

## BOOK REVIEWS

Theo Witvliet, *The Way of The Black Messiah* (Oak Park, Ill.: Meyer & Stone, 1987). 265 pages.

Theo Witvliet is a Dutch liberation theologian who lectures in ecumenism at Amsterdam University. As a theological journalist he has reported often on happenings in the World Council of Churches. He himself tells the reader that his desire to write a text like the one in question goes back more than a decade. The occasion was a symposium sponsored by the WCC which enabled Black and Latin American liberation theologians to engage in dialogue in 1973. The author apparently began delving heavily into the literature on liberation theology around that time, summarizing his research in very able fashion in his 1985 Orbis publication, *A Place in the Sun*, which in my view remains the best introductory text on liberation theology to date.

He has written a very careful text on Black Theology, the first of its kind by a white theologian. He unquestionably meets the criteria that anyone, especially whites, must meet in order to write on this topic. These include: 1) familiarity with the literature of the black religio-cultural experience; 2) sensitivity to that literature and a willingness to take it seriously; 3) genuine commitment to the liberation of the oppressed and a willingness to see through their eyes; 4) willingness and courage to instruct whites on the significance of liberation theology, etc. The latter criterion applies primarily to the white scholar who would write black theology. Theo Witvliet meets these criteria.

He ably defends black theology against the charges of either not being "real" theology, or of merely being ideology. Both charges have often been made by white theologians in early and later phases of the development of black theology. Though he thinks that black theology is no more "mere" ideology than theologies of the dominant group, Witvliet points out that both sides are left wanting when it comes to making a clear distinction between theology and ideology (254). Though he seems to be sympathetic toward Cone's view that it is the oppressed who are in a better position to determine when theology deteriorates into ideology, e.g., when it is functioning for the interests of oppressors rather than for the liberation of the oppressed and forgotten of history (253), he is just as adamant that the real difficulty in the use of the term ideology is that both white and black theologians give it a negative significance (255). The author would rather view ideology as:

... the way in which people envisage their reality, as the imaginary relation of human beings to the conditions in which they really live. In that case ideology is not a false awareness of power relationships (though it can be that), but that which precedes and determines consciousness. Christian faith, as a human possibility and choice, lives in ideology and not outside it. The same is true of theology (256).

He goes on to say that Cone's theological commitment is involved both in ideology and his struggle against oppression. The same may be said of white theologians involved in socio-political struggles. On this view, then, the real issue is not between faith and ideology, but between "faith" and "faith."

The black person who reads this text will find it difficult not to be impressed by the breadth of his research into black literature and the degree to which he seems to have assimilated this material. The author gives a good bibliographical survey of resources on the black experience (189-193), and includes sixty pages of very informative notes. To have read this text without also reading the notes is to have only half read it!

Witvliet considers James H. Cone to be the frontrunner in black theology, but he skillfully points out what he believes are weaknesses in Cone's theology, e.g., his failure to give enough attention to pneumatology, even though on Witvliet's view Cone's theology "tends towards a pneumatological christology" (224; also XVII, 218, 220, 225). In addition he contends that methodologically Cone remains a prisoner to the very thought he wishes to be freed from (176). He believes Cone needs to free himself from Tillich's method of correlation, and proceeds to explain why (232). So, the author clearly thinks highly of the work of Cone, quoting him more often than any other black theologian; but he does not hesitate to make constructive criticism of all black theologians. He is able to do this because, unlike many white theologians, he demonstrates that he has read much of the literature on black theology carefully and systematically. This enables him to point to weaknesses during the early phase of black theology; and how these were overcome in later stages of development. He therefore avoids the mistake of white theologians who in 1979 (Schubert Ogden, *Faith and Freedom*) and 1981 (Deane Ferm, *Contemporary American Theologies*) wrongly accuse Cone's theology in its more advanced period of being too exclusive.

