

1-1-2004

## Down-to-Earth Spirituality: Encountering God in the Ordinary, Boring Stuff of Life, R. Paul Stephens

John Sibert

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



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

---

### Recommended Citation

Sibert, John (2004) "Down-to-Earth Spirituality: Encountering God in the Ordinary, Boring Stuff of Life, R. Paul Stephens," *Leaven*: Vol. 12: Iss. 2, Article 20.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.pepperdine.edu/leaven/vol12/iss2/20>

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 editor of Pepperdine Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [bailey.berry@pepperdine.edu](mailto:bailey.berry@pepperdine.edu).



## Book Reviews

ELEANOR DANIEL AND MARK LOVE, EDITORS

### **Otherwise Preaching: A Postmodern Ethic for Homiletics**

*By John McClure*

St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2001. 175 pages.

What is preaching? Who are preachers? What are the relationships among the preacher, the listeners, and God? What is or what should be the content and substance of the sermon? Throughout the centuries we have sought to answer these central questions and—in the process—either engaged or avoided conversation with the world beyond the church.

The people of God have been given a text, but how we read and preach from that text is guided by a particular theology and method. John McClure, while attracted to deconstructionism, (“a significant form of other-directed textual analysis”) understands it to be deficient for preaching because it is not grounded in the Judeo-Christian tradition. However, he finds in the work of the phenomenological philosopher Emmanuel Levinas (d. 1995) an ethical approach to deconstructionism that has the potential to enable a deconstructionist/postmodern preaching. Building on Levinas’s concept of “otherness,” McClure’s project in this book is to develop an “other-wise homiletics.”

As McClure’s introduction to the current conversation in philosophy reveals, the clash between modernity and its challengers is not always easy to understand or follow. Yet McClure undertakes the important tasks of explaining and engaging preachers in this crucial exchange. Deconstruction breaks open texts and ideas and exposes their internal

weaknesses, misplaced assumptions about authority, and inappropriate perceptions of a stable meaning. McClure challenges preaching to break open the authority of the Bible, tradition, experience, and reason. Central to McClure’s argument is that it is not an outside philosophy that questions these false assumptions. Rather, “it is something preaching does to itself.” What preaching must do is recognize and come to terms with the reality of its situation.

Central to Levinas’s project is the understanding of the importance of the other. All preaching must recognize responsibility and obligation to that other. Therefore, before setting forth his understanding of preaching, McClure explores four “houses” of the preaching enterprise: scripture, tradition, experience, and reason. He claims that we must “exit” these houses because they have been constructed by modernity and the Enlightenment, a construct that ignores the other. Only after exiting these houses can we develop a preaching that is always open, constantly working against the tendency toward closure and always ready for the other.

McClure offers an important and challenging perspective when he observes that ultimately there is no trustworthy text, tradition, experience, or reasoning ability. We have only the face of others. In later conversations, he has assured me that after we exit these houses we can go back in, recognizing that they are forever altered. But, I must confess that I find that very difficult to do. Once we leave the house and go outside, can we build a new house only with the face of the other? Is there any shelter from the storms of

life that buffet us? And where is God in this enterprise? McClure concludes by observing that

preaching simply says, “here I am,” here is a witness of the glory of the Infinite with no stable theme, with no fixed evidence, nonetheless commanded by the glory of the Infinite to become this sign of that which is other-wise.

McClure makes an important challenge to today’s preachers, reminding us that we can never preach without being attentive to and remembering the other—our neighbors and strangers. But, while focusing on the immanent, his approach tends to lose sight of the transcendent. I hope that, as he continues this project, McClure will help those of us who feel lost and abandoned to find a new home. He shows us the door out. He needs to show us the door back in.

LUCY LIND HOGAN

Dr. Hogan is a professor of preaching and worship at Wesley Theological Seminary, Washington, D.C.

### **From the Housetops: Preaching in the Early Church and Today**

By Bruce E. Shields

St. Louis: Chalice, 2000. 184 pages.

