

The task of the Christian Minister is an exacting one. For those who have never been called to the full time task of preaching, it may appear a relatively easy thing to preach each week, given that the scriptures are so vast and varied. Yet therein lies the problem, not only how one should seek to regularly minister from God's word, but also how to do it whilst retaining a freshness and vigour for the commission that God has given to his servants?

Every true minister of the gospel is made not manufactured, although he can be moulded. Living in an age of rapid change it is tempting to try other methods, yet the time honoured one of the *foolishness of preaching* (1 Corinthians 1:21), remains the best way to communicate God's mind to sinful man. Therefore the preacher should have confidence that God knows the best way for him to communicate his revealed truth each week, in the sure knowledge that he will always see his word hits the target (Isaiah 55:11).

Many different aids are available to the preacher, yet books remain one of the best resources, especially those written by fellow preachers. The following selection come from preachers with different backgrounds and experiences, and have been produced to stimulate and encourage the busy pastor.

**James M. Garretson**, *Princeton and Preaching; Archibald Alexander and the Christian Ministry*.<sup>1</sup>

This is a beautifully written volume that the careful reader will greatly enjoy but also derive great profit from as it has such a rich content.

Using the life and works of Archibald Alexander to illustrate what preaching can be, the author has divided his material into eleven parts. It begins with a life of Alexander, and then goes through the usual topics, but in a most interesting and stimulating fashion.

It is full of wise instruction. In relation to the call to the ministry we are told that Alexander considered: 'Grace was more important than gifts; character more important than miraculous phenomena. What mattered most was whether Christ was forming himself in the character of those who believed they were called to serve in the Christian ministry. Character, in turn was evidenced in doctrinal fidelity and biblical piety' (38).

Although it refers to a past age the prayerful reading of this book will do preachers great good and undoubtedly benefit their hearers.

**Peter Jeffery**, *Preachers who made a difference*.<sup>2</sup>

A brief introduction to the lives of a number of famous preachers, from Hugh Latimer to Lloyd-Jones; written in a pithy way to stimulate and encourage the reader to learn more about them, and the message they proclaimed. It would be a useful tool to give to any who show an interest in becoming preachers.

This book comes with a CD of extracts from the writings of those mentioned, except for Lloyd-Jones, which seems a peculiar omission.

**Michael J. Quicke**, *360 Degree Preaching, Hearing, Speaking and living the Word*.<sup>3</sup>

Michael Quicke appears to have written a book with the Preacher/Teacher of a large congregation in mind, one who is probably in a team ministry and is required to produce only one sermon per week. For it encourages the preacher to 'memorize the sermon structure,' which, unless you are extremely gifted, is not easy to do, especially if there are three or more messages to deliver each week.

The book is divided into two; the first part is called, 'Preaching Realities', and goes through the basics of looking at the background of preaching and how the message of the Bible should be conveyed in the twenty-first century, suggesting the use of modern equipment to engage the hearer. 'Electronic technology has to become as much part of our church experience as pipe organ technology' (118). What happens to those who are unable to obtain or use such items is not mentioned.

Part two is called 'Preaching Opportunities', and is based around 'the preaching Swim' - which is an illustration that will probably be lost to land lovers, - a total engagement with the act of preaching. This is explored in five stages and seeks to help the preacher to improve his work in the study and pulpit. Stage 1 Immerse in Scripture, Stage 2 Interpret for today, Stage 3 Design the sermon, Stage 4 Deliver the sermon, and Stage 5 Experience the outcome.

The author seeks to ground his method in an all encompassing circle, hence the title of the book, and fig 2 on page 51 illustrates the Dynamics of a 360 degree preaching event, that begins, ends and is empowered by the triune God. At times it feels like his thesis is being forced into this model but the book does nonetheless

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contain many useful passages. Coming from a professor of preaching in the United States it has a number of diagrams and charts that may help in the seminary class room, but some will find these off putting.

With many fine phrases and ideas this is a work that would benefit a number of preachers. Quicke assumes that women will also be preachers (88).

**Roger Standing**, *Finding the Plot, preaching in narrative style*.<sup>4</sup>

This book is a plea for narrative preaching to have a greater emphasis in Church life than it appears to have at present. There are four parts; Part 1 What's so special about narrative? Part 2 Preaching in a narrative style, Part 3 Narrative sermons, and Part 4 Preachers insights.

A great deal comes through in other books but is given a particular value here. It was difficult not to become wearied by the end of the book with over emphasis of this topic and many of the sermon examples are what would be expected.

The fault may lie with the reviewer but it would have greatly enhanced the value of this work if the Old Testament had been dealt with rather than the New. For many preaches struggle with the narrative of the Old Testament, particularly books like Kings, and Chronicles. Great though Dale Ralph Davis commentaries are on these books, they are not designed to be read out loud to the congregation, so greater help in understanding and preaching from the Old Testament would have been most useful.

**Greg Scharf**, *Prepared to Preach; God's work & ours in proclaiming his word*.<sup>5</sup>

The author teaches at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and has produced a stimulating volume. He divides his work into four parts; Part 1 Preparing to prepare, Part 2 Preparing yourself to preach, Part 3 Preparing your mind, your body, and the congregation, and Part 4, Preparing the message God gives you to preach.

Much of the material in this book is replicated elsewhere, but is worth reading for the gems that are contained within it. Chapter 10 on Preparing your body to preach, deals with physical fitness, personal appearance, hygiene and diet; it is a great checklist that all preachers would do well to take heed to so that the message and not the preacher is remembered after the sermon.

This might well be a good book for ministers to work through at a fraternal.

**Edgar Andrews**, *Preaching Christ*.<sup>6</sup>

The majority of chapters of this book originally appeared as monthly articles in the Evangelical Times. In thirteen helpful chapters the author works from 'What shall we preach,' to 'Christ in all the scriptures.' For many preachers the things discussed in this volume will not be new, but they would make a helpful contribution to any preaching classes that they run.

