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BOOK REVIEW

***The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Second Letter to the Corinthians* by Mark A. Seifrid. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014.**

by John T. Pless

Prof. John T. Pless unpacks Dr. Mark Seifrid's focus on the theology of the cross in Second Corinthians.

SECOND CORINTHIANS IS A PARTICULARLY RICH New Testament book when it comes to the mission that Christ Jesus has entrusted to the Church. Paul's second letter to the church at Corinth has found a careful and articulate commentator in Dr. Mark A. Seifrid, the Ernest and Mildred Hogan Professor of New Testament Interpretation at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kent. For the purposes of this journal, I will accent Seifrid's insights into Paul's understanding of mission as it is made manifest in Second Corinthians.

Paul's second letter to the Corinthians is his pastoral theology of the cross. His life and work, hence his apostolic mission, is carried out under the cross. Seifrid helpfully observes:

The issue between Paul and the Corinthians, then, is the difference between faith and appearance, the difference between faith and appearance, the difference between what the eyes can see and what the ears can hear in the apostolic proclamation of the cross. The apostle bears "the word of the cross" (I Cor 1:18), not merely in his proclamation, but in his body and life. God's saving work takes place *sub contrario* in the crucified Jesus contrary to all human thought and expectations. The delivery of that work in the apostolic word takes the same form (xxxii).

The missionary life of the apostle is cruciform as can be seen in his suffering on behalf of the Corinthians. Seifrid demonstrates that Paul's theology of mission is a theology of the cross in contrast to those who would lay

claim to super-spirituality and seek to ground the success of the mission in their own personalities rather than the crucified and risen Jesus. This theme of the theology of the cross echoes throughout the commentary. For example, in his exposition of 2 Cor. 1:19, Seifrid says Paul's reference to Jesus as God's Son underscores the following:

that God's faithfulness and identity are bound up with the crucified Christ (I Cor 1:23). God savingly reveals himself *sub contrario*. The "word of the cross" (I Cor.

1:18) remains foolishness to the world – and to the Corinthians.... All attention is deflected away from the proclaimers to the One whom they proclaimed, whose message they bear in body and in life (61).

Seifrid's reading of 2 Corinthians 3 is an exquisite exegetical treatment of the Pauline distinction of God's Law from His Gospel," a distinction between demand and gift" (121). Paul is an "emissary" of this gift, the word of promise, but he knows that "Only where the Law has arrived is it possible to hear the Gospel rightly" (1300). Here and in many other places throughout this commentary, Seifrid

exhibits his indebtedness to Luther and Oswald Bayer, one of Luther's foremost contemporary interpreters.

What is the apostolic mission? Seifrid describes it in view of justification by faith, righteousness accomplished by Christ for sinners:

It is the *apostolic* mission that Paul here describes as the "mission of righteousness." He subsequently charges his opponents as being "false apostles" and in fact "emissaries of Satan" disguise themselves as "emissaries of righteousness" (11:15). Outward

Seifrid demonstrates that Paul's theology of mission is a theology of the cross in contrast to those who would lay claim to super-spirituality and seek to ground the success of the mission in their own personalities rather than the crucified and risen Jesus.

appearances, which are the basis of human judgment are always deceptive (cf. 5:12). God's work in Christ overturns all such false estimations. Those who seem to be apostles are not. The one who seems not to be an apostle is the true apostle sent to the Corinthians. The glory of the mission of righteousness, although it is transcendent, presently remains hidden (158).

Seifrid's provides a robust treatment of justification in his commentary on 5:18–21, over and against the alternatives suggested by the so-called New Perspective on Paul. Apostolic authority rests entirely on the word of reconciliation.

This apostolic mission is rooted in God's mercy (1 Cor. 4:1). This mercy "provides 'the space' in which Paul exercises his calling as an apostle.' Mercy cannot be attained by discipline, strength, virtue, or works" (191). This mercy separates Paul from "missionaries" who are peddlers of God's Word enabling him to speak the truth of the crucified Jesus. God's mercy in Christ enlivens hope so Seifrid notes that "The essence of apostolic ministry is speaking in faith, doing so out of situations that contain no earthly hope" (205).

