

1-1-2011

Book Reviews

Curtis Booher
cbooher@milligan.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.pepperdine.edu/leaven>

 Part of the [Biblical Studies Commons](#), [Christianity Commons](#), and the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Booher, Curtis (2011) "Book Reviews," *Leaven*: Vol. 19: Iss. 1, Article 14.
Available at: <http://digitalcommons.pepperdine.edu/leaven/vol19/iss1/14>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Religion at Pepperdine Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Leaven by an authorized administrator of Pepperdine Digital Commons. For more information, please contact Kevin.Miller3@pepperdine.edu.



Book Reviews

CURTIS BOOHER

Bonnie Bowman Thurston, *Preaching Mark*

(Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2002).

Dawn Ottoni Wilhelm, *Preaching the Gospel of Mark: Proclaiming the Power of God*

(Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008).

In the end, it was the women at the tomb that were given the commission to go and tell the good news of the resurrection in Mark's Gospel. It is appropriate, then, that two impressive female scholars provide equally impressive resources to assist preachers and teachers in the proclamation of that same gospel message.

Bonnie Bowman Thurston and Dawn Ottoni Wilhelm have each produced a book that should be on the shelf of any person that is endeavoring to preach or teach from the Gospel of Mark. Each book provides a synthesis of some of the best that scholarship has to offer concerning Mark's Gospel, and each provides suggestions for applying that information in meaningful ways to the people in our congregations. It is rare to find a resource that truly bridges the academic's lectern and the preacher's pulpit. We have two such resources in the books produced by Thurston and Wilhelm.

Preaching Mark

by Bonnie Bowman Thurston

Bonnie Bowman Thurston is the former William F. Orr Professor of New Testament at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Dr. Thurston has occasionally served as an adjunct professor at Emmanuel School of Religion, which is within walking distance of my office on Milligan College's campus. While I have not had the pleasure of participating in any of her courses, several students have personally informed me that her courses were not only academically enriching but were also spiritually transforming. This same balance can be found in her book *Preaching Mark*. Excellent scholarship within the larger context of spiritual transformation has become a hallmark of Thurston's writing. Some of her other books include *For God Alone: A Primer on Prayer* (2009); *The Spiritual Landscape of Mark* (2008, winner of a 2009 Catholic Press Association Award); and *Women in the New Testament* (2004).

Thurston's stated aim for the book is to "provide preachers and teachers of Mark's Gospel with information to help them appropriately interpret and proclaim it" (x). Like many good preachers, she is attempting to address the question "So what?" as she provides an accessible resource for those who preach and teach to people who are asking the very same question. The guiding questions that keep her treatment of the texts on target include: Why did Mark preserve this story? Why was it important for his community? And what does it mean for us today?

Several features of the book help make it a useful resource for preachers and teachers. She intentionally deals with units of material rather than single verses to help minimize the fragmentation of Mark's Gospel. Thurston will provide an introduction to larger units of material before dealing with the smaller pericopae within them. At the end of the treatment of each unit, she provides a summary of material covered in the larger unit. The introduction and summary allow the preacher or teacher to keep the context of each unit in mind during preparation. Throughout the book, Thurston makes suggestions for further reading. Instead

of basing her recommendations on academic interests alone, she has intentionally chosen resources that will assist in the preaching and teaching of a particular passage. Another useful feature in this regard is an annotated bibliography for preaching and teaching Mark that is provided as an appendix. Motivated by her specific aim for the book, Thurston has kept the highly technical aspects of scholarly writing to a minimum. Her transliteration of Greek and use of the English text will be good news for those preachers that may have lost some of their abilities with the Greek text.

The great strength of Thurston's book is that she consolidates the current consensus on the interpretation of various texts through the filter of usefulness for preaching and teaching. The single weakness of the book is that I find myself wanting more of her thoughts about what to do with it. She certainly provides primers for thinking about how a particular passage might be addressed in a sermon or lesson, but further development of the material would have been welcomed.

Bonnie Bowman Thurston wrote *Preaching Mark* with the hope of producing a work that that "will be helpful to preachers" (xi). She has certainly accomplished what she set out to do. I highly recommend her work to anyone that would preach or teach their way through Mark.

Preaching the Gospel of Mark: Proclaiming the Power of God

by Dawn Ottoni Wilhelm

Dawn Ottoni Wilhelm is associate professor of preaching and worship at Bethany Theological Seminary in Richmond, Indiana. Her role as a teacher of preachers must surely have shaped her perspectives of life and scripture. In the book, *Preaching the Gospel of Mark: Proclaiming the Power of God*, she thinks carefully about Mark's Gospel with the distinct mind of a preacher. The result is a tremendous resource for the development of sermons for anyone in a position to preach from Mark.

The goal of Wilhelm's commentary is to "help preachers, teachers, pastors, and students of Scripture to faithfully interpret and engage Mark's Gospel as it proclaims the power of God's reign and urges the participation of all God's people in the witness of the gospel" (xi). Her goal is achieved as she provides a resource that will benefit even those who have preached from Mark on numerous occasions. A definite strength of the book is Wilhelm's ability to identify homiletical moments in the biblical text. As I read through the book, I had an overwhelming awareness that I was looking at the Gospel's text through the eyes of an experienced preacher. The thought that consistently echoed in my mind was, "Why didn't I see that?" I often found myself inspired and surprised by Wilhelm's insights.

There are some distinct features that make Wilhelm's book a valuable resource for preachers. For preachers who follow the lectionary, this book will be a helpful companion to the Revised Common Lectionary (Year B). For those preachers who do not follow the lectionary, the frequent references might be a distraction. Throughout the book, certain words appear in bold print to indicate that they may be found in a helpful glossary. Each broad unit of material is introduced by an overview that helps to honor the larger narrative framework of Mark's account. The various pericopae located within the larger unit are carefully examined in a section entitled "Exploring the Text." The commentary provided by Wilhelm provides the preacher or teacher a bridge between sound scholarship and practical relevance. One of the most helpful features is the section that follows the exploration of the text. Throughout the book, Wilhelm offers sections titled "Preaching and Teaching the Text" that include various ways to preach or teach from a particular text. These suggestions for preaching and teaching serve to showcase Wilhelm's unique voice for proclaiming the good news. It is a voice that needs to be heard by a broad audience. I recommend that anyone who desires to enhance his or her preaching of Mark should listen carefully to Dawn Ottoni Wilhelm.

CURTIS BOOHER IS ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF CHRISTIAN MINISTRY AT MILLIGAN COLLEGE IN MILLIGAN COLLEGE, TENNESSEE.