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Book Reviews

The Divine Dramatist: George Whitefield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism

Harry S. Stout

William B. Eerdmans Company: Grand Rapids (1991)

301 pages, paperback, \$9.95

Dr. Harry Stout, the author of this work, is the John B. Madden Master of Berkley College and Professor of American religious history at Yale University.

One element in the book constitutes its chief value. It gives due prominence to a man who has long been sadly discounted by historians. It shows George Whitefield not only to have possessed unequalled powers as an orator, but to have been one of the foremost figures of the English-speaking world during his entire adult lifetime. This is true of the book throughout, but it is particularly evident in the chapters "An Uncommon Friendship"—Whitefield's association with Benjamin Franklin, and "American Icon," which declares his wholesale acceptance in the 13 Colonies. All who admire Whitefield and believe the gospel that he preached will rejoice in this emphasis.

Nonetheless, the chief message of this book is false. It appears in the title *The Divine Dramatist*, and continues on virtually every page. It makes it appear that Whitefield was a superb actor and that his evangelism was accomplished solely by his dramatic power. Professor Stout tells us:

Given Whitefield's unprecedented success in marketing religion in the eighteenth century we have to wonder what techniques he employed. My search for an answer took me to a most unexpected and ironic source: the eighteenth century stage. . . . Whitefield became an actor preacher, as opposed to a scholar preacher.

Having decided on this theory that Whitefield was above all an actor, Stout weaves it into his entire account of the evangelist's life. He begins with a chapter that he titles "The Young Rake," in which he falsely charges that as a boy George was characterized by his dissolute behavior. He also asserts that the Whitefield family had fallen from its goodly status and that the lad determined to achieve such success on the stage that he would raise it to its former position again. This jumping to a conclusion is symptomatic of the author's style, and examples of his mistake could be pointed out in abundance.

Most glaring are his omissions of important elements in Whitefield's life. In a painfully garbled account he speaks of his conversion as a humanly contrived experience copied from the Puritans, but the transformation it effected in his life is almost entirely overlooked. He portrays Whitefield as having no interest in theology, but disregards the doctrinal content of the first ten sermons that he published, for example, and of the letters that he wrote during his second passage to America. He knows nothing of the fact that Whitefield was the first founder of Methodism, and that in preparing to sail to America he invited John Wesley to give leadership to his work; that during his absence Wesley sought to turn the people against him and that when he returned home he found Wesley had succeeded in his endeavor to the extent that he had but a hundred or so left to hear him. So he started over again, and within two months his great congregations were restored. Dr. Stout fails to recognize that a movement then sprang up under Whitefield's ministry, giving him in three years as large a body of followers as Wesley had, and that he held the first Methodist Conference—an accomplishment that Wesley then copied. Stout fails as well to see that following Whitefield's third visit to America, upon his return to England he determined to give up the leading of his own movement

and to become "but the servant of all"—to assist any pastor, whatever his denomination, as long as he was very sound in the faith, and, above all, to help Wesley. This remained his chief endeavor throughout the last 20 years of his life. Without recognizing these important elements of Whitefield's career we have his life only in a sad distortion.

Mention must be made also of Dr. Stout's assumption that Whitefield was lacking in physical courage. In reporting an event in which Whitefield was standing, raised by a short flight of stairs to address a crowd, being attacked by an unruly mob, he jumped down the stairs toward them and they fled. Stout makes it appear that Whitefield was in fear of his attackers, and that in this action he escaped from them. Whitefield was constantly in danger in performing his open-air ministry in England and Wales, and every day of his life he exhibited more courage than is required by the average of us in a lifetime.

Although Dr. Stout at times recognizes Whitefield's sincerity, he also continually portrays his ministry as simply superb acting. He pictures him as aiming only at maintaining his personal prominence and, therefore, Whitefield's quoting the words of the Apostle Paul, "We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake" was the basest of hypocrisy.