In order to determine whether black theology may rightly be considered as liberation theology Witvliet applies three hermeneutical elements throughout as a way of testing this. These elements are liberation, context, and ideology. In each case he desires to know the hermeneutical questions and decisions implied in each of these elements. He is consistent throughout in this regard, and shows unquestionably that black theology is liberation theology, and more so than some other brands. He does a commendable job of explaining what must happen before we can talk of authentic liberation theology (41, 43-44), viz., that there must be

both a break with a traditional continuity with the faith in the sense of remaining in that camp. He also tells us what the criterion is for viewing liberation theology as a new way of doing theology (67). He shows a good understanding of how black religion is neither the creation of Western Christianity nor a pure derivative of Africa (196). The author argues for a pneumatological basis for the hermeneutical process that connects the historical praxis of Jesus with the black experience (218, 224). It is the Spirit, not black theology that makes this connection. He reveals his appreciation of Cone's "razor sharp polemic" (165), and proposes a three-fold function of polemic (86-87). As a form of "self-liberation" black polemic is "a strategic weapon for breaking open the closedness of this argument [i.e., the failure to acknowledge the spiritual right of blacks to even existing] and making room for the question of the theological relevance of black experience and history" (87). In addition, he discusses the three points without which one cannot understand the context of black theology (160-162). He points to Martin King as the pioneer black theologian (125, 143), and skillfully indicates both the contributions of King and Malcolm X made to the emergence of black theology and the dialectical tension between them (117-129, 139, 140, 143, 144, 161-162).

This text is essentially written for whites (4, 14). Yet I agree with Gayraud Wilmore who introduces the text with a fine Foreword, that it is not likely to make significant impact in white theological circles inasmuch as whites have not paid much attention to the developments in black theology. But perhaps Witvliet's book will serve to keep the door of possibility and hope cracked.

The only way this text fails, I think, is the interjection of numerous Latin phrases without the English translation. Many laypersons (and scholars without training in Latin!) may find this too much of a distraction in an otherwise excellent text.

The appearance of this book encourages me at two points. First, the white theologian who is committed to the liberation theme and who, as Wilmore says, "has the correct instincts, inspiration, and information" (IX) can in fact write black theology, and in some instances as well as committed black-skinned theologians (a point I tried to make in an essay entitled, "Who Teaches Black Theology?"). Second, I am more convinced than ever that sensitive white theologians like Witvliet must bear more of the burden and onus of instructing the white theological and church community on black and other brands of liberation theology. Though blacks will need to do some of this as well, it seems to me that our challenge lies first and foremost in our community and church, at least for some time yet.

I feel good about this text. Yet as I reflect on it there are points I would highlight and some I would hope the author would consider as he continues his work in this area. These are not presented in order of importance.

First, the author is impressed with the significance of the use of story in black theology in general and in Cone's theology in particular. He is able to see that in black theology the black story is crucial inasmuch as it determines both its content and its structure (233). He goes so far as to say that what Cone writes in *God of the Oppressed* about the black story turns out to be some of the best pages in the text (257). Pointing out the significance of concept and theory formation as well as critical analysis in theology, he concludes that "the story is the basic material and basic structure of theological reflection" (258). Here he rightly thinks that Cone has done a better job than most in recognizing this and the fact that the biblical story and our individual stories are not to be confused. Witvliet has been able to see, where many white theologians have not, why the black story is important in black theology and why one cannot begin to understand this form of liberation theology apart from that story.

The author is very disturbed by what he sees as insufficient consideration of pneumatology or the role of the Spirit. Here he refers to "the third article of faith" or the Holy Spirit (220). In various other places in the text he points out his belief that it is the Spirit, not black theologians that makes the connection between the praxis of Jesus Christ and the black experience (218, 223). More attention and credit needs to be given the Spirit, for the Spirit calls persons and connects them with the divine movement. I think Witvliet's point is a good one, and in fact there are black religious scholars, e.g., Robert Hood, who have argued a similar point.

In a lecture given at Christian Theological Seminary on February 25, 1987 entitled "The Spirit as a Source of Liberation," Hood contended that the influence of the Spirit on blacks was inspired by African traditional religions, and that the slaves use of Spirit was always a kind of double entendre, in that in the presence of white slavers they expressed one meaning (pointing to another world), while deep in their souls Spirit had revolutionary and political implications. It was the Spirit that gave them their great sense or urgency. For Hood Spirit is part of the grammar of black religion which links the black church and black theology. Most importantly, Hood contended that black theologians have not done enough with Spirit and this needs to change. In private conversation he conceded that there seems to be a little movement in this direction in Cone's essays on the black church and worship in Cone's book, *Speaking the Truth*. Though I think Witvliet and Hood are talking both about similar and different things when they say that pneumatology has not

been highlighted enough in black theology, this clearly is a matter that needs much more attention, especially because of the historical role of Spirit in black religion. In addition, the author may be helped immensely by an examination of what Spirit means and how the Spirit functions for black folk.

