

There is a university town in Britain where there is, for all intents and purposes, one evangelical church. Recently, the minister of this church told some friends of mine that he does not believe in preaching. Instead he believes that non-Christians are best evangelized and Christians edified through celebratory worship. If this church was charismatic one could understand this minister's view, but this church is known as a mainstream evangelical congregation. Which is why the attitude of this minister and too many like him around the country makes me very angry. Here is a shepherd who is neglecting his flock. In some ways I think he is more culpable than the theological liberals who lead the other churches in the town. He knows the truth but neglects to preach it.

How should one respond to such people? A start would be to direct him to read and meditate upon 1 Corinthians 3:10–17. Then he should be directed to some good books that would remind him about the nature of the ministry in general and preaching in particular. There are many excellent books in print, old and relatively new, that would benefit him and indeed any gospel minister. However there are several recently published books that are worthy of his and our attention.

The first is *Brothers, We are not Professionals* (Mentor 2003) by **John Piper**. Piper is one of those authors who writes books that consistently demand to be read. Written in Piper's customarily elegant and epigrammatic style, this book of 30 relatively short chapters addresses a variety of issues in the ministry. His primary concern is to wean us from the kind of professionalized ministry that has come to prevail in North America and increasingly in this country. In the preface Piper puts his thoughts in the wider

context of the challenge of secularism and Islam to Christianity and the need of a serious and godly ministry at the heart of which is the cross of Christ to meet it. The first chapter bears the title of the book and here Piper makes his point forcibly as he writes, 'Brothers, we are not professionals! We are outcasts. We are aliens and exiles in the world (1 Peter 2:11). Our citizenship is in heaven, and we wait with eager expectation for the Lord. You cannot professionalise the love for his appearing without killing it. And it *is* being killed. The aims of our ministry are eternal and spiritual. They are not shared by any of the professions ... The world sets the agenda of the professional man; God sets the agenda of the spiritual man.' Then he turns to prayer.

Banish professionalism from our midst, Oh God, and in its place out pour passionate prayer, poverty of spirit, hunger for God, rigorous study of holy things, white-hot devotion to Jesus Christ, utter indifference to material gain, and unremitting labour to rescue the perishing, perfect the saints, and glorify our sovereign Lord.

Amen to that. But this book is not a jeremiad regarding ministry, but rather an encouragement to faithful, godly ministry in the great Reformed tradition exemplified by Piper's hero Jonathan Edwards. There are several chapters that take up the familiar Piper themes, but many more on different aspects of the minister's life and work. All of us would benefit from meditating in what he writes on prayer (Brothers, let us pray), busyness (Brothers, beware of sacred substitutes), study and reading (Brothers, fight for your life), the importance of knowing the original languages (Brothers, Bitzer was a Banker), affliction (Brothers, Our affliction is for their comfort), and so much else. If you are a minister I would encourage you to get this book

and for a month use a chapter a day in your devotions so that your ministry is refreshed and refocused for God's glory, your people's good and your own sanity.

A book that is just as challenging to the work of the gospel ministry is *Preaching with Spiritual Vigour* (Mentor 2003) by **Murray A. Capill**, who teaches at the Reformed Theological College in Australia. In the book Capill examines the ministry of Richard Baxter with particular regard to his preaching. Much of the material is drawn from the *Reformed Pastor*, but he uses other works of Baxter as well. An encounter with Baxter's ministry is always deeply challenging. The danger is to fail to contextualize Baxter. This Capill doesn't do. Baxter is put in his historical context and then appropriate applications are made to our ministries today. While deeply appreciative of Baxter, Capill does critique him when he needs to be, both theologically and methodologically. What Capill so helpfully brings out is Baxter's love for Christ and people and the passion with which he ministered. Baxter was no professional minister in the sense that Piper objects to.

The third book of this triumvirate of must reads is **John Carrick's** *The Imperative of Preaching* (Banner of Truth 2002). There are many good and helpful books on the theology of preaching, but this one is a cut above most. By examining the rhetoric of the New Testament and particularly the letters of Paul, Carrick gets to the heart of the inner logic of preaching. In six chapters Carrick examines the place of the indicative (statements), the exclamative (emphasis and feeling), the interrogative (questions) and the imperative (commands). In each chapter he examines Scripture and then gives examples from a wide range of preachers – such as Whitefield,

Samuel Davies, and Lloyd-Jones. At the end of the book are three appendices of additional illustrations of biblical rhetoric. The book is heart-warming as well as intellectually stimulating and I found that it gave me new enthusiasm for preaching. Whatever others means of communication we use, the gospel demands preaching of the kind Carrick describes. I would recommend younger ministers to read this book as an antidote to the rather lecturing style of preaching that seems increasingly common among those who are committed to biblical exposition. If we are really serious about expository preaching it will affect not only the content of our sermons, but also the way to deliver and communicate it.