A work that differs from all others upon a certain subject must of necessity provide footnotes which refer the reader to the author's sources of information. But one looks in vain for such a scholarly adjunct here. Yet although there are no footnotes, the author frequently encloses a word, two words, or even a phrase in quotation marks, often preceding such words with words supplied by himself, in such a way as to give the quotation an entirely false meaning.

The book abounds with technical errors. This reviewer has marked his copy with the term "false" written in the margin where these mistakes occur and has done so more

than 300 times! For instance, Stout confuses Howell Harris, the Welsh evangelist, with Gabriel Harris, a businessman from Gloucester. He pictures Whitefield as arriving at his open-air meetings, proud to be conveyed there in William Seward's grand carriage, but Seward tells us that upon being converted he had sold his carriage—this before he ever even knew George Whitefield. He speaks of Whitefield as putting on his revivals in town after town, but Whitefield never referred to the results of his work as “revival” and virtually never used the word. He would have used the term, as biblically-oriented people have ever done, only as descriptive of a work done by God. He charges that Whitefield's pronunciation was so poor that he spoke of the “Lord God” as the “Lurd Gud,” yet Whitefield's preaching won the high praise of such masters of the English tongue as Lord Bolingbroke and the Earl of Chesterfield. Pages could be filled with the technical errors that Stout has made.

The author makes no mention of the *sine qua non* of the study of Whitefield, Richard Owen Roberts's *Whitefield in Print*, a tome of 765 pages which lists 8,285 works on its subject. In reading *The Divine Dramatist* this reviewer found his mind often reverting to the Scripture, “But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: . . . neither can he know them because they are spiritually discerned.” The knowledge of Whitefield which has long been degraded by Arminian writers is further dishonored by this book which portrays him as chiefly a self-promoting actor.

Reviewer

Arnold Dallimore, a retired Baptist minister living in Cottam, Ontario, is the author of the 1,200-page, two-volume biography, *George Whitefield: The Life and Times of the Great Evangelist of the Eighteenth Century Revival* (Vol. 1, 1970; Vol. 2, 1980).

Preaching and Preachers

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones

Zondervan: Grand Rapids, MI (1971)

325 pages, paperback, \$21.99

If the contemporary preacher were to read only one book on the work of preaching and the centrality of the ministry of the pulpit, this book should be it! This is one of those books that every minister should own, read, reread, and mark. If your pastor does not own a copy, give him one. You may very well receive better preaching if you do, and he will most likely be grateful to you for the gift. You should read the book even if you never preach yourself, for you will understand the call to preach much better if you do. And you will probably listen to preaching with more benefit as well.

Most evangelicals who know anything about great preachers in our century recognize the name of the late D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, who died March 1, 1981. Since he was born in 1899, one can say his life expanded across our century. But his life reaches far beyond 1981, as “being dead he still speaks” via the publication of most of his extant sermons in modified form for the reader. I number literally dozens of friends who have been powerfully altered by the reading of his masterful works on Ephesians, Romans, the Sermon on the Mount, and Spiritual Depression, all material originally preached.

Lloyd-Jones had distinct views of the pulpit. There was no uncertainty in his mind about his craft and call. He wrote, “To me the work of preaching is the highest and greatest and the most glorious calling to which anyone can ever be called.” No apologies here for the high calling of *preaching* the Word of God to congregations.

The first chapter of this classic, titled “The Primacy of

Preaching," is worth the price of the book, especially as preachers and listeners become more and more apathetic regarding the pulpit and its work. He takes up subjects like "The Form of the Sermon," "The Act of Preaching," "The Preacher," "The Preparation of the Preacher," and even a chapter on "The Congregation." Some of this material could be used to teach congregations in order that they might understand preaching better and thus appreciate it more fully. I believe this is one of the few preaching books written in our lifetime that even non-preachers should read. I would urge pastors to share parts of this book, if not the whole volume, with their elders and deacons at a minimum. The better the view of preaching held by those leaders, the better will go the work of the minister in his pulpit. And the next time your congregation seeks to fill its pastoral office, the better will be the search and the fuller the knowledge of what they should look for in the process.

