried to adjust to each of them. The first are those who are opposed to or are in doubt about anything ecclesiastical and religious. He cannot, he said, avoid speaking to them out of fear of offending others. “My work is with those who ask questions, and for them I am here.” The second are those who are unshaken in their faith and he tried not to undermine them. The third are those who have gone through the other stages and are able “to hear the full power of the message, freed from old difficulties...[and] understand me, even when I use the old symbols, because they know that I do not mean them in a literal sense.”

As an interpreter of Christianity in the present cultural epoch, Tillich was, nonetheless, a disturbing voice to many both inside and outside the churches. His word was always both a “yes” and a “no” to religion and also to culture. Many of the writers sort through his dialectical analyses of contemporary civilization (Roger Lincoln Shinn), the culture of the West (Walter A. Weisskopf), religious socialism (Dennis P. McCann), psychology (William R. Rogers), literature (Nathan A. Scott, Jr.), art (Robert P. Scharlemann), world religions (Joseph M. Kitagawa). There are also fine discussions of Tillich and Jewish thought (Albert H. Friedlander), Catholic theology (Thomas Franklin O'Meara) and new religious movements (Jack Boozer). The philosopher John

E. Smith assesses Tillich's interpretation of religion and David Tracy, who acknowledges a great debt to Tillich, writes of Tillich's "remarkable staying power as a live influence in contemporary theology." There is no "School of Tillich" but there is the pervasive presence of Tillich in terms of "a continuing set of concerns, a general method of approach, and a welcome inability to become too easily classifiable."

There is criticism here as well as tribute. David Tracy is known for his own "two source" theory of theology: texts appropriately interpreted and common human experience appropriately analyzed. He notes that Tillich draws on "culture" as a source for constructing theology and then wonders: "The fact is that Tillich's explicit refusal to allow 'experience' to be a 'source' for theology, while 'culture' is allowed that position, is confusing and perhaps confused." John Powell Clayton believes that Tillich's great significance is not settled by his *Systematic Theology* which "is no masterpiece" and is "disappointing" because of Tillich's "notorious tendency to reform constantly even his most basic concepts...." Tillich was aware of this, and was dissatisfied with the *Systematic Theology*. At the close of his life he felt that the whole of it should be recast in the light of the history of religions. The timelessness or greatness of Tillich's work is not in the consistency of his concepts but in his determination that theology *mediate* between the eternal criterion of truth (Christ as the New Being) and whatever the *kairos* might be in which people live. He knew that all systems are inherently obsolete. He himself wrote, "New organizing principles appear...[so that] a new conception of the structure of the whole emerges. This is the fate of every system."

There is only one essay on an explicit theological topic: Langdon Gilkey's lucid exposition on "The New Being and Christology" showing Tillich's concern for the priority of the saving work of Christ over questions of the two natures and the like. Gilkey also writes a concluding essay on "The Theologian in Contemporary Society." It is Tillich who has the last word—his open letter to Emanuel Hirsch, a friend who had become the prominent Nazi (German Christian) theologian. Here Tillich makes his own devastating critique of naziism, having by this time been expelled from his academic position at Frankfurt and begun to teach at Union Seminary in New York City.

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**SHAPING THE FUTURE: THE ETHICS OF DIETRICH BONHOEFFER**, by James H. Burtress. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985. Pp. 183. \$16.95.

Make no mistake! This book is a major contribution to Bonhoeffer studies that will inform and challenge theologians and ethicists alike. But it is more than this. Written with lucidity and passion, it is a

significant book for any Christian who seeks to lead a life of discipleship in today's world. Bonhoeffer, you see, wrestled with two crucial questions for Christians in the twentieth century: "Who is Jesus Christ for us today?" and "What does following Jesus mean?"

Dr. James H. Burtress, professor of theology at Luther Northwestern Theological Seminary in St. Paul, has poured his heart and soul into this book, and there is a sense in which the viewpoint expressed is as much his as it is Bonhoeffer's. Burtress, a founding member of the English-language Section of the International Bonhoeffer Society, has been reading and pondering Bonhoeffer throughout his teaching career; thus we have in *Shaping the Future* the fruit of many years of preparation. Burtress declares in his Afterword that the book is not so much a conversation with Bonhoeffer as it is the presentation of the result of a conversation with him about ethics. It deals more with method than with ethical issues. In the author's own words, it is "an attempt to present as clearly as possible the task to which Bonhoeffer set himself in the field of ethics, and the lines along which he proceeded to address that task" (167).

The structure of the book is simple. Between a Prologue and an Afterword, there is an Introduction dealing with "Locating and Interpreting Ethics in the Bonhoeffer Legacy" and then three chapters on "Formulating an Ethical Theology," "Structuring the Responsible Life," and "Engaging Concrete Places and Times." An Appendix provides a helpful guide to the Bonhoeffer corpus and to secondary literature available in English.