I am impressed by the author's candid admission that though he has tried to be thorough and fair in his treatment of the literature on the black religio-cultural experience, there is still a sense in which he and other sensitive whites remain outside of that experience. He not only points to Helmut Gollwitzer and Paul Lehmann as outsiders (250, 252), but himself as well (264). Witvliet displays a level of sensitivity that escapes most white theologians and ethicists I know. Though he is not hesitant about challenging certain views of black theologians, he admits that "as an outsider" he is in no position to tell black theologians "what their hermeneutical challenge must be." One of the things that disturb me greatly about so many white religious scholars is how quickly they proceed to tell blacks how theology should be done and what the most important questions are in theology, and without ever having shown signs of having heard what blacks have to say. Witvliet shows that it is possible for white theologians to respond differently. This is most refreshing.

Relatedly, Witvliet reveals that he knows a lot about trying to see the problem through the eyes of the victims—or the other. He understands clearly that there is a price to be paid for this, and that it is not enough to just say that one takes this practice seriously. One way he puts this view into practice is through familiarizing himself with the black experience. He knows that failure to do so militates against ever understanding what black theology is all about. So he set up a disciplined system of reading black history and other literature. I do not imagine that Witvliet has found this too much of an imposition. White theologians can learn much from this, for black theology and the black experience are important not only for blacks, but for everybody!

Black theology is important because in its way it bears witness to the black story, the story of the struggle for human dignity and freedom in the midst of the opacity of history. In the story of these 'stepchildren of Western culture' (C.Long) we realize the otherness of the O(ther), embodied in blackness, with all that this term implies in terms of hurt, shame, defilement, anxiety and guilt-feelings in a centuries-long history of white supremacy (265).

Witvliet knows that until white theologians work consciously and indefatigably to see the problem of oppression from the bottomside or through the eyes of the oppressed they will never be able to engage in constructive dialogue with them. Neither will they fully understand the extent of the pain and suffering of the "beaten Christs" of this country and the Third World.

In several places the author implies that had it not been for the dia-

logues with Latins and women, black theologians may have had more difficulty in moving from a basically race analysis to the inclusion of class and sex analysis (233, 245, 236-237). "It was above all the critical questions of Latin American and feminist theologians which led black theology to leave behind the image of America as a closed society, as a white monolithic block. . ." and to be able to see that the problem of racism is integrally entangled with other forms of domination, e.g., classism, sexism, capitalism, and the ever widening chasm between the black middle class and the black declassé. Though I think there is much truth in what Witvliet says here, I am not convinced that this is the whole truth.

Let us assume that the dialogue with the Latins and women never occurred. In light of the nature of the black church experience and the seriousness with which black Christians have always taken the principle of the equality of all persons before God, as well as the unity and oneness of all persons through the blood of Jesus Christ, is it not reasonable to think that some black theologian would have eventually moved beyond mere race analysis to include other forms of oppression? What of the Christian socialist George Washington Woodbey? What of W.E.B. Du-Bois, who as a "socialist of the path" could see that "capitalism and racism were inextricably tied together" (see Manning Marable, *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America*, p. 15)? And what of the many political essays written by Manning Marable in which he deals with the relationship between race, class, sex, capitalism, and other forms of oppression? Surely black theologians could have gotten the same encouragement from these black analysts as they did from the Latins. Also, the early interest that black theologians had in looking into black historical sources would have led them to the consideration of black feminists of the nineteenth century, e.g., Jarena Lee, Francis E.W. Harper, Sojourner Truth, Julia Foote, Anna Cooper, etc., who fought against sexism in the black church and community. It is difficult for me to believe that a James Cone would not have responded to these cries as he did in 1976 when he took a public stand against black sexism. Therefore, I do not disagree completely with Witvliet's view that it took the dialogue with the Latins and women to move black theologians to include other forms of analysis and to see how systems impinge on each other. I insist, however, that what I have said above is an important piece of this, and that there is something about the black religio-cultural experience itself that would have caused black theologians like Cone to move in the direction he did.