The chapter titled "Illustration, Eloquence, Humour" will not please many modern readers who have grown accustomed to serious abuses in these areas. He writes of humor, "The most one can say for the place of humour is that it is only allowable if it is natural. The man who tries to be humourous is an abomination and should never be allowed to enter a pulpit." This conclusion, alone, would drive up to 80 percent of our modern ministers either out of the pulpit or radically alter the way they preach, both in their manner and content!

In the following chapter, "What to Avoid," Lloyd-Jones gives us a treasure chest of practical help. He says, for example, "There are many things the preacher has to avoid. One is a display of knowledge." Later on he adds, "Watch your natural gifts and tendencies and idiosyncrasies. Watch them. What I mean is that they will tend to run away with you. It can be all summed up in a phrase—watch your strength. Not so much your weaknesses: it is your strength

you have to watch, the things of which you excel, your natural gifts and aptitudes."

One of the most useful practical suggestions in this volume affected my own life some 20 years ago when the book was first published and has been a major source of help to me since. The Doctor, as Lloyd-Jones was called, for he was a medical doctor, wrote, "The best way of checking any tendency to pride—pride in your preaching or in anything else that you may do or may be—is to read on Sunday nights the biography of some great saint." Try it, pastors. But don't get too low either, remembering that the greatest of men are still men at best, and forgiven sinners like you and me. But this much is sure, your work is never as important as you tend to think it is when you are filled with a sense of accomplishment. I might add, paradoxically and parenthetically, that it also is never as insignificant as you think it is when you count your numbers and the response of your congregation and feel as low as possible. (This is usually done in comparison with someone else's ministry and its importance versus your nonimportance, actually a terrible sin of pride!)

In his chapter "Calling for Decisions," Lloyd-Jones offers his thoughts concerning *entertainment*-centered worship services. It is safe to say he abominates the whole idea, which has grown ever so popular in the United States in the past decade. He also questions the method of using *altar calls* or *public invitations* to come forward at the end of a meeting, indicating a decision for Christ or something of that nature. He offers some of the finest reasoning I have read on the subject. Though you may disagree with his conclusions you would do well to consider his arguments carefully. If nothing else, such consideration will cause you to be much more careful in what you do and say when you call upon sinners to repent and respond to the gospel. I fear most people respond very emotionally to this subject due

to deeply engrained traditions, and thus have not carefully dealt with the kinds of arguments presented by Lloyd-Jones. (One American minister wrote his doctoral project on invitations and later published it. In it he actually takes up a response to this chapter, which indicates something of the importance of ML-J's arguments, I think!) One thing Lloyd-Jones consistently does in this book is think. He reasons with you, prods you to think, and disturbs you when you do. This is one mark of a useful and powerful work, both in the pulpit and in writing.

The final chapter of *Preaching and Preachers* may well be the most important one. "In Demonstration of the Spirit and of Power" states what ML-J concluded was often the missing element of his own preaching ministry—power with God and power with the hearer, divinely given as unction and the blessing of the Holy Spirit. Toward the end of this section he asks his reader:

Do you expect anything to happen when you get up to preach in a pulpit? Or do you just say to yourself, "Well, I have prepared my address; some of you will appreciate it and some will not?" Are you expecting it to be a turning point in someone's life? Are you expecting anyone to have a climactic experience? That is what preaching is meant to do. That is what you find in the Bible and in the subsequent history of the church. Seek this power, expect this power, yearn for this power; and when the power comes, yield to Him. Do not resist. Forget all about your sermon if necessary. Let Him loose you, let Him manifest His power in you and through you. I am certain, as I have said before, that nothing but a return of this power of the Spirit on our preaching is going to avail us anything. This makes true preaching, and it is the greatest need of all today—never more so. Nothing can substitute for this.