Bruce Shields is shouting from the housetops, strongly advocating a paradigm shift in homiletics and the sermonic process based on the emerging discipline of orality studies. This relatively new discipline was apparently sparked by a poet and carried forward by academicians and for 40 years has impacted the discipline of homiletics and community life.

Shield’s thesis is that the early church experienced preaching and worship as an oral and aural event, not primarily written. Because we preachers have been trained to be literary experts of the written text, we find ourselves overlooking oral aspects and how that orality points to the life and vitality of the early church.

Shields provides pointers of oral characteristics in the text and suggests ways that this will help us see the performative act of the sermon. He assumes that the spoken word is an event in which something happens to build and maintain community. The book is a serious attempt to bridge the gap between an Enlightenment model of preaching and a postmodern understanding of the community’s communication behind the actual texts themselves.

I appreciated his high view of scripture and of the preaching event. It is hard to embrace both at the same time. But admirably, Shields does just that. He sees the sermon as a performative venture in which the spoken word becomes the presence of God among the believers. Theologically, the chapter “The Crux of the Gospel” was an immense delight to read. Shields positions the message and the minister squarely in the Christ event of crucifixion and resurrection. He helpfully delineates what it means for ministers to “bear their own cross.” This section alone is worth the book’s purchase.

After reading this volume and laying it aside, however, I was struck with the paradox of *writing* about the *oral*. Interestingly, we as postmodern readers must do with his book what he advocates we do with Scripture—look for pointers of orality in the written text. If Shields had included a CD of the four sermons printed in the appendices he would have made a stronger case for orality.

Unfortunately, Shields never mines the biblical metaphor of “shouting from the housetops.” Several critical questions are thus left unexplored. Does the metaphor indicate intensity? Urgency? What is the interplay, and homiletic implications, between whispering and shouting?

Despite these concerns, Shield’s efforts are refreshingly welcome. When I began preaching 30 years ago I could not have read this book with the same appreciation. Perhaps I do so now because intuitively I have experienced a paradigmatic shift in my own homiletical practice, thus giving me a base to hear what Shields has attempted to say in this volume. He has articulated the evolution of my own preaching. The question will no longer be, “What is the original meaning of the text, and how should I

preach it today?" Rather, the question now is, "How did the early church hear this message, and how should the church in the twenty-first century hear it?"

The ear now takes precedence and priority over the pen and the eye. This fundamental shift holds exciting potential for the sermon seeking to capture the postmodern Christian's ear. Beware this book. It will change your outlook on preaching and promote a new world view!

CURTIS D. MCCLANE

Mr. McClane is minister at the Highland View Church of Christ in Oak Ridge, Tennessee.

### **Canon & Proclamation: Sermons for Our Times**

*By Paul C. McGlasson*

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000. 181 pages.

Paul McGlasson presented the sermons published in this book to the Central Presbyterian Church in Stamford, Texas. In his introductory remarks, he sets forth a theology of preaching centered upon the canonical approach of Yale's Brevard Childs. McGlasson declares that canonical preaching entails sermons based upon the Hebrew and Greek texts of the Christian Bible where each must be scrutinized in respect to the book in which it is located, and as part of the canon.

Canonical preaching is radically Christological, guided by God's Spirit, witnesses to "the truth to all humanity," and aims to "transform everyday existence in obedience to the command of Christ." Not only is McGlasson dependent on the methods of Childs, but also of Karl Barth (as is Childs himself) in his focus upon the centrality of Christ even in the Old Testament, and in alleging that the message must be thrown out "as a stone."

McGlasson disallows both anecdotes and autobiographical narrative. He asserts with great passion,

Illustrations are a symptom of the terrible decay of modern preaching and the need for wholesale reform at the very roots. They may

be good entertainment, but they are not good preaching; indeed, good preaching on the basis of canon should contain no illustrations whatsoever. (p. 7)

Concretion in application, rather, should come about through regular visitation in members homes.