One small point, the varying nature of the illustrations are irritating; they undoubtedly had a place in the newspaper, but are not so compelling in a book.

**Haddon Robinson and Craig Brian Larson**, eds., *The Art & Craft of Biblical Preaching*.<sup>7</sup>

A large volume in every way, which will certainly test not only the pocket, but also the manual dexterity of the reader! It is an eclectic mix of styles and contributors with Robinson and Larson acting as editors, also adding a few items themselves. The list of writers, all one hundred and nine of them, might be a little surprising, it includes Timothy Keller, Dick Lucas, David Jackman, Jay Adams, Warren Wiersbe and Bill Hybels, and many professors of varying types, but there is also a comedian and several writers in residence. Whilst it is helpful to hear what others feel or think about preaching, in a work of this type it would have been better to have limited it to those who actually preach.

It is divided into eleven parts, the first one is; 'The high call of preaching,' and it goes through various stages to finish with 'Evaluation.' Not only are there chapters on topics related to preaching but also interviews with preachers which gives the book an uneven feel.

Some highlights to whet the appetite are: 'Preaching through personal pain' by Daniel T. Hans. He begins with these heart rending words; "Two days ago my daughter Laura died," and then works out the implications of this using Job as a template. 'Life in Leviticus', by Rob Bell, is a challenge to preach a series through one of the least understood but very important books of the Bible. He did so when he planted a church, and it was enthusiastically received. Also well worth reading is; 'Preaching Hell in a tolerant age' by Timothy Keller. This is a masterpiece of persuasive argument, and

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it is a chapter that all should read, for it shows how this serious subject can be handled sensitively and winsomely. This is a book mainly for reference or dipping into, and considering its size more suitable for the seminary rather than the manse. Although sensible use of the accompanying CD would be useful in a preaching class run by Pastors in their churches as it contains fourteen sermons by some of the contributors.

**Roger Wagner**, *Tongues Aflame, Learning to Preach from the Apostles*.<sup>8</sup>

Roger Wagner has written a most stimulating book on preaching that encourages the reader to engage with the scriptures and to look at the apostolic example of preaching that lives. This work is divided into two main parts; Part 1, Characteristics of the Preaching in Acts, and Part Two, A closer look at the sermons. Part 1 contains things that can be found in other volumes, but, Part 2 is most helpful in considering afresh the mighty sermons of the early church.

Many striking phrases leap off the page; 'If you are going to lead men and women into an authentic relationship with Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, you must make repentance from sin a prominent theme in your sermons, as the apostles did. In expounding and applying the scriptures you must help your audience see itself as God does' (166).

This book also contains timely practical advice on how to say 'no' to unwanted intrusions into the most essential things; 'You have many duties included in your 'job description' as a local pastor in addition to preaching – you are a counsellor, an administrator, an ecclesiastical judge (i.e. in the conduct of church discipline), a youth leader, a consultant on interior decoration, a hospital visitor, a handyman, etc. No doubt you would say, in theory, that preaching is your most important task. But, in practise, is it?' (297).

With so many good books on preaching around, the reader may feel like passing this one by, resist the temptation, get a copy, read and let this wise author powerfully present to you the reason why having tongues aflame is an achievable object.

**Stuart Olyott**, *Preaching pure and simple*.<sup>9</sup>

Like the author this work is concise and precise. For such a small book a great deal of information is conveyed in a

most helpful way to the reader.

It is divided into three parts, the first one asks and answers the simple question, 'What is preaching?' Part two 'What makes good preaching?' is the bulk of the work and considers no fewer than seven sub-headings. Part three contains two brief sections, a suggested method of sermon preparation and then an appreciation of the life of Hugh D Morgan. The advice on sermon preparation is most helpful, except that it would have been valuable if the author related how he coped with the stress of sermon preparation in a busy pastoral situation. For taking time over sermon is often a luxury that many pastors long for but do not have.

If it were in my power, I would get a copy of this book into the hands of every preacher not only for their encouragement but also to enthuse them afresh in sermon preparation and delivery.

It would have been helpful to have had a CD of the preaching of Hugh Morgan with this book for he died 14 years ago and therefore many will not have heard him or realised why the author holds him in such high esteem.

**Bryan Chapell**, *Christ-Centred Preaching, Redeeming the Expository Sermon*.<sup>10</sup>

This book deals with the science of expository preaching. It has been passionately written and conveys the author's enthusiasm for this form of preaching.

There are three main parts to his book and a significant section called Appendices. Part 1 Principles for Expository preaching, Part 2 Preparation of Expository preaching and Part 3 A theology of Christ-centred messages. Written by someone who teaches in the classroom, included are tables of terms, diagrams and formulas that some may find intimidating, but a thoughtful and prayerful reading will reap rewards. Each chapter has a helpful outline showing where the author will take the reader, and a goal for the chapter – this helps to focus on what is being taught and how it fits into the whole work. The chapter concludes with a series of questions for review and discussion – the author assumes that this will be used as a text book. Then a series of exercises are meant to be worked through to see how much has been learnt by the preacher. These exercises would ideally work best in a group situation where friendly but firm correction could be applied.

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In many ways the best section is Part 3 on Anthology of Christ-centred messages, for most preachers, if they are honest, struggle not only to see Christ in all the scriptures but also suffer from not seeing him in the right way nor presenting his place in the Old Testament in a correct fashion. Chapter 11 in Part 3, Developing Redemptive Messages is a powerful corrective to poor preaching and like other items mentioned above, deserves to be read by all preachers..

Of the books reviewed, this is the most intellectually satisfying, because it stretches the preacher to consider