I cannot commend this book too highly. Get this book if you are called to preach. Get this book if you listen to preaching. Get this book if you want to understand much of what is wrong today. Read it with an open mind, a heart hungering for more of God, and a desire for reformation and revival in our time.

Editor

Homiletics

Karl Barth

Westminster/John Knox Press: Louisville, KY (1991)

136 pages, paperback, \$10.99

One of our century's most influential theologians, often criticized for good reason by evangelicals but infrequently read by them, had much to say about preaching. Like great Reformers of the sixteenth century, the late Karl Barth was a preacher of the Word and a man concerned for his hearers. These thoughts of Barth about the pulpit have been carefully edited (I would *assume* carefully translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley as well, since I do not read German) and presented in this complete version of the German *Homiletik* (1966).

The chapters of this book are based on a series of seminar lectures Barth gave at Bonn in 1932, and again in the summer of 1933 under the title "Exercises in Sermon Preparation."

The central thrust of Barth's book is a call to fidelity to the gospel. He insists on grace alone, and he demonstrates that preaching, which takes its shape in a sermon, can become a "work" done for "effect." He argues, rather, that ultimately homiletics is the work of preaching God's Word by grace alone! Here one senses that the Reformers' view of preaching affects Barth profoundly.

Interestingly Barth condemns “introductions” and “conclusions.” He reasons that conclusions to sermons often weaken grace, provide trite summation and minor-key application. I would not abandon formal conclusions for this reason, but I find his observations trenchant and troubling in the light of much preaching that I have done and heard over the past 25 years.

In another moving paragraph he argues, “Pastors should aim their guns beyond the hills of relevance.” Topical preaching which seeks to refer continually to the current political and social scene is to be rejected, according to Barth.

The area of Barth’s theological methodology which most often comes under fire from evangelicals is his view of Scripture. He did not embrace the same philosophical view of inerrancy affirmed by conservative writers in the late twentieth century. I believe his approach can and should be faulted, and some of the theological conclusions he drew should also be questioned. Having said that, I would add that this little book demonstrates that in his approach to preaching Barth developed a more biblical view of preaching than most evangelical writers in our century. Indeed, liberal scholars often criticize Barth for what they call his “uncompromising biblicism.” He believed that the faithful preacher should not mix his ideas into the text at all; indeed he must guard faithfully against all tendency to do this. Said Barth, “The sermon will be like the involuntary lip movement of one who is reading with great care, attention, and surprise.” I have found, in reading Barth, that he is surprisingly biblical again and again. Even when I disagree with him, which I certainly do, I find him driving me to the Word and to think. The Scriptures, Barth believes, speak God’s Word. As with Spurgeon, he would agree that our task is to release the message and meaning of the Word, of the text, so that this powerful lion can do its work.

Here is a statement of Barth that I reject, yet find myself feeling that he has spoken especially to conservative evangelicals in our era. He writes, “The proper attitude of preachers does not depend on whether they hold on to the doctrine of inspiration, but on whether or not they expect God to speak to them.” I would argue that ultimately one’s view of inspiration will affect preaching, for if he loses full confidence in the trustworthiness of the text, as many disciples of Barth apparently did, then he will give up Barth’s high view of preaching the Word of God alone. At the same time I would agree that those with a high view of the inspiration of the text often do not preach the text, going in for everything but clear, powerful, and expositional preaching of the Bible. One need not look far in the West today to realize that we are not producing theological and biblical preachers as Barth pleads for in this fine book. Barth, more than many with a sounder view of inspiration than his, calls us to “ongoing submission” to the Bible. He urges “active expectation” when we read the Word. Again I find little of this kind of emphasis in much modern dialogue regarding preaching today.

