

[MJTM 23 (2021–2022)]

#### BOOK REVIEW

Chase R. Kuhn and Paul Grimmond, eds. *Theology is for Preaching: Biblical Foundations, Method, and Practice*. Studies in Historical and Systematic Theology. Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2021. xxvi + 343 pp. Pbk. ISBN 978-1-68359-459-8. \$29.99.

This volume appears in Lexham’s wide-ranging “Studies in Historical and Systematic Theology” series, which engages past theologians and present theological issues from a distinctively evangelical perspective. Grouped in five categories, the nineteen essays (and two sermons) defend a theologically informed approach to preaching, maintaining the priority of Scripture as interpreted within the framework of classic Protestant orthodoxy.

Five essays under the heading “Foundations” defend systematic theology both as a discipline in its own right and as a guide to faithful interpretation of Scripture for preaching (Kuhn, “Theology for Preaching, Preaching for Theology”); argue that the church’s preaching finds its theological justification in the character and “communicative activity” of God, at least partly on the grounds that Jesus (ostensibly) prioritized preaching over healing and deliverance (Mark D. Thompson, “The Declarative God: Toward a *Theological* Description of Preaching”); review New Testament Greek vocabulary for preaching and proclamation (Claire S. Smith, “‘Preaching’: Toward Lexical Clarity for Better Practice”); defend Bullinger’s claim that “The preaching of the Word of God is the Word of God” by virtue of Christ’s agency in and through the ordained minister (Timothy Ward, “Preaching and Revelation: Is the Sermon the Word of God?”); and summarize New Testament teaching on the qualities required of a (male) preacher, discussing the roles of the church and the individual, respectively, in affirming God’s call to preach (Christo-

pher Ash, “Who Can Tell? Preaching, Giftedness, and Commissioning”).

Addressing “Methodology” (the book’s longest section), David I. Starling (“Hermeneutics and Preaching: Theological Interpretation and the Preaching Task”) invokes the letter to the Hebrews as representative of theologically committed interpretation of the Hebrew Bible that should characterize theologically informed preaching, much as Paul R. House (“To Them, For Us: The Bible’s Continuing Relevance”) proposes that preachers should apply Scripture typologically to their current audiences in the same way that Paul expounded the Hebrew Bible for the church at Corinth: “Scripture’s audiences are one, and the message is one” (105). But neither author acknowledges the critical hermeneutical difference between apostolic authority (on the part of New Testament writers) and the fact that a modern preacher must submit to the primacy of canonical texts. Daniel Y. Wu (“Old Testament Challenges: Christocentric or Christotelic Sermons?”) proposes that both approaches are legitimate and should complement one another, even though both are properly superseded (in his view) by an emphasis on engagement with and responding to God. But how this approach deals with the revelatory primacy of Christ (which is at the crux of the debate) is not explained. In “New Testament Clarity: The Presence of Christ in the Proclamation of the Word,” one of the more closely argued and compelling contributions, Peter Orr offers a detailed exposition of Paul’s account of preaching in 2 Cor 3:12–4:6. The preaching of the gospel, according to the Apostle, is Christ’s means of self-manifestation in the era of his bodily absence, such that the power of the Holy Spirit enables hearers to “behold” the face of Jesus. Comparing similar language elsewhere in 1 Cor 1–2, “The Centrality of the Cross in Proclamation” (by Will N. Timmins) offers a closely reasoned exegesis of the phrase ἐν σοφίᾳ λόγου from 1 Cor 1:17 as Paul’s description of rhetoric that (erroneously) relies on human, rather than divine persuasion in the power of God’s Spirit. Peter Adam provides a brief historical sketch of “Expository Preaching in Historical Context: A Rich and Inspiring Resource,” focusing especially on Augustine and Calvin (with an extensive bibliography). Finally, Graham

Beynon's "The Preacher as Person: Personality and Relationships in the Pulpit" gives a finely nuanced account of the rôle of character and personality in relation to divine grace in preaching. Personal transformation, he argues, and finding one's God-given voice, are integral features of the divine economy of preaching.