The remainder of the book consists of 44 sermons grouped in eight series originating from: (1) the life of Jacob, (2) the Gospels, (3) the life of Solomon, (4) parables, (5) the life of Elijah, (6) 1 Corinthians, (7) Proverbs, and (8) the birth of Christ. Between each series is a sermon from a particular Psalm. None of the series entails preaching through successive biblical texts, but are selective, always following the sequence of the text.

McGlasson conscientiously replicates his vision of preaching. He tells no stories other than those in scripture. His application clearly is a reflection upon what the text might mean for individuals and the church. He is not adverse, however, to locating wickedness in the contemporary world in the extremes of fascism and communism (p. 28), a focus on human methods of self improvement (p. 32), the promise of self fulfillment in capitalism (p. 109), the temptation of the church to answer the world's questions (p. 40), theology on the left and the right (p. 86), and current ideologies (p. 130). One might argue that these specific evils serve as illustrations, but at least, they are not set forth as anecdotes.

McGlasson is good at setting out the text with its details and reflecting creatively on aspects that relate to the contemporary church and individual life. But because he shuns specificity from the current scene, after a time the sermons become repetitive and somewhat lifeless. I agree with McGlasson in letting the text speak. But because he is so interested in the larger setting for the text, he sometimes fails to set forth its concretion.

McGlasson's *modus operandi* is an important corrective to the overuse of stories and personal narrative in much preaching today, but he has gone to the other extreme and is not as creative with the text as he might be. I think he could profit not only from his commitment to reading the text in the Greek and the Hebrew, but also from reading good commentar-

ies that reflect both upon original meanings and at the same time set forth creative implications for our time.

THOMAS H. OLBRICHT

Dr. Olbricht, is Distinguished Emeritus Professor of Religion at Pepperdine University, Malibu, California. He now resides in South Berwick, Maine.

### **The Word Disclosed: Preaching The Gospel of John. Revised and Expanded**

By Gail R. O'Day

St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2002. 151 pages.

Gail O'Day's *The Word Disclosed* purposes

to make the gospel of John available for the church's preaching in new ways, and at the same time to use the lens of the Gospel of John to think more generally about the shape of preaching in the contemporary church. (p. 2)

She stresses that the biblical text must set the agenda for the theology of the preacher's sermon and ultimately transform the preacher through imaginative conversation. Thus enabled, the preacher may lead the congregation to experience the text's drama and in the process discover the presence of God.

There are two main divisions in the book. The first division consists of analyses of four texts—3:1-17; 4:5-42; 9:1-41; 11:1-45—which were selected because they belong to the Lenten cycle for Year A in the Revised Common Lectionary. O'Day presents an exegetical overview of each text with particular stress on narrative and theology. She then provides suggestions for preaching from each of these texts.

In the second division, O'Day offers six sermons from other passages in John (6:24-41; 10:22-30; 12:1-8; 13:1-20; 17:6-19; 20:19-23) in order to model "how the preacher through his or her sermon, may enable the congregation to experience the good news of the gospel of John in its fullness" (p. 8).

In my judgment, O'Day's exegetical analyses are the strength of the book. She utilizes nearly every standard exegetical tool, with particular concern for

the literary function and theological character of the text. Most important, she emphasizes the centrality of the biblical text and proper exegesis in sermon preparation. Her sermons on John 12 (Mary's anointing of Jesus' feet) and 13 (Jesus' washing of the disciple's feet) are faithful to both the structure and theology of the texts with thoughtful contemporary application.

Nevertheless, I have some concerns. First, in the section on exegesis, the reader is not encouraged to consider the larger context of a passage. For example, there is no mention that John 9 is usually considered to be part of a larger block of material (7:1-10:21). That consideration is useful for understanding the discussion in chapter 9 regarding Jesus' identity and the threat of expulsion from the synagogue.