Witvliet dates the origin of black theology to the events of 1966 "when the civil rights movement split and Black Power appeared" (105). Without arguing the point, I contend that we can say this only if we are mindful that inasmuch as black theology was born in protest it is neces-

sary that we look much further back than the sixties. Black protest against white oppression actually began in the interior of West Africa (during the forced march to the seashore where slave ships awaited), continued in the makeshift forts on the beaches, during the "middle passage," and in the colonies. These early struggles to be free were instances of Black Power. It therefore seems to me that, though there was surely no such thing as a formal black theology in those days, the rudiments of it date back to those early struggles.

This next point pertains to Wilmore's view in the Foreword that Witvliet "belongs with us," and that "he has already proven himself to be no outsider to the black theology movement in the United States" (XII). Here I would simply raise a flag of caution (albeit apprehensively, since I want so badly to believe that he is right). Unquestionably Witvliet has done good work and we should be supportive of him. I think, however, that we need to give him some more time to demonstrate his commitment in print as well as in white theological and church circles. No, blacks must do nothing to hinder those white brothers and sisters who want to try to do right by the oppressed. By the same token we must not forget the history of betrayal and pain either. Witvliet has taken a big step forward in terms of the dialogical process between black and white theologians. We must allow him the opportunity to do more however. In addition we need to be careful that we not force him to be what he may not be ready to be. In other words, no matter how much we may desire that he be in the black liberation camp, he may need more time. In any case, I am highly impressed with *The Way of the Black Messiah* and want to believe that Theo Witvliet really does belong with us.

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David Lyle Jeffrey, ed., *A Burning and A Shining Light: English Spirituality in the Age of Wesley* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 517 pages.

David Jeffrey has produced an anthology on English Spirituality during the Wesley era that is truly commendable in many respects. In the Preface Jeffrey sets forth his aim to produce an anthology that provides "an introduction for the general reader to some of the best English spiritual writing in the age of the Great Evangelical Revival, from Watts to Wilberforce" (ix). He includes sermons, writings, hymns, not only from Isaac Watts and William Wilberforce, but from eleven other individuals, including William Law, John and Charles Wesley, John Newton, Hannah More and William Cowper. Happily, I note his treatment of collections of two women and his strong editorial observation of the role

of a third in the evangelical movement—Lady Selina, Countess of Huntingdon.

To guide the reader through his voluminous and fine collection of documents, Jeffrey provides a 52 paged "Introduction." This section supplies the reader with a good historical-religious overview of the Revival period, a set of helpful endnotes, and a good collection of original and secondary bibliographic references. In addition, Jeffrey introduces the collection of each of his subjects with a brief but sufficiently in-depth biographical portrait with notes. Whether these biographies consist of four pages, prefacing William Law's selections, or nine pages, introducing John Wesley's, they are helpful in placing the collections in their historical and religious contexts. On the whole, his selections are illuminating and reflective of the evangelical era.

I have some concerns about Jeffrey's book, however. (1) Though his biographical sketch on John Wesley is informative, I have the sense that Jeffrey judged Wesley a bit more harshly than the criticism meted out to his brother Charles or most of the other subjects treated in the text. Jeffrey, for all of the positive points he raises about Wesley, sprinkles his bio-sketch with negatives such as Wesley's supposed difficulty in working with others which drove people from associating with him (203-204); Wesley's supposed legacy of "sermon texts that often seem to lack clarity of logic or coherence in their organization" (205); Jeffrey's claim that one finds "surprisingly little in the way of pastoral guidance in his voluminous correspondence that has enduring spiritual value" (205); and Wesley's alleged "despotic desire for control" (205). Perhaps Jeffrey went too far in an effort to demonstrate that the saint John Wesley, like every person, had clay feet.

(2) I am also disappointed that Jeffrey's editorial comments on his selections do not reveal much more clearly the African presence in Wesleyan spirituality. Granted, a book focused on "English spiritual writing" might with possibly good reason(s) omit the historical treatment of the presence of Caribbeans, North Americans, and English blacks in ecclesiastical circles. But in the collection of original documents of John Wesley and William Wilberforce surely space could legitimately be found for including these men's theological arguments against racism and slavery. Perhaps one might contend that antislavery tracts do not clearly fit the category of "spiritual writings." I would insist, however, that Wesley's and Wilberforce's protests against racial injustice carried the same force for them as their exhortations against adultery and materialism. All were viewed as obstacles to holy and righteous living and as hindrances to the individual Christian's goal to be "a burning and shining light."

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Roger D. Hatch, *Beyond Opportunity: Jesse Jackson's Vision for America* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988): 157 pages.