In the preface to this book the translator informs us that Barth taught these lectures along with a seminar on Calvin and a Luther discussion group. This was paralleled by a course in dogmatics. This little bit of history underscores Barth’s view that behind good preaching lay good theology. He believed that closeness to life was attained not by contemporary stories, humor, illustrations and other forms we have gone for with such a passion today, but by closeness to the text. Because of this the present volume is a polemic against much of what evangelicals are doing in their pulpits today. I believe it hits the target and should be read by those who dismiss Barth’s view of inspiration and, unfortunately, at the same time dismiss Barth altogether.

As one reviewer has written regarding this little volume:

More than any other thinker in the century, Barth linked theology and preaching: he proposed that theology should be "nothing other than sermon preparation." Thus, to follow his deliberations on preaching is to enter his theological world. Truly, here we have a shape of things to come.

The idea that sermon preparation is theology is critical to Barth's view. I have studied theology in formal settings, studied homiletics as well, but never was I taught that theology and sermon preparation are related in this clear way. It has revolutionized my own approach to the pulpit, as well as my study before I enter the pulpit. I do not study to get a sermon. I study the text to know God and as I know Him I then preach Him and His truth. This will take shape in theology, which is my effort to put God before my hearers in truth and power.

Editor

***The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text:
Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature***

Sidney Greidanus

William B. Eerdmans Company and Inter-Varsity Press (1988)
374 pages, paperback, \$14.95

Books on preaching are legion. Really bad ones are numerous; mediocre ones, more numerous. Good books, old and new, on preaching are rare. Great books are the rarest of all. It is not surprising, therefore, that any new book on preaching is likely to be viewed with a measure of healthy suspicion.

The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text is a relatively new book on preaching, and it possesses certain traits of

greatness. Indeed, it is a movable feast. It manages in 12 chapters to be not only a compendium of homiletics, but of hermeneutics and biblical theology as well.

As such, it is a book for which I have looked for 25 years. It is for that length of time that I have personally struggled with the whole question: What is the biblical message, and how do I communicate it with relevance to the people of my own time? To be sure, I have received real help in my struggle from a variety of men and books, from a rich diversity of backgrounds, and, I hope, from the Holy Spirit Himself. What I have looked for, however, throughout these years and throughout the struggle is a book that would clearly, cogently, and concisely address the issue and give real answers. Greidanus's book does just this.

"The modern preacher stands at the intersection of the ancient Scriptures and the contemporary congregation and has a responsibility to both" (p. 341). Relieving this burden of responsibility is the task that Greidanus sets for himself. His achievement is admirable.

The scheme of this achievement is to divide his material into four sections. In the first two chapters Greidanus looks at preaching in the times of the prophets and the apostles, preaching in our times, and preaching "then and now." In the process he pleads for a preaching that is truly expository, preaching that is true both to the message and the form of the Bible. Moreover, he critically interacts with the so-called "historical-critical method," finding it truncated and destructive in its failure to see and accept the supernatural world view of the biblical writers. What follows is an attempt to integrate the vital discoveries of the critics and their method with the biblical vision and faith in what he calls "a holistic historical-critical method."

In chapters three through five Greidanus gives us a thoroughgoing and holistic approach to hermeneutics, the science of biblical interpretation. He divides this approach

into literary, historical, and theological interpretation. His emphasis upon a "holistic" method is at loggerheads both with unbelieving criticism and believing moralism. The Bible is more than a collection of the best attempts of men to understand the divine. But, it is also more than a compendium of divinely inspired stories and dictates intended to make us better or to make us do better. Rather, the Bible is a message from God concerning His purpose and acts in history, culminating in the coming of His Son, Jesus Christ. It is here that Greidanus in a masterly fashion combines biblical theology with a scientific method informed by biblical faith.

The issue of contemporary sermon-crafting and preaching is dealt with in chapters six through eight. What he means by expository preaching becomes evident here. How are we to integrate the biblical text and its theme with a form that honors both, while at the same time communicating both in a relevant and timely way?