Second, the sermons from John 6 and 10 shift the focus from Christology, the focus of the biblical text, to the believer or ecclesiology. Instead of sermons on Jesus as the bread of life or the good shepherd, these sermons are about the disciples' dependence on Jesus for sustenance and safety.

Third, the omission of sermons on the texts previously analyzed (chapters 3, 4, 9, 11) significantly weakens the book's effectiveness. This is a missed opportunity to model the movement from text to sermon.

Fourth, O'Day calls for sermons that lead an audience to experience and/or discover spiritual truth. In all her sermons, that truth is the realization of the presence of God, which is the transforming power of the gospel. Yet, she offers no specific moral implications for living in the presence of God. I fear the lack of specific moral exhortation will not connect with an American church audience, who come looking for tangible understanding.

Despite these misgivings, I found the book refreshing, challenging, and helpful for anyone wishing to preach from the fourth Gospel.

MEL STORM

Dr. Storm is a professor of New Testament at Rochester College and elder at the Heritage Church of Christ in Clawson, Michigan.

## Preaching Biblical Wisdom in a Self-Help Society

By Alyce McKenzie

Nashville: Abingdon, 2002. 255 pages.

Alyce McKenzie, assistant professor of homiletics at Southern Methodist University, has provided preachers with some valuable suggestions as to both how and why to preach from the wisdom materials of the Bible. Her first chapter (re)introduces us to biblical wisdom—its definition, genres, and goals—and suggests ways in which wisdom may be especially appropriate for the postmodern pulpit.

Her second chapter lays out a proposed method (based on Don Browning's "A Fundamental Practical Theology") for assessing the many wisdom approaches to life—approaches both ancient and modern.

Chapters 3 and 4 provide an informative survey of popular contemporary "wisdom" books, ranging from *Everything I Needed to Know I Learned in Kindergarten* to *Don't Sweat the Small Stuff* to *The Celestine Prophecy*. Then, in chapters 5 through 9, McKenzie takes up the biblical wisdom texts of Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, Matthew, and the Gospel of John.

McKenzie sees Proverbs as a resource from which to develop "a biblical character ethic" (p. 91), based on the "three explicit theological affirmations" made by Proverbs: (a) "wisdom comes from God as a gift to those who will receive it;" (b) the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom;" and (c) "those who seek wisdom attain the blessing of an ordered life, a life characterized by good things: longevity, prosperity, harmony, and happiness" (p. 103). Her "key texts for preaching" include Prov 1:1–7; 1:20–23; 8:22–36; and 31:10–31.

Admitting that "Job is a unique work that defies classification in any one literary genre," McKenzie finds it most like "an answered lament" (p. 119). Her overall treatment of the book is not particularly helpful, but her "key texts for preaching," centering on the dialogue between God and Job in chapters 38–41, do carry good sermonic suggestions.

Much better realized is chapter 7, "Qohelet: Face the Truth, Find the Joy." McKenzie dates Ecclesiastes to the Persian period and finds that "Qohelet's concerns and themes are consistent with this time of economic and social uncertainty" (p. 147). Furthermore, "he knows his audience well: they are people who are not secure with what they have" (p. 149). In such circumstances—indeed, in all circumstances—"the highest value is to live gratefully and contentedly in the present moment, acknowledging human limitations and divine mystery" (p. 153).

McKenzie's suggested four-week series of sermons on the shape of life—A Simple Life; A Grateful, Joyful Life; A Present Life; A God-Fearing Life (pp. 162–168)—carries out this theme.

Although Matthew is not generally thought of as a "wisdom" writing, McKenzie points to many wisdom elements in the Gospel. Here the "key texts for preaching" are the beatitudes. Wisdom in the Gospel of John is more frequently recognized. Interestingly enough, McKenzie's "key texts for preaching" here are neither the prologue nor the traditional wisdom themes and metaphors, but three "encounter" stories: Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman at the well, and the man born blind.

