

## EDITORIAL

MANY HOMILETIC TEXTBOOKS begin by defending, to greater or lesser degrees, the importance and centrality of preaching. For example, in his classic work *Preaching and Preachers*, Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones argues in a chapter entitled “No Substitute” that nothing may supplant or compete with the centrality of preaching in the church’s efforts to fulfill her divine mandate.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, in his book *Between Two Worlds*, John R. W. Stott maintains that “preaching is indispensable to Christianity,” for Christianity is essentially a word religion. It is defined and comprehended by the Word of God. In fact, God’s speaking makes our speaking necessary. “We must speak what he has spoken,” says Stott. “Hence the paramount obligation to preach.”<sup>2</sup>

Haddon Robinson’s popular textbook on expository preaching also begins with an “apology” for preaching. Robinson wishes to recapture something of the power ascribed to preaching in the New Testament. Preaching is a unique ministry, requiring a personal “face-to-face” encounter. Nothing can serve as a substitute for it. “A power comes through the word preached that even the inerrant written word cannot replace.” For in preaching, as the apostle Paul understood it, “God Himself spoke through the personality and message of a preacher to confront men and women and bring them to Himself.”<sup>3</sup> Thus preaching is not a negotiable item of business. It is indispensable, for it has to do with the activity of God himself.

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<sup>1</sup>Lloyd-Jones, D. Martyn, *Preaching and Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), 26-44.

<sup>2</sup>Stott, John R. W., *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1982), 15.

<sup>3</sup>Robinson, Haddon W., *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), 17-18.

Lastly we take note of Bryan Chapell's recent book *Christ-Centered Preaching*, which joins the melody sounded above. What Chapell calls "the nobility of preaching" serves to testify both to preaching's importance and to the sense of inadequacy every pastor experiences in his own heart as a servant of the Word. The power of the Word, however, and thus the power of preaching, rests in *the power of God*. "God is not relying on our craft to accomplish his purposes.... The human efforts of the greatest preachers are still too weak and sin-tainted to be responsible for others' eternal destinies." God himself empowers his Word to transform hearts and heal lives.<sup>4</sup>

We gladly endorse and join this panoply of voices, for indeed there is "no substitute" for preaching. It is the church's "paramount obligation," truly "indispensable." In faithful preaching "God himself speaks," "empowering his Word" to accomplish his mighty work of salvation.

This issue of the *Mid-America Journal of Theology* is a theme issue on preaching. Herein a high theology of preaching is argued, scrutinized, and evaluated. John R. Sittema raises the perpetually pertinent question regarding the call to the ministry, which in his view must entail chiefly the call to *preach*. His essay "Called to Preach?" is printed here in a revised form, having been published by Mid-America Reformed Seminary earlier as a booklet. Sittema demonstrates how the question whether a man is called to preach is impossible to answer if a substandard or less than biblical view of preaching operates in his thinking. This essay therefore offers a biblical survey of the meaning, mandate, and importance of preaching.

Cornelis Trimp, who brings many years of teaching and scholarship to the preaching-task, investigates modern homiletic trends in relationship to the historic, confessional understanding of preaching. He offers valuable insights into the public nature of preaching and what it means that the Holy Spirit administers the Word of God through preaching.

It seems that every generation has to defend the rights and priority of preaching against trends that seek to push it aside. If

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<sup>4</sup>Chapell, Bryan, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 18.

we would agree with Haddon Robinson's observation that, for Paul, God himself speaks through the personality and message of the preacher, then it is essential that we know what that means. My article, "The Real Presence of Christ in the Preaching of the Gospel," explores the views of Luther and Calvin on the nature of preaching. These two Reformers conceived of preaching, when biblically and faithfully executed, as nothing less than divine speech. The article includes an analysis of what is meant and not meant by Christ's "real presence" in biblical preaching.

The articles by Cornelis P. Venema and Alan D. Strange explore the Reformed-Presbyterian confessional heritage with respect to preaching. They answer the question: What do the confessions say about preaching? In other words, what does the church *believe* and *confess* about preaching? Venema examines the most important Reformed confessional documents in a general survey, while Strange explores the Westminster Standards in detail.

Finally, if we would preach, what gospel will we preach? Joseph H. Hall examines the Marrow Controversy, which raged in Scotland during the early part of the eighteenth century. The Marrow men waged a battle to liberate the church from a creeping legalism and a rabid hyper-Calvinism. They championed the Reformation doctrine of justification by faith alone and the free (or well-meant) offer of the gospel, that is, the serious and genuine call that all should come to the Lord, for he promises rest and eternal life to everyone who does.

The faculty of Mid-America Reformed Seminary is pleased to offer this issue of the *MJT* for the cause of biblical preaching. Readers ought to note that Volume 10, dated 1999, follows Volume 9/2, 1993 (which was actually produced in the Spring of 1998). Due to a variety of factors, we have been unable to keep pace with our intended publication schedule. Henceforth the goal will be to publish annually a single volume of the *Mid-America Journal of Theology*. The editorial committee intends the Volume 11, 2000 issue of the *Mid-America Journal of Theology* to be, *D.V.*, a theme issue on "The Sacraments." The unity of Word and sacrament needs analysis today, for the role of the sacraments in the life of the church is inadequately understood. In exploring the role of the sacraments, preaching itself is seen in its proper

preeminent role. It must remain at the forefront of the church's labor of ministry. In the words of the Heidelberg Catechism, God wants his people instructed by the living preaching of his Word. May these articles and reviews serve to that end.

—J. Mark Beach