In chapters nine through twelve the writer brings together all of the various strands of his thinking, showing how the preacher might treat the various genre of biblical literature. A chapter is given to each of the following: preaching Hebrew narratives, preaching prophetic literature, preaching the Gospels, and preaching the Epistles.

There is so much bad preaching today, not only in liberal circles, but in fundamentalist and evangelical churches as well. This book may be looked upon as a truly God-sent contribution.

What is the source of this bad preaching? Where does it come from? What can be done to improve it, or better, to renew and transform it?

We must recover a preaching that is truly biblical. Of course, most preachers claim to be biblical. At least, they want to be biblical. The problem is complex, and Greidanus knows it. Indeed, the whole of his book might be described

as an attempt to define and demonstrate what biblical preaching is. Early on, he quotes Leander Keck:

Preaching is truly biblical when (a) the Bible governs the content of the sermon and when (b) the function of the sermon is analogous to that of the text. In other words, preaching is biblical when it imparts a Bible-shaped word in a Bible-like way (p. 10).

It is just at this point that so much contemporary preaching fails to cut the mustard. For example, how many church message boards announce that the pastor's message on the Sunday nearest the Fourth of July will be from the text: "Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord"? The content of most of these sermons revolves around the evils of our times, the need of a national return to God, the blessing(s) that will come if such a return is realized. Now, this is not a truly Bible-shaped word imported in a Bible-like way. Psalm 33:12 is concerned with declaring the privileges of God's covenant people. The emphasis is not upon human response or responsibility, but upon God's initiative and grace. There are no imperatives here, only indicatives. A biblical handling of this text must give it its immediate context in Psalm 33, its broader context in the historical roll of ancient Israel, and, finally, its fulfillment from the standpoint of such New Testament texts as 2 Corinthians 6:16-18 and 1 Peter 2:9-10. The application of such a text will have nothing to do with a patriotic or nationalistic theme, but with blessings of election, covenant, and God's ownership of His people.

We must recover a preaching that is God-centered. Too much that passes as preaching in Bible-believing churches today is indistinguishable from lectures in Christian Science churches or the local synagogue, or, for that matter, from a multitude of "self-help" conferences being offered on any

particular weekend. The thing that unites all of these disparate groups is the man-centered emphasis. Can it be persuasively denied that all too often the emphasis in the "Bible-believing" church is just as man-centered as that of the other groups mentioned?

Now, man-centered preaching cannot, by definition, be biblical preaching. The message of the Bible is full of God. It is God speaking, God acting, God doing and getting things done. Greidanus has much to say about the need for preaching that is God-centered.

When one asks about the purpose of the canon, the thrust of the Bible as a whole, the answer seems quite obvious: The canon intends to tell us about God—not God in the abstract, but God in relationship to His creation and His people, God's actions in the world, God's coming kingdom (p. 113).

Further on, he quotes Leland Ryken who says, "Biblical literature consistently affirms a God-centered world view. This means that God is not only the supreme value, but that He also gives identity to all other aspects of experience" (p. 114). In concluding an entire section devoted to this theme, he says, "Theocentric interpretation seeks to expose in every passage this God-centered focus of the entire Bible" (p. 116).

Such a theocentric approach will eschew the tendency to moralize from the examples of the biblical characters, whether they are seen as good or bad examples. For example, the story of David and Goliath (1 Sam. 17) is not intended to set before our eyes a hero; rather it magnifies the God who establishes His king and His kingdom by the weak and despised methods of faith which "bring to nothing the things that are." The "heroic" approach to this passage makes it little more than an inspired "Jack-and-the-Beanstalk" story, while a theocentric perspective enables us to see God at work, and at work in such a way "that no flesh

may glory before Him."

The dearth of such preaching in our churches today cannot but be a source of the lack of joy, vigor, and vision among us. "The people who know their God shall be strong and shall do exploits" (Dan. 11:32). Preaching that is God-centered will do much to encourage reformation and revival. Indeed, we expect neither without it. Greidanus can help in this recovery as it is a common theme of the whole book.