Unless a preacher has a ready answer for the question with which McKenzie opens her class on preaching from the biblical wisdom literature—"When was the last time you preached from the book of Proverbs?"—or unless a preacher has a good reason for *not* preaching wisdom, that preacher would be well advised to read this book.

PAUL L. WATSON

Dr. Watson is pulpit minister and elder for the Cole Mill Road Church of Christ in Durham, North Carolina.

## Preaching: An Essential Guide

By Ronald J. Allen

Nashville: Abingdon, 2002. 135 pages.

Don't let the number of pages or the cover color of Ronald Allen's latest book on preaching fool you. This is not "Cliff's Notes on Preaching," even though the color and title suggest that the contents may be a cheat sheet for preaching. While Allen admits this book is not intended to be an introductory text, it is a work that will benefit both beginner and experienced preacher.

The book's format is also a bit deceptive. In the introduction, Allen lays out the book's entire content, and it seems to follow the classic "tell them what you're going to tell them, tell them, then tell them what you told them" style. In fact, each chapter is also laid out in such straightforward style. But in the midst of all that is familiar (including a chapter advocating the appropriate use of topical sermons), there is the unfamiliar as well.

Rather than saving the sample sermons for the appendix or excerpting several different sermons along the way, Allen follows his introductory chapter with a sample sermon that becomes a reference point throughout the rest of the book. The respective chapters then ask and answer a series of profound questions that preacher and congregation are faced with week to week, text to text.

What is the good news from God in the sermon? Does the sermon honor the integrity of the Bible or the topic? Is the sermon theologically adequate? Does the sermon relate the text or topic to the congregation in a responsible way? What is the significance of the sermon for the congregation? Does the sermon move in a way that is easy to follow? Does the preacher embody the sermon in an engaging way?

In the process of asking these questions, Allen deals with traditional questions regarding exegesis, congregational and cultural circumstances, and the preacher's style and chosen form for a particular sermon. But he also engages a number of provocative theological and epistemological questions. For example, while discussing the importance of

deciding between a textual or topical approach, Allen plunges into the deep waters of modern and postmodern thought and the possibility of multiple meanings in a text rather than one single absolute meaning. In the process, Allen offers helpful guidelines in deciding when to use a topical sermon rather than a single text.

In the chapter that discusses the theological adequacy of the sermon, Allen appeals to three questions suggested previously by him and Clark Williamson: Are the claims of the text (or topic) appropriate to the gospel? Are the claims of the text or the topic intelligible? Are the claims of the text morally plausible? Regarding the first of those questions, Allen states,

I evaluate all texts and topics through the double lens of God's unconditional love for all, and God's call for justice for all. I ask of each text, and its various elements, Does this text affirm that God loves each person (and all parts of nature) with unconditional love? Does this text call for justice (that is relationship of love in community) for each person and all constituents of the natural world? (p. 52, italics in original)

Such probing questions become a lens of their own and lead to a differentiation of texts in their appropriation for contemporary audiences. Some texts (Psalm 8, for example) are theologically adequate to the gospel and to the contemporary church. Other texts (for instance, John 5) are "mostly adequate but partially inadequate" (pp. 61-62). Allen offers two reasons for the inadequacy: (1) the miraculous event recorded is no longer intelligible, and (2) what Allen describes as the caricature of the Jews in John 5 must be critiqued as inappropriate to the gospel.

There are also texts and topics (though he suggests there are relatively few) that are mostly inadequate and should not be preached (he cites I Tim 1:20, turning over Hymenaeus and Alexander to Satan).

Allen's chapters dealing with congregation and sermon form, like the rest of the book, are insightful and offer the student of preaching wonderful entry points for further reflection and reading. The final question/chapter, particularly, raises issues and

questions to which every preacher must return on a regular basis. How does the preacher embody the message? How is the preacher's own spirituality nurtured through preaching, and how is that spiritual presence experienced by the congregation through the sermon? Allen address the performative character of preaching in this chapter but also recognizes that internal as well as external features create that embodiment of the message.