*Beyond Opportunity* is a very good exposition of Jesse Jackson's political views and an indispensable source for anyone seeking a more comprehensive, in-depth understanding of the ideas of this prominent minister, human rights activist, and twice presidential candidate. The author, Roger D. Hatch, is probably correct when he points out in the introduction that this work suggests a holistic understanding of the American electoral process. A well-organized, clearly-written book with an engaging flowing style, *Beyond Opportunity* in its six chapters, introduction, and epilogue, covers a wide range of topics relative to Jackson's thought. The author discusses Jackson's endeavor to move the human rights struggle "beyond opportunity," i.e., the acquisition of civil liberties, of the civil rights movement of the 1950's and the 1960's to economic equality and parity; his vision of the U.S. in which even historically oppressed black Americans may experience it as completely free and just; Jackson's advocacy of a more humane set of domestic policies which empowers Americans of all races, classes, and occupations; his view of a foreign policy which sides consistently with justice and mercy throughout the world; Jackson's vision of a movement for social change which transcends the classical divisions of "conservative" and "liberal" and carries all people to "common ground" and a "higher moral ground," a vision reflective of the Judeo-Christian tradition and the most noble tradition of America; and a treatment of the controversies which have beset Jackson and his campaigns for the White House including charges of opportunism and anti-Semitism.

The author clearly sets forth his objective in the book's introduction: to advance beyond a discussion of Jackson's personality and style to address his ideas. By so doing, he has plainly demonstrated that Jackson's views are systematic and coherent. Given the frequent unreliability of the news media in providing us with such well-rounded portraits of public figures, *Beyond Opportunity* is a boon for understanding one of the most influential Americans in the last quarter of the twentieth century.

My criticism of Hatch's work revolves more around what he left unsaid rather than the quality of those things presented, i. e., this reviewer has three major concerns. 1) It would be immensely helpful if the author had provided a more critical analysis of Jackson's thought. One wonders if the "problem" might be Hatch's basic agreement with Jackson's views. If so, this agreement should be stated much more forcefully. 2) Even greater difficulty with *Beyond Opportunity* was the author's decision to

focus upon Jackson's views to the exclusion of assessing his character. Though it may be possible to prioritize his thoughts rather than his personality, it seems somewhat unrealistic to attempt a complete dichotomy of the two. The situation borders on the absurd when Hatch in his epilogue admits that this inquiry ("What do you really think about Jesse Jackson?" 131) is often made of him and then proceeds to evade the issue. Hatch writes:

I have resisted answering that question, in part because I was still in the midst of my research and had not fully formulated my conclusions. I can no longer use that reason. Yet I still resist answering the question, but for a different reason. This question of what someone really thinks about Jesse Jackson usually centers around evaluating him as a personality, not around his ideas or political platform or agenda. It has been my goal in this book to demonstrate that—his ideas deserve explication and examination. American politics, to its detriment, has too often devolved into personality contents rather than a contest over issues . . . (131-132).

Two points deserve elaboration in response to Hatch's ambivalent position. First, he makes the same mistake as former senator and presidential candidate Gary Hart. In politics, people do not, and perhaps will never, neatly separate ideas from personality. Granted, we should focus on Jackson's "political program or agenda"—part of which has been his stated intention and efforts to become President of the United States. The American people have made it quite clear that their perception of a person's character (in addition to his ideas) is at least significant in their decision to support or withhold their support.

Secondly, there is something quite disturbing about the decision of an author who refuses an assessment of the individual's personality or character. A reader almost has to conclude that the author has a negative impression of the person. He does Jackson a grave disservice by allowing his imagination to run wildly. It would have been more useful and fair for Hatch to state his negative assessment (if such is the case), defend it, and open himself as an author to the critical opinions of other scholars and informed persons.

3) Finally, the major area of concern is Hatch's omission of an in-depth, systematic, sustained discussion of Jesse Jackson the preacher, theologian, and religious leader. This discussion would have been of immense value to scholars (religionists, historians, political scientists) and the general public. The back cover of *Beyond Opportunity* hails the work as the "the first book to examine Jackson's ideas as they emerged from the context of Jackson's black church experience." Hatch devotes several pages at the beginning of the book to a general discussion of political and religious language of the black church and a limited discussion of the black church and the civil rights movements, and he occasionally mentions Jackson's call to the ministry and his co-pastorship of a Chi-

ago Baptist church. But I am disappointed that a professor and chairperson of a university department of religion did not elect to present a more in-depth, thorough analysis of the religious Jesse Jackson, neglecting to examine the crucial theological and religious underpinnings of Jackson's political world view.