Of the making of books on preaching there seems to be no end. More briefly I will mention some that have come my way. With the present travails of the American Episcopal Church one can forget that for much of the 19th century it had a large evangelical party. One of its most influential figures was **Charles P McIlvaine**, bishop of Ohio. Theologically Reformed, McIlvaine experienced revival as chaplain at West Point and had a very fruitful ministry in New York City before moving west. *Preaching Christ* (Banner of Truth 2002) was originally delivered as addresses to clergy in Ohio. With warmth and biblical fidelity, MacIlvaine urges us to keep Christ central in our preaching. The two chapters on 'How some fail to preach Christ' and 'What is it to preach Christ?' are particularly helpful. Considering when he wrote one doesn't expect McIlvaine to deal with some of the issues related to preaching Christ redemptive-historically, especially from the Old Testament, but what he says is a necessary reminder for preachers today. For how such preaching can be made more arresting and interesting, readers may

turn to *Expository Preaching with Word Pictures* (Mentor 2001) by **Jack Hughes**. One of the criticisms of expository preaching is that it is often boring and sadly that has to be admitted. However that shouldn't be the case. From his writings and what we know of him no one could ever have accused the Puritan Thomas Watson of being a boring preacher. In this book Hughes explores the way Watson used illustrations to make his sermons appealing, interesting and memorable. But Hughes casts his net wide and refers to many other authors as well grounding what he says in Scripture. Those of us of Reformed convictions should take a leaf from Watson's book in regard to our preaching. To do so would help to make our preaching much more popular which to my mind is a crying need if we are to reach our nation and win other evangelicals to our cause. In a very different way **Stuart Olyott** advocates popular preaching in *Ministering like the Master* (Banner of Truth 2003). Based on the Sermon on the Mount, Olyott shows preachers how to preach sermons that are interesting, evangelistic and practically relevant to people. In his preaching Jesus connected with people and that is what our preaching must do today. It is the disconnectedness of much sound Reformed preaching that I suspect motivated the delivery and publication these lectures. Olyott's customary simple, clear and forthright style is itself, even in print, a model for preachers.

Word pictures were perhaps not the forte of **DM Lloyd-Jones**. Every preacher has his strengths and his was both his understanding of the text and submission to it as well as logical argument open to the anointing of the Holy Spirit. But contrary to what his reputation is among some, Lloyd-Jones was

a popular preacher. Recently some of his evangelistic sermons have been published. Banner of Truth have been publishing his Sunday evening sermons on the Acts under the title *Authentic Christianity* (Banner of Truth, vol. 2, 2001, vol. 3, 2003). As well as being spiritually rewarding in themselves, these volumes are excellent examples of evangelistic preaching that all ministers would benefit from studying. Here is the rhetoric that John Carrick describes in the book I mentioned above. Here is expository preaching that is faithful to the text without being pedantic.

Mentor has recently published several helpful guides to expository preaching. **Stephen McQuoid's** *The Beginner's Guide to Expository Preaching* (Mentor 2002) is a very good introduction to preaching that might be useful in a preacher's class. There is nothing particularly new here that cannot be found in older works, but it is fresh and accessible. Of a similar nature is *And the Word became a Sermon* by **Derek Newton** (Mentor/OMF 2003). Again there is nothing startlingly new here, but this book comes from the perspective of a missionary teaching pastors in a developing country, in this case the Philippines. This is a particular interest of mine. As Christianity expands so rapidly in many parts of the developing world the imperative is to help pastors to become expository preachers, particularly when they cannot afford the books we take for granted. To that end **Peter Grainger's** *Firm Foundations* (Mentor 2003) could prove very useful. This is not a guide to preaching, but rather a book of sermon outlines with advice as to how to structure expository sermons. There is a danger in a book like this that preachers use the outlines and fail to learn how to prepare a sermon themselves. But from my experience teaching

preaching in two Asian countries such outlines might help until a generation of preachers is reared who can prepare expository sermons from scratch. Such is the need for such preaching now that perhaps we need a book like this in the way Anglican clergy need the Book of Homilies in the 16th century. Over the years many people have been blessed by the preaching ministry of AN Martin. In *My Heart for Thy Cause* **Brian Borgman** offers us a study of what is subtitled, *Albert N. Martin's Theology of Preaching*. In fact while drawing on Martin's writings and tapes, the book is really about preaching of Martin's kind. Many other authors are referred to. The book reads as if Martin wrote it. Again there is not much new here, but there is a necessary reminder of some of the things close to Martin's heart in preaching—application, godly character, plainness of speech, boldness and so on.

The Proclamation Trust has done much in recent years to encourage expository preaching. From its stable have come one book and two booklets to note. *The Practical Preacher* (Mentor 2002) edited by **William Philip** is a short collection of addresses given at different PT events. There is much wisdom here from David Jackman, Sinclair Ferguson, Melvin Tinker, Jonathan Prime and Martin Allen. **Sinclair Ferguson** has written a very helpful and theologically stimulating booklet entitled *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament* (PT Media 2002) that every

preacher should read. We must recover thoroughly Christian preaching of the Old Testament that avoids the moralizing and spiritualizing that is too common among evangelicals. Ferguson's sensible use of a redemptive-historical approach that treats the Old Testament as Christian Scripture is very helpful. **William Philip** has put us in his debt with *Concerning Preaching* (PT Media 2002) in which he identifies a number of unhealthy trends among those who are committed to expository preaching that we would be wise to heed. More positively, however, he calls us back to the essentials of biblical preaching. Finally I recommend a pamphlet by **Albert Mohler** of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville entitled *Preaching: The Centrality of Scripture* (Banner of Truth 2002). Based on Paul's charge to Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:2, Mohler calls us back to the great work of preaching. He interacts with some recent writers on preaching whose view of Scripture undermines preaching and I found his treatment of the words 'in season and out of season' particularly illuminating. We are to preach 'when it fits and does not fit, when it works and when it seems not to work, when it bears visible fruit and when it seems barren, when it is appreciated and when it is denounced, when it is legal and when it is illegal, when it is plentiful and when it is scarce, when it is broadcast on the airwaves and when it is preached in the catacombs. We are to preach the word at all times.'