For those who teach preaching, this book offers a series of appendices that are invaluable, especially Appendix B, "A Summary of Questions to Guide Sermon Feedback." Here, Allen offers a series of 12 questions, all previously discussed in the book, which are all reflections of key aspects of a good sermon. It is a very helpful set of questions for the classroom; it is also a helpful summary of the contents of the book.

Remember, this is "an essential guide." Allen offers other resources for those looking to find more comprehensive preaching texts. This book is not "Cliff Notes" it is a provocative "teaser" that leads one to consider not just appropriate or essential techniques for preaching but also the largeness of the task and journey of the Christian faith.

Ultimately, the good news of the gospel must remind us all that the good news of God's redemptive love must carry the freight for preacher, sermon, and audience. To the degree that Allen's work points us to the activity of God as the activity of preaching, it is indeed "an essential guide."

John O. York

Dr. York is a professor of New Testament and homiletics at Lipscomb University.

## **Dancing in the Desert, Spiritual Refreshment for Your Parched Soul**

*By Marsha Crockett*

Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003. 159 pages.

Marsha Crockett explores a number of life experiences common to most of us, including discontentment, loss, disappointment, frantic time schedules, and confusion about purpose. Describing these as desert experiences, she offers Rest Stops, Rivers of Delight, and Hidden Joy, all rubrics that divide her chapters as she deals with each particular topic.

Crockett draws from the stories of various biblical characters using those stories as parallels to the particular spiritual struggles she examines. In the chapter "Rest ... in the Desert of Weariness," she offers a creative retelling of Elijah's cave experience as he fled from Jezebel after he humiliated the priests of Baal at Mt. Carmel. The chapter's Rest Stop invites readers to inventory their attitudes about work that cause burn out and overload. Crockett advises that Jesus can come into the workplace with the deep and refreshing rest he offers so that we can embrace our work in less frantic ways and find rest in doing so.

The chapter titled "Identity... in the Desert of Confusion" is an example of Crockett's frequent reference to early Christian writers. Leading the reader to awareness of true identity as one who is the image of God, she quotes Teresa of Avila, "Suppose an otherwise normal man was asked, 'Who is your father? ... What country are you from?' And suppose his reply was, 'I have no idea.' Wouldn't we think this man absurdly ignorant? But isn't our spiritual ignorance just as absurd?"

Readers looking for a guidebook with section breaks for reflection and journaling will appreciate Crockett's approach. But those choosing to jettison these invitations will find helpful and creative articulation of various spiritual wrestlings and encouraging words from Christian spiritualists and from the words of Scripture.

CHARME ROBARTS

Dallas, Texas



### **Down-to-Earth Spirituality: Encountering God in the Ordinary, Boring Stuff of Life**

By R. Paul Stevens

Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003. 208 pages.

R. Paul Stevens is convinced that true spirituality is down-to-earth in the sense that God is most often encountered in the ordinary common stuff of everyday life. Stevens explores *Down-to-Earth Spirituality* through a collection of reflections on the Jacob narrative, wherein ordinary moments are transformed by the presence of God. Readers searching for a scholarly commentary on the Jacob narrative or a theological treatise on incarnational spirituality will be disappointed with this book. The book reads more like a series of sermons or devotionals focusing on various aspects of everyday life.

The author pieces together reflections on various mundane aspects of ordinary life such as eating, sleeping, working, marriage, family, birth and death in which Jacob encounters God. Jacob is not presented as the idealized spiritual hero found on Sunday school flannel graphs, but rather as a complex, conflicted mixture of earthly passion and gritty spirituality. The result is a colorful tapestry of faith reflective of both God's majesty and humanity's frailty. The author provides the reader with some powerful reminders about the nature of Christian spirituality. Stevens contends that God's purpose is not that we might deny our humanity but rather that we might become more fully human. He reminds us that ministry is not restricted to the sanctuary and that there is no such thing as a godless experience. Perhaps most importantly, the author suggests that we do not need to be in another family, job, body, or relationship to be found by God.