In his Introduction Burtress discloses some basic decisions regarding sources and interpretation. As a basis for interpreting Bonhoeffer's ethics, he is using not just the posthumously edited volume entitled *Ethics*, but the entirety of Bonhoeffer's writings. With respect to interpretation, he sides with those interpreters who find more continuity than change in Bonhoeffer's thought. Finally, he picks "responsibility for the future" as the basic theme in Bonhoeffer's ethics, thus defending "Shaping the Future" as the title for the book. He thus places Bonhoeffer with those ethicists who are "teleologists" rather than "deontologists" or "situationists," that is, with those "who concentrate on the consequences of actions rather than on the motives out of which the actions are done" (16).

Although Burtress admits that Bonhoeffer never uses the term, he argues that throughout his adult life Bonhoeffer, rather than pursuing "theological ethics," was at work formulating an "ethical theology," that is, "a theology that is penetrated at every point by ethical concerns and questions" (25). Bonhoeffer's ethical theology assumes the context of the church and is radically centered in Jesus Christ—the person Jesus and not some abstract christology. The centrality of Jesus Christ leads Bonhoeffer to reject all traditional Christian thinking in terms of two spheres (God and world, sacred and secular) and to affirm that, since the incarnation, neither God nor the world can be known apart from Jesus Christ, in whom they come together. They are a "unity in duality," or as Chalcedon talks about the two natures, they are "without confusion and yet distinct." Here, explains Burtress, we are at the heart of Bonhoeffer's ethical theology: reality is God and world in Christ, and the realization of this reality in life is what ethics is all about.

Burtress claims that Bonhoeffer's rejection of two-sphere thinking meant, negatively, the rejection of idealism (because of inherent dualisms) and positivism (because of empirical reductionism), but also all "religious" thinking (because it conceives of God and world as separate and understands its task to be that of connecting the two). Positively, Bonhoeffer's construal of reality as God-and-world-in-Christ led him to affirm reality as "the sacrament of the ethical," which means that ethical action must be "in correspondence with reality" and must involve both relationality (being with one another) and responsibility (being for one another). Furthermore, it meant that ethics must be embedded in time and history, eschewing timeless principles in favor of the concrete situation where the will of God is discernible only on the completion of the act. With great insight, Burtress points out that the "will of God" for

moment of hearing and obeying, but is a category stretching out into the future.

The author contends that Bonhoeffer's rejection of spatial thinking led him to recast many traditional (Lutheran) categories into temporal/historical ones. The doctrine of the two kingdoms, for example, becomes talk about the last things and the things before the last (ultimate and penultimate); orders of creation become orders of preservation and finally divine mandates. Given this stress on the temporal, what keeps Bonhoeffer's ethics from being that of "raw situationism"? Burtress believes it is Bonhoeffer's constant interest in structure and order, and even in law. Bonhoeffer's ethical thinking involves such things as "conformation with Christ," a positive understanding of the law as "the law of life" (*Lebensgesetz*), the command of God as "permission to live," the recovery of "the natural" for the sake of the gospel, and a "religionless Christianity for a world come of age." Bonhoeffer, insists Burtress, is both conservative and radical at the same time: conservative in using traditional categories, but radical in recasting them according to his christological commitments.

As a test case for his interpretation of Bonhoeffer's ethical theology, Burtress presents in the closing chapter an extended exposition of an essay Bonhoeffer wrote in prison, "What Is Meant by 'Telling the Truth'?" Using Kant's "ethical formalism" as a foil, Burtress shows how Bonhoeffer's definition of truth as "the real expressed in words" is diametrically opposed to Kant's timeless, universalizable understanding of truth. For Bonhoeffer, speaking the truth must be learned, for it involves concrete times and concrete places. Burtress illustrates Bonhoeffer's view by showing how the latter handled his interrogations in prison. Bonhoeffer's ethical thinking, he concludes, is more akin to the artist than to the logician.

All in all, I think Burtress has successfully defined the center and traced the lineaments of Bonhoeffer's thought. Only a Lutheran could be so sensitive to where Bonhoeffer is at least challenging if not correcting the Lutheran tradition—usually in the name of Luther! I believe he is correct that Bonhoeffer was primarily concerned with formulating an "ethical theology," but if this is true, isn't the sub-title of the book misleading? On the other hand, the sub-title, "The Ethics of Dietrich Bonhoeffer" might be justified if the author had recognized that at times, especially in the book *Ethics*, Bonhoeffer was in fact dealing with "theological ethics" when he discussed questions of corporal punishment, killing in wartime, euthanasia, suicide, contraception, abortion, rape, slavery, and torture. In my opinion, a presentation of how Bonhoeffer handled these issues would have enriched, and probably complicated, our view of his ethical thinking. By exploring the question of truth-telling as the *only* test case, has Burtress made it too easy for himself and oversimplified the relationship between ethical theology and theological ethics in Bonhoeffer's thought?

