



What Words Will Do

The phrase has several possibilities. It can be put as a question: "What words will do?" Then we are asking about the choice of words necessary for communication. All of us who are involved in the ministry of the Word must be wordsmiths. We have to keep working at giving expression to the Word by means of words that evoke interest in our would-be hearers and at the same time convey the gospel.

Or we can put the phrase into question form in another way: "What, words will do?" Can words alone give expression to the Word? Well, no. The church also uses music, the visual arts, architecture, and liturgical gestures (and the list could go on) to convey the gospel as well.

Or we can leave the phrase as is and consider it a topic. Then we might carry on a discussion concerning what words will do when they are well chosen and put to use in proclamation, teaching, pastoral care, conversation, and public witness.

In planning this issue of the journal, we have allowed all three possibilities to have their place. *William Hulme* takes up the issue of communication, particularly the expression of one's feelings, and points out ways to direct conversations that are laden with deep feelings. *Terence Fretheim* addresses the matter of language about God and shows that Old Testament writers expressed their understanding of God by metaphors often drawn from interpersonal relationships. He suggests that our own talk about God can and should be enriched by metaphors drawn from relationships within life experiences today. *Lloyd Bailey* introduces us to the various reasons why English versions of the Bible differ in their choices of words. His discussion must be one of the best available in a brief article. It must also be one of the most interesting, not least of all for its occasional humor. *Darrell Jodock* suggests that revelation consists essentially of an event (not words at first), an encounter of the presence of God. Words are used to articulate revelatory experiences. The Scriptures seek to communicate the presence of God, and new metaphors need to be crafted in our day to communicate God's presence in our midst. *Gail Ramshaw-Schmidt* affirms that any

religious tradition must conserve its central metaphors. In the Christian tradition some metaphors can still be considered living, while others are dead. The living metaphors must be taught to the church, and language must show artistry. *John Cook* reminds us that biblical narratives visualize encounters with the presence of God (epiphanies) and goes on to say that the church of today, as in the past, will do well to visualize its message. Religious leaders should therefore attend to the integration of "that language of visual forms that states our priorities to the world along with our spoken messages." *Richard Luecke* writes that, in spite of the fact that rhetoric is not a favored subject today, this is an eminently rhetorical age. Media, business, and even the sciences employ rhetoric to persuade. Luecke takes us back into antiquity to view ways that rhetoric was

employed and evaluated in classical sources and then adopted and adapted by Christians. He concludes that Christian rhetoric “becomes a means by which the Word accomplishes its persuasive and transformative effects in the world.” Finally, *Paul Gooch* recognizes that there are instances where words fail. Is that because some experiences are simply ineffable? He looks at texts written by Paul, Shakespeare, and Gerard Manley Hopkins in light of this question and proposes why in each case certain experiences can be said to be inexpressible.

Our Resources section contains two essays. When I was on sabbatical last year, the Editorial Board invited me to write an essay for this issue related to my work in New Testament christology. In this essay I take up four aspects of New Testament christology which, in my view, are important for our speaking of Jesus, but which tend to get lost due to pressure from other directions. Then the Texts in Context essay follows, written by *Robert Paul Roth*, which is devoted to the second lessons for the Eighth through Eleventh Sundays after Pentecost—all from that marvelous gem, the Epistle to the Colossians.

A.J.H.