Further, we must recover a preaching that is Christ-centered. Sadly, the rather harsh indictment made at the beginning of the last section could be made with equal fervor here. How often do we hear preaching from supposed Christian pulpits that is decidedly lacking in content that is Christian, i.e., related directly to Christ? There is preaching that is moral in that it attacks sin and urges moral change, but in a manner that is divorced from the central truth of Christ's person and accomplishment. We hear preaching regarding the "end times" but in a form that preoccupies the hearers more with something that will happen than with Someone who will come. We even hear preaching about spiritual change and "decisions" rather than declaring the Good News of Christ. Now none of this is, strictly speaking, Christian preaching in that it is not strictly Christocentric, Christ-centered.

Nor is this to plead for a preaching that is artificially Christ-centered, as if we must preach the death and resurrection in every sermon. Greidanus writes:

Often Christocentric preaching is misunderstood as "Jesucentric" preaching; that is, every sermon must somehow make reference to Jesus of Nazareth, His birth, life, death, or resurrection. That endeavor itself is not wrong, but its imposition as a methodological principle on every text is wrong, for it leads to forcing parallels between the text and Jesus. Moreover, it shortchanges Jesus, for the New

particular weekend. The thing that unites all of these disparate groups is the man-centered emphasis. Can it be persuasively denied that all too often the emphasis in the "Bible-believing" church is just as man-centered as that of the other groups mentioned?

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Testament testifies that He is the eternal Logos, one with the Father and the Holy Spirit (e.g., John 1; 1 Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:15-19; Heb. 1-2). It will not do, therefore, “to speak of Christ only at some fixed point part way along the line, as though previously one could speak only of God, without reference to Christ.”

From the New Testament perspective, therefore, theocentric interpretation without any further additions is already Christocentric, for Christ is God.

Yet Christocentric preaching is more than theocentric preaching but what is this “more”? It comes to expression, I think, in the deceptively simple assertion: “The Christian proclamation of an Old Testament text is not the preaching of an Old Testament sermon.”

Christocentric preaching is the preaching of God’s acts *from the perspective of the New Testament* (pp. 118-19).

Perspective is the key word in this understanding. Without the proper perspective all will fail. Greidanus says further:

The essence of Christocentric preaching lies not in lines drawn from the Old Testament to the New Testament but in the prior move in the opposite direction—the move from the fullness of the New Testament revelation to a new understanding of the Old Testament passage (p. 119).

Greidanus himself gives a wonderful example of a Christocentric approach to both interpretation and preaching from the record of the stilling of the storm in Luke 8.

For example,

In the familiar story of Jesus sleeping in the boat during a storm, the climax is not, as so often preached, in the calming of the wind and waves. It is rather the disciples’ question at the end of the story: “Who is this? He commands even the

winds and the water, and they obey Him” (Luke 8:25).

Thus, the conclusion of this sermon can hardly be the assurance, true as this may be, that Jesus calms the storms in our lives, but the question (if not the answer to): “Who is this?” (p. 307).

It is my personal conviction that the greatest need of modern preaching is the recovery of this Christocentric perspective. If I am right, then Greidanus can help us tremendously in filling this need.

Much more could be said concerning a variety of things such as the question of sermon form, relevance, etc. Greidanus offers practical, valuable help in these and many other areas.

My advice, I almost said my plea, to every preacher or student aspiring to preach is: Get this book. Study it. Ponder it. Argue with it. It will challenge you, correct you, help you, inform you, and thrill you. It will enable us all to better carry out our responsibility to the ancient text and our modern hearers as those who “preach the Word.”

As a postscript I must ask: Why do the publishers continue to give us such excellent works in such shoddy bindings? This expensive paperback is glued at the spine. Its covers curl like ancient scrolls in humid weather. And it refuses to lie flat under any circumstances, a point of great frustration to any would-be reviewer.

Thomas N. Smith