A further concern is whether "teleologist" is the best designation for Bonhoeffer's type of ethics. Is not his position closer to what H. Richard Niebuhr in *The Responsible Self* has called "cathekontic ethics," the ethics of the fitting? Finally, has Burtress so emphasized Bonhoeffer's concern for the historical future that he has almost eliminated the eschatological element that is so evident in *Creation and Fall* and continues in Bonhoeffer's "Colossians-style cosmic christology"?

Raising these issues in no way diminishes Burtress's brilliant achievement in *Shaping the*

*Future.* With extraordinary power and elegance he has concentrated attention on the question that is central to Bonhoeffer, namely, the *Jesus* question. And with that, he has faced us with the question of discipleship, the question of the cross.

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**PREACHING: A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO THE DESIGN AND DELIVERY OF SERMONS**, by James W. Cox. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985. Pp. 299. \$18.95.

James W. Cox is Professor of Preaching at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, author of several books on various areas of preaching and editor of the bimonthly *Pulpit Digest*. The book is indeed, as the subtitle claims, “comprehensive,” covering virtually every aspect of preaching, although some topics are dealt with only briefly.

It is not a “Baptist” book, even though there are hints here and there of the author’s background. It is a valuable book for the whole church.

The real strength of the book is that the author is working from a vast background of reading, teaching and editorial work. As editor he no doubt reads hundreds of sermons, including those of many of the best-known preachers of past and present. That background enriches this book. Never have I read in one volume such an enormous number of references and examples from other preachers and scholars.

Dr. Cox emphasizes the importance of worship as the context for preaching, and observes that while Roman Catholics are rediscovering the role of preaching some Protestants are becoming preoccupied with liturgy to the detriment of preaching. He quotes a Catholic scholar at Vatican II who concluded by saying, “I hope Catholics and Protestants will meet and not pass each other on the way” (44). Cox recommends careful attention to worship—“neither a nostalgic return to the practices of a classical period nor a rootless celebration of the present” (49).

Knowing how beginning preachers sometimes stare at a text wondering how to proceed, I thought it helpful that Dr. Cox includes a helpful list of questions a preacher can use to move from text to sermon. Some of these are: What is this text about? What is the significance of this text in relation to Jesus Christ and the history of redemption? Where does this text strike closest to home in your life? What are some of the causes of the conditions or situation discussed or suggested in the text? There are many others (73-76).

I say “hurrah” to the author for stressing the necessity of boiling down one’s sermon preparation to a “central idea.” My experience is that more sermons fall flat due to a lack of focus or central idea than any other reason. Cox suggests writing down three goals of your sermon: Central idea, General end [purpose], and Specific intent (83f.). If every preacher would take time to do that, preaching would improve dramatically! Naturally as a Baptist he speaks about the need for decisions from the listeners—“clean choices,” he calls it—but he does so not as an emotional or manipulative appeal, but by affirming that “all true and effective evangelism rests on solid theological foundations” (91).

A preacher should also reflect what the aim of the sermon should be—evangelistic, expository, doctrinal, ethical, pastoral, and/or devotional (90-115). Of course they overlap, but

these categories assist us in reflecting on the purpose of our sermon rather than just cutting loose with only a vague concept of purpose.

A very helpful part of the book is the extensive section devoted to preparing and structuring the sermon, with examples from dozens of preachers (117f). He is not rigidly tied to one way, but lays out all kinds of possibilities, each with many examples. It cannot help but stretch one's own preaching and break molds we may have stuck ourselves in.

His suggestions for formulating a structure will be helpful, especially to preachers who have trouble moving from "a lot of good ideas" to a tightly knit, cohesive message. He insists on making a preliminary outline, but gives many "structural options" for various kinds of sermons (141-160).

The most difficult obstacle to good preaching today is that we are trained in studying and writing, but not in *oral* communication. Many sermons are carefully crafted essays with no oral life to them whatsoever and the congregation sits through those 15-20 minutes untaught, uninspired, unmoved and maybe unawake. Cox has valuable chapters on making sermons interesting as oral communication. He even includes tips on radio and television speaking, although very brief, and a section on body lan-

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guage which takes a shot at huge, wrap-around pulpits which shield the preacher from the shoulders down.

The last chapter on "The Preacher's Personality" connects the task of preaching with the pastor's whole ministry and person, something preachers must always keep in mind.

I appreciated the lay-out of the book, with section and chapter titles given not only at the top of the page, but also in the footnote section

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