Under the category of "Theology for Preaching," Edward Loane ("Salvation by Preaching Alone? The Sermon in Soteriology") invokes the preaching of Christ and his deputizing of the apostles as a foundational warrant for the church's preaching today. Critically, however (citing Calvin), he identifies preaching as the instrumental rather than meritorious or effective cause of salvation, since the sermon is ordinarily God's chosen instrument for this purpose. Andrew M. Leslie ("Sanctified by Word and Spirit: A Theology of Application") expounds this principle in keen theological detail, explaining "the perlocutionary dynamic of Christ's sanctifying work" in relation to the illocutionary content of Scripture and sermon alike. Somewhat unusually for an Evangelical treatment, Peter F. Jensen ("Now is the Time to Preach: Preaching in Eschatological Context") seeks to correct what he perceives to be an over-emphasis on the cross of Christ, to the neglect of the moral and existential imperatives of human finitude and final divine judgment. Addressing the ecclesiastical dimensions of preaching, David G. Peterson's "The Priority of Proclamation: Preaching in a Liturgical Context" argues for the centrality of the sermon in the worship of the church (as befits the book's generally Reformed outlook) and advocates use of lectionary schemes (in this instance, the Revised Common Lectionary) as a modified form of *lectio continua* for homiletical exposition.

"Preaching for Theology" seems more of a catch-all category, as the three essays in this section are less clearly linked. In "Theological Formation through the Preached Word: A Biblical-Theological Account," Simon Gillham offers a refreshingly self-critical assessment of expository preaching (his own included), arguing that biblical preaching should aim at an embodied (rather than simply intellectual) knowledge of God, insofar as knowledge of God and personal transformation are mutually reinforcing and recursive. Along the same lines, he advocates narrative

(instead of uniformly propositional) and corporately based approaches to preaching, so as to invite communities (rather than discrete individuals) to inhabit (rather than intellectualize) the world of the text. Gillham, it should be noted, is a missiologist whose research focuses on cross-cultural ministry. Jane Tooher (“The People Who Listen: The Corporate Task of Hearing God’s Word”) stresses the importance of careful listening to the Word of God, and, for preachers, advocates construing their audience as “ideal listeners” who are already willing and ready to hear a word from God in the sermon. By way of conclusion in “Letting the Word Do the Work: A Constructive Account of Expository Preaching,” Paul Grimmond summarizes: “The aim of this book, and the aim of this chapter, has been to argue for the importance of systematic theology and to reflect on the significance of dogmatics for the preaching task” (296). It seems only fair to point out, however, that the volume attempts considerably more than this, as does the essay itself, which advocates addressing emotion or “affections” and calling for personal change on the part of hearers, in addition to shaping a systematic theological perspective on their part.

Finally, “Theology Preached” offers a pair of sermons. Simon Manchester’s “Listening Before Speaking—Jeremiah 23:16–32” focuses on the distinction between human and divine origins of the sermon, with the insistence that divine inspiration is to be found in the biblical text alone, while “Meeting Jesus: Luke 5:1–11” (Phillip D. Jensen) is essentially a salvation sermon inviting readers to meet Jesus, if necessary for the first time.

These essays set forth a consistently Reformed (mostly male-oriented) vision of the church’s ministry: only two contributors are women; all but four represent Australian theological institutions (primarily Moore Theological College, Sydney). Except as noted, the volume mostly reiterates familiar social and doctrinal positions rather than seeking to be self-critical or break new ground. Accordingly, readers who share this perspective will gain much encouragement from the volume; those who do not will find little interaction with alternative points of view.

Typographical errors (missing words; extraneous spacing; misspellings) are relatively infrequent but by no means absent.

Review: KUHN AND GRIMMONDS *Theology Is for Preaching* R91

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