Pastors who teach and preach on stewardship or "on funding the mission" will be well-served by Seifrid's exposition of 8:1–9:15 as "The Collection as the Confession of the Gospel" (316–367). Here again we see the imprint of Oswald Bayer's thinking on Seifrid's understanding the theology (and ethics) of gift. The offering, Seifrid asserts is a way of sharing in "the *koinonia* of the mission" (323). This section should be read in light of Seifrid's illuminating discussion of *koinonia* in his commentary on 13:11–14 (cf. 499–500).

Mark Seifrid has provided us with an excellent commentary on Second Corinthians demonstrating how the apostle engages Witness, Mercy and Life Together. All three are evidenced in Second Corinthians, and Seifrid is a sure-footed guide to exploring their meaning and implication for the Church's mission.

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BOOK REVIEW

***A Lutheran Primer for Preaching: A Theological and Practical Approach to Sermon Writing* by Edward O. Grimenstein. Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2015.**

by Albert B. Collver

PREACHING IS BOTH THE PRIMARY ACTIVITY that defines the work of the ministers of the Gospel and one of the most difficult tasks to master. Preaching goes beyond oratory skills and public speaking, requiring a proper distinction between the Law and the Gospel to expound and unlock the Scriptures for the hearers properly. A frequent observation on the mission field is how poor the preaching can be. Of course, poor preaching is not limited to the mission field, but the challenges of mission work can exacerbate the problem. The transmission of the skills necessary for preaching and the fact that missionaries frequently are not experts in the field of homiletics contribute to the challenges new mission starts and new churches face in the training of pastors to preach to indigenous churches. Another challenge is that indigenous churches rarely see good preaching modeled. The preaching that they see and perceive as effective is modeled for them by TV evangelists and practitioners of prosperity gospel preaching. With these challenges in mind and a lack of short and simple resources, the Rev. Dr. Edward Grimenstein wrote *A Lutheran Primer for Preaching* with the mission field particularly in mind. Although the book was composed with the mission field in mind, its application is not limited solely there.

The book has 14 short chapters, each between 6 and 10 pages long. The last two pages of each chapter have questions for in-class activities or group discussion as well as out-of-class activities and assignments. These are helpful both for the instructor as well as the class. The first seven chapters could be categorized as the theology of preaching, while chapters 7–14 bring in the practical aspects of preaching. The section of on the theology of preaching

begins with a theology of the Word of God and how the Lord's Word is creative and life-giving. The Lord's Word is something that has the power to do what it says. The Lord's Word is more than symbolic or representational. After all, the Lord spoke and creation came into existence. Likewise, when the Lord speaks forgiveness, sins are forgiven. This discussion is reminiscent of Martin Luther's discussion of action-words that do what they say, "So his word surely is not merely a word of imitation, but a word of power which accomplishes what it expresses, Psalm 33[:9], 'He spoke, and it came to be,' especially because it was first spoken here, and was meant to be an action-word."¹

A Lutheran Primer for Preaching is the first confessional Lutheran model and book produced in a generation.

An intriguing insight from Grimenstein was that the speaking of the serpent in the Garden of Eden was an act of rebellion. He writes:

The serpent's first and greatest sacrilege against his Creator, aside from open rebellion, was deciding to take for himself what belongs alone to God. This included not only wanting

honor and glory for himself, but also choosing to corrupt for his own use the other great action of God: speaking. The very fact that the serpent was speaking was an act of rebellion. He took what was reserved for God, namely the creative act via speech, and corrupted that for his own personal usage and gain.²

All of creation came into being by the Word of God. All of creation fell through the speaking of God's Word in a corrupted way. Preaching brings life when it delivers the Word of God. Likewise, preaching can bring death

"The worst fault in modern preaching, my dear friends, is this, that the sermons lack point and purpose; and this fault can be noticed particularly in the sermons of modern preachers who are believers." — C. F. W. Walther, *The Proper Distinction between Law and Gospel*.