Stevens asserts, "If God has come in the flesh, and if God keeps coming to us in our fleshly existence, then all of life is shot through with meaning. Earth is crammed with heaven, and heaven will be crammed with earth." This statement offers the contemporary church a helpful theological lens for engaging the postmodern world. At a time when many Christians lament the "secularization" of society and the result-

ing minimalization of institutional religion, this book serves as a reminder of the inherent spirituality found within all creation. Ministers and church leaders will benefit from this work in that it will provide them a more expansive view of the spiritual life than is usually reflected in the programs of the local church. Rarely do church leaders have the chance to look past church programs in order to recognize and enhance the daily spiritual formation that occurs in the lives of all people of faith.

If the contemporary church is going to engage the post-Christian context in which she finds herself, she must reframe her anemic understanding of divine encounter to include the finding of God in the ordinary "stuff" of life. Such a reframe is congruent with the nature of God who "became flesh and dwelt among us." The spiritual reflections compiled in *Down-to-Earth Spirituality* provide readers with insights into how spiritually emaciated souls can find satisfying nourishment by encountering God in the "everydayness" of life.

JOHN SIBURT  
Richardson, Texas

### **The Word Before the Powers: An Ethic of Preaching**

By Charles L. Campbell

Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002. 206 pages.

In this book Charles Campbell reminds us that ethical preaching is not just preaching about ethics. Moral preaching must be more than the reiteration of some standard catalog of "dos and don'ts;" it must serve to form the people of God into a moral community. So far, none of this is novel. I suspect that the work of Hans Frei, Stanley Hauerwas, Alasdair MacIntyre, and others has made enough headway among Restorationist preachers, that these themes of "narrative," "community," and "character formation," are familiar words and concepts. Many are now convicted that preaching is a formative act between the Word of God, the work of the preacher, and the people.

What is novel here is Campbell's introduction of a fourth party in the preaching moment: the "principalities and powers." By "principalities and powers," Campbell means to identify those "structural realities" (both material and spiritual) that constantly exercise power and influence on and around us. They may wear a number of tags: banks, colleges, political parties, political theories, industries, philosophies—all they need possess to be counted as a "principality" or "power" is the propensity to exercise their will over people.

Campbell's definition assumes the work of Walter Wink, whom he quotes: "The powers comprise all of social, political, and corporate reality, in both visible and invisible manifestations" (16). Campbell claims that preaching is a moral activity *precisely* as it does two things. First, the proclamation of the gospel forms the very character of the community by providing a "vision" that sees the principalities and powers for what they truly are. Second, preaching is itself an act of "non-violent resistance" to the continual force of the principalities and powers. Too often, Campbell suggests, preaching does not function in these ways, thereby unconsciously participating with the very powers it seeks to confront. When this happens, our preaching is no longer moral.

I am in hearty agreement with Campbell's call to ethical preaching so conceived. Yet, this important book opens a nagging question: how does the church know when she is cooperating with the powers (or indeed is acting as a power), and when she is being prophetic? Campbell's definition of "power" could be applied to the church as well. We are a "social, political, and corporate reality," with both "visible and invisible manifestations." One example, provided by Campbell, will suffice here. He suggests that one way the church cooperates with the powers is in her continuing refusal to ordain homosexual persons. Without agreeing or disagreeing with Campbell on this point, it is surely the case (by his own definitions) that the sexual culture of contemporary America is also a "power," and so the church finds herself needing another step here: some logic of discernment that she might recognize when she is conceding the field to the powers, and when she stands in prophetic critique of them.

This observation does not reduce the power of this book, but rather points toward avenues for continuing the discussion.

REX HAMILTON  
Rochester College