There are serious omissions of details which render fragile the claim of positing this work in "the context of Jackson's black church experience." Exactly what was the nature of Jackson's call to the ministry? Has the preacher-politician over the years modified his understanding of his vocation as Christian minister? Did Jackson ever elect to return to seminary after leaving for his civil rights involvements? How actively is he involved in the Baptist congregation which he co-pastors? What are his relationships with other religious leaders and denominations? How do his views on Christianity and political involvement differ from those of Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson? How does he theologially account for the political differences between himself and those of personalities on the religious right?

In sum, I found Hatch's *Beyond Opportunity* could contain a more informative background discussion on the black church and its political involvements, a greater elaboration on Jesse Jackson the preacher, and a more complete discussion on the basic tenets of Jackson's theology. These interpretive keys, will provide the student of history, politics, and religion, as well as the general public, a fuller portrait of Jesse Jackson the politician.

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Marilyn Richardson, ed., *Maria W. Stewart, American's First Black Woman Political Writer: Essays and Speeches* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 1987). 133 pages.

It is seldom that a book captures attention from beginning to end! Marilyn Richardson's superb editing of this volume is praiseworthy because she has made it possible for us to read the essays and speeches of Maria W. Stewart in their entirety.

Richardson introduces Stewart as America's first black woman political writer who championed the cause of unfettered equality and black freedom at a time when the nation looked upon slave and free black Americans, especially black women, as radical agitators beyond the pale of liberating politics. Readers now have a first hand account of a remarkable black woman who used moral suasion and the power of Scriptures to condemn slavery, segregation and racial discrimination, working toward their abolition as a primary mission in the social, educational, eco-

nomie, political, and religious uplift of her fellow black Americans. Maria Stewart's work and philosophy, "set forth those dynamic elements of her ideology which continued to shape her social gospel over the ensuing years . . . the inestimable value of education, the historical inevitability of black liberation—through violent means if necessary—the need for black unity and collective action, and the special responsibilities of women" (9).

Richardson's biographical sketch of Maria Stewart's work and social gospel is understandable because of her schematic and topical arrangements of the documents presented in the book. Part I chronicles Stewart's essays and speeches delivered in Boston between 1831 and 1833. Part II details her life after 1833 in Washington, D.C., where Stewart taught young blacks in various church schools and worked, until her death in 1879, as a matron at the Freedman's General Hospital and Asylum.

Although Maria Stewart had a long and distinguished career, "she has not been singled out for critical scholarly attention" as a principal in the nascent abolitionist and civil rights movements. In Richardson's work, Stewart takes her rightful place among her better known contemporaries such as Frederick Douglass, William Lloyd Garrison, David Walker, and Alexander Crummell.

Undeniably, Marilyn Richardson has produced an excellent book. Her perceptive introduction and commentaries are extraordinarily valuable in placing Maria Stewart in proper, historical context. No one interested in the Afro-American female's socio-political and religious past, or in the human condition, can afford to ignore this work.

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Ronald E. Sleeth, *God's Words and Our Words* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1986). 139 pages.

Samuel T. Logan, Jr., *The Preacher and Preaching: Reviving the Art in the Twentieth Century* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1986). 463 pages.

We do not often spend much time thinking about preaching as a holistic process, as a whole matrix of features and relationships which result in what we notice as "preaching." Fortunately, the religious professional community does not see it that way. Both Ronald E. Sleeth in *God's Word and Our Words* and Samuel T. Logan, Jr. in the *The Preacher and*

*Preaching: Reviving the Art in the Twentieth Century* acknowledge their profession's need to examine the various dimensions and relationships of the act of preaching and its need to be accountable to excellence within current cultural contexts.

In *God's Word and Our Words*, Sleeth indicates in the Preface to his work the intention to lay "out basic homiletical principles and . . . how those principles could be incorporated in the various facets of the preaching act." He examines preaching in terms of its relationship to the nature of the gospel; in terms of its historical context, i.e., its roots in the synagogue and in Greek and Roman rhetoric, as well as its Christian distinctiveness; and in accordance with current communication theory as an analytical frame. He provides information which helps the preacher to understand the nature and relationships of this theological event as a communicative and a teaching/learning process. He gives advice along the way concerning what he feels to be reasonable ways of operating. Throughout the book, he seems to be responding to the basic question, "Is preaching still a viable act?"