¹ Martin Luther. "Confession Concerning Christ's Supper" in *Luther's Works, American Edition*, vol. 37. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1961), 181.

² Grimenstein, Kindle location 19.

when the Word of God is distorted or replaced with the doctrine of men. The section on the theology of preaching concludes with a chapter about the proper distinction between Law and Gospel.

The “practical” section of the book discusses preaching the Bible and how the sermon should begin and end with the Scripture. After all, the sermon really should be nothing other than a delivery or exposition of the Scripture for the hearers. This is not to say different styles of preaching cannot be employed, nor does the author suggest that the sermon should be a *lectio continua*, verse by verse commentary of the Scriptures. Rather, the sermon should be a preaching of the Bible for hearers today. One chapter discusses how to prepare a sermon, where the author compares extemporaneous preaching to detailed note or manuscript preaching. Grimenstein wrote that during the preparing of the sermon the preacher must remember who he is:

If that preacher fails to understand that through the speaking of the Word, God makes promises to us and that through Christ we can trust and believe those promises not merely as intellectual fact but as matters of faith, then he will never preach the type of spoken Word that God has demanded His preachers to speak.³

Indeed, it is an important point to remember that preaching delivers the Christian faith.

Chapters 11–13 present a sermon preparation worksheet along with a sermon preparation model called “Five Pages.” The worksheets help the preacher identify texts, keeping God as the actor of the sermon, focusing on Jesus as Redeemer and reminding the preacher that it is the Holy Spirit who brings belief and creates faith. The second worksheet helps the preacher develop one theme for a sermon that is a declarative statement that shapes the entire sermon. Drawing from the two sermon preparation worksheets, the preacher is encouraged to use the “Five Pages” model. The “Five Pages” are not necessarily a five-page sermon, although in some cases it could become that. The “Five Pages” are the five parts or themes of a sermon that could be expanded or used as notes for preaching. The “Five Pages” are broken down as follows:

Page 1 — Law in the text; Page 2 — Law in our lives; Page 3 — The Gospel in Christ; Page 4 — Gospel in the text; Page 5 — Gospel in our world. From these “Five Pages,” the sermon itself is to be written. The “Five Pages” model is a helpful tool for the preacher that causes the preacher to construct his sermon using the distinction between Law and Gospel. Considering how scarce Law and Gospel preaching can be on the mission field, the “Five Pages” model can be of great service for teaching preaching at indigenous seminaries.

Chapter 14 discusses sermon delivery. Grimenstein notes that the goal of the book is to help in sermon preparation. The most important task for the preacher is to have prepared his sermon. The sermon itself can be written out as a manuscript, prepared as an outline or even memorized based on sermon preparation work. The sermon should bring people “to meet Jesus Christ Himself in His Word.”⁴ The Gospel is “for you,” and the Gospel should predominate in a concrete, not an abstract, way. The book’s appendix contains sermon preparation worksheets to help the preacher construct his sermon.

A Lutheran Primer on Preaching is the first confessional Lutheran model and book produced in a generation. Not since Richard Caemmerer has a Missouri Synod homiletician offered a theological and practical approach to Law and Gospel preaching that is both textual and Christological. This book is recommended for homiletics teachers and students particularly in the mission field, yet it has value for any preacher wanting to refresh himself on the basics of preaching. The book also could serve as a good Bible study to help a congregation understand the goal and purpose of preaching.

Not since Richard Caemmerer has a Missouri Synod homiletician offered a theological and practical approach to Law and Gospel preaching that is both textual and Christological.

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³ Grimenstein, Kindle location 1006.

⁴ Grimenstein, Kindle location 1658.