Preaching in Believing: The Sermon as Theological Reflection,
Ronald J. Allen

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Allen contends that the preacher, along with the church, should connect systematic theology and preaching for several reasons. The connection explicitly links preaching and the formation of character. Beliefs have formative consequences both in the life of the church and in the broader culture. Probing this dimension enables the church to discern whether it embodies the beliefs it proclaims. Systematic theology also helps the church connect doctrines with concrete experiences, thereby allowing for diverse interpretations while searching for holistic renderings of the faith.

Honoring the otherness of a text, with its varied expressions, creates a conversational model for theological reflection. The text (or the classical expression of theological beliefs) and the contemporary situation do not trump one another, but enter into a dynamic relationship.

Overall, Allen’s book is an accessible read, especially for those who have not thought explicitly about the connection between systematic theology and preaching. It should challenge theological perspectives that privilege either the world of scripture or the world of the reader. However, the book needs a greater balance of analytical precision and constructive suggestions. In other words, a combination of theological prolegomena (questions about norms, resources, and dimensions of systematic theology) and theology proper (the actual content of theological beliefs) would aid the reader.

Obviously, such a move would unpack Allen’s revisionary perspective and change the conversation. Nevertheless, the book should provoke discussion about the relationship between systematic theology and preaching across theological perspectives.

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