In like manner, in the Foreword of his volume, Samuel T. Logan, Jr., articulates his concern that "the Reformed pulpit in the twentieth century was neglecting its incredibly rich heritage and failing to provide the kind of homiletical leadership it both could and should." In light of this concern, he collected manuscripts from eighteen leading men in the professions, Reformed pastors and homiletical scholars, in the United States and Europe who responded in their own ways to his two basic questions:

1. How can today's preaching recover the vitality of its great Reformational heritage?
2. What are the main deficiencies of the contemporary pulpit, and how can they be met biblically?

This edited volume presents a three-pronged overview of concerns, explanations, and guiding principles which contribute substantively to ongoing conversation on the act and the process of preaching.

In putting these two works together, then, from the perspective of a layperson who represents history and who has specific interests in language, language use, and teaching/learning processes, what do they say? First, they both speak boldly about the rich heritage of preaching, but Logan spends more time on the preacher and seems to choose as a priority, not the elucidating of the historical context, but responding in practical fashion to those who already acknowledge the "fact" of the richness. As a layperson, therefore, I appreciate the care with which Sleeth weaves the Christian story, showing how Christian preaching did not spring up in a vacuum but grew out of existing traditions. His chronicling underscores the dynamic nature of a lasting phenomenon in taking from prior values and drawing on current insights, e.g., the insights of

communication theory.

I wonder, however, whether even in Sleeth's care with historical context that he might have overlooked a thread which most surely contributed to the vibrancy and texture of our current practices and understanding. He begins with the influences of the synagogue and of Greek and Roman cultures. To my surprise, though, he makes no mention of the substantive influence of Africa, particularly Egypt and the other African cultures which certainly contributed dynamically to the dominance of Alexandria as a cultural center. There is no disputing that both Greece and Rome, even in religion, drew very specifically from Egypt. I believe, therefore, that the context which Sleeth seeks to establish would be even richer if this missing thread were acknowledged, explored, and connected.

Secondly, both Sleeth and Logan speak articulately about the profession's efforts to reflect and analyze its theoretical and methodological constructs. They emphasize the need for scholarship, for specific analyses, for dialogue in making sure that preaching continues to fill vital roles within our communities. They go even further to respond to the practical concerns of the individuals within their ranks by offering advice for developing and sustaining excellence. As a person who is concerned with the conscious exploration of disciplinary constructs and with developing effective strategies for bringing new people into various disciplinary fields, I find these works to be in keeping with the way that disciplines across the curriculum are raising questions and engaging in reflection and inquiry.

Thirdly, as a person who is conscious of the need to acknowledge diversity within our culture and the world, in terms of my immediate concerns with race, class, and gender, I had two surprises with these works. I was surprised that Logan included no manuscripts from females, and surprised that Sleeth was sensitive to the traditional sexism of the religious community. He refers to preachers as being both male and female. He points out the preponderance of male-based illustrations in sermons. He seems to recognize the need for religious professionals—scholars, pastors, teachers, preachers—to known richness from male as well as female perspective. He admonishes his colleagues and budding colleagues not to neglect women as subjects.

Ultimately, both Sleeth and Logan in these two works give me yet another opportunity to have faith in the integrity of the scholarly religious community. These men strike me as examples of scholars who are at least attempting to keep their ranks in touch with the realities of our daily lives. For me, though, some questions still remain with regard particularly to institutionalized levels of racism and sexism. We can no longer ignore in any scholarly community the existence of these societal

ills. The church, as one of the basic institutions of our culture, is not exempt. Even within the sacred dimension of our lives, we have much historically and currently to acknowledge and to overcome. Consequently, when I see Sleeth present a contextual frame which does not include the contributions of African cultures, and when I see Logan's collection of essays which do not include female voices, and I suspect excludes racially diverse voices as well (the descriptions of the contributors give me no indications of race or ethnicity), I must wonder how much we are disadvantaged by distortions, whether conscious or not. I must wonder how much we might be suffering unnecessarily by not having the benefits of more comprehensive, balanced views of reality. Until there is evidence to the contrary, we can only wonder. We can not really know either our full range of possibilities or the range of our potential. And, of course, I, then, must sadly wonder about the wisdom of our willingness to remain ignorant.

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