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Preacher and cross: person and message in theology and rhetoric

Mike Rattee

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data. Today's society is characterized as rapidly changing, pluralistic and multicultural. I believe that today's Asian American context is much different from the actual environments of these three countries in the Far East.

The book gives excellent information to those who want to know about Asian American context, especially for those who want to serve immigrant churches. As the book stresses, the context of the Asian American church is different from the mainline church. The book explains why and what is different (religious and cultural background), and suggests how to approach the Asian American church in a sermon (methodology). Spiritual preaching and the "Spiral-Form" sermon are recommended as the most effective and efficient method of preaching for the Asian-American church. Unfortunately, there is a lack of theoretical development and detailed examples of the form and style in sermon in the book.

In my experience, both in the Korean-Canadian Church and White-English speaking congregations, there is a lot of differences and similarities. As the book points out, cultural and traditional background are crucial in understanding the Asian American church. However, the context cannot be the centre in the preparation of sermon. The Word of God has the power of transformation. Moreover, the church is not an organization, she is an organism which grows, adapts, adjusts and changes the context. Although a specific context can be a beginning point for a sermon, it is not the dwelling place. I believe that Chinese, Korean and Japanese Christians have their own characteristics and unique cultures and historical backgrounds different from those of Buddhism, Confucianism or indigenous religions. The culture of Asian American Christians would be closer to Western Christianity than other religions. That is how I can survive in a foreign context. *Preaching the Presence of God* is a good introductory book for getting to know the Asian American context with a lot of bibliographic materials.

Sung T. Shim
Alliston, Ontario

Preacher and Cross: Person and Message in Theology and Rhetoric

André Resner, Jr.

Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishers, 1999

205 pages, \$28.99 Softcover

Let's have a debate. Is successful preaching dependent more upon the preacher's character or the sermon's content? What makes a sermon more persuasive: the messenger of the Gospel or the message of the Gospel? Resner deserves credit for reopening an old debate in homiletics – should preachers learn more from rhetoric or theology in order to preach better? As with most

“either-or” styles of argument, the inevitable solution is a “both-and” approach. Thus, *both* the message and the messenger are important components. Rhetoric and theology *both* have something to teach preachers. Resner offers a solution and middle-ground position that should please preachers in the rhetorical camp and those in the theological camp. How he gets there and what he actually concludes is worthwhile reading.

First, the author surveys what classical rhetoric says about the speaker's *ethos* (one's character, reputation, perceived moral goodness) from 500 BCE to 100 CE. He liberally quotes original sources so readers can hear directly from Plato, Aristotle, the Sophists (Isocrates), Cicero, and Quintilian. Resner concludes that in rhetoric the speaker's *ethos* is of utmost importance. The ideal orator is the “good man (*sic*) who speaks well”. Today, rhetoric would assert that who you are speaks louder than what you say.

Next, readers are taken on a journey through the homiletical literature from Tertullian (200 CE) to Augustine (400 CE) to Karl Barth (1940) and a host of contemporary homileticians (Thomas Long, Fred Craddock, Clyde Fant, Robin Meyers). Here the message is uneven. Some, like Augustine, Craddock, and Meyers, advocate high dependence on rhetoric. Communication theory and rhetoric both teach that the speaker must appear as credible to an audience if persuasion is to occur. However, Tertullian and Barth take a hard-line approach and say that God must be center stage in preaching, not the preacher. The Word of God has its own power and we can do nothing to make it more persuasive.

So how does the book end? By eliminating the either-or split, and instead, looking to the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 1-4 for a way to transform rhetoric with theology; that is, to Christianize rhetoric. Resner concludes that Paul favored a *reverse-ethos*, also called an *ironic-ethos*. The focus then, is not on the goodness on the preacher by society's standards, but by God's standard, which is seen in the cross. The cross reverses and shames the wisdom of this world. Thus, the preacher's authority is a *reverse-ethos*, in that it is based not on building one's self up as credible but in reliance on a lowly object of scorn – the cross of Jesus. One's message and lifestyle must reflect having been crucified with Jesus.

Resner's conclusion is tenable, even laudable. However, the question “so what?” looms large in this reader's mind, and unfortunately the book does little to answer it. Resner does say that preaching must be message-centered, and the ultimate message is Jesus' crucifixion. But that remains too vague. Most preachers know they are to preach the cross. Practical tips on how to do it are needed, yet not provided in this book. The author starts to admonish us to preach the cross in a way that judges and condemns the values of this world, but this promising section lasts only 1-2 pages and again, lacks any practical instruction. There is a brief foray into the debate of whether preachers should refer to themselves in the sermon through first-person illustrations. Again, this is

a promising section of practical importance, yet remains underdeveloped.

Stylistically, the book is well researched, well written and thus, easy to follow. Much of this is due to Resner's consistent repetition. In every chapter he announces what he is going to say, he says it, and then he repeats what he has said. You cannot miss his arguments. Strangely, the book ends with a quirky insult to theological schools for following cultural values rather than the cross' values in training preachers. No proof or further explanation is given. This is a glaring blip in an otherwise well reasoned and well documented book. The strength of *Preacher and Cross* is its ability to debate and provide an answer to the theoretical issue of the importance of *ethos* in preaching. Its weakness is that it travels too long on the theoretical highway and doesn't take enough off ramps to visit the practical concerns of local church pastors.

Mike Rattee
Emmanuel Bible College
Kitchener, Ontario

Liturgical Spirituality

Philip Pfatteicher

Valley Forge, Penn.: Trinity Press International, 1997
xii + 292 pages, \$33.95

The quest for "spirituality" is very much with and among us today. This may well be the finest book on spirituality from a Lutheran prospective written in our time. Pfatteicher, well known from his other writings on liturgy and worship, defines his term liturgical spirituality as "that distinctive interior life of the spirit that is formed and nurtured by the church's liturgy" (ix). His topic, then, is "the spiritual life as formed by the liturgy" (ibid). He proposes to tell how the principal symbols of Christian liturgy are experienced spiritually by a congregation.

He begins by defining the spiritual life. It is first of all gift and response, and not our work. His view of spirituality is then theocentric. He also stresses the corporate nature of Christian faith: It is God with us, and it is communal. It is embodied, and in this sense not especially "spiritual" as we normally think of the word. It transforms us, to make us more like God. "Spirituality then is prayer plus love plus devotedness. It is, in the words of Brother Lawrence, 'the practise of the presence of God', the way one does one's religion. It is interpreting the world according to one's innermost life and intimate and ultimate concern. It is an everyday activity, the way one goes about daily life...but that is rooted and focused in the intersection of time and eternity that we call worship...God's service of us and our response in our service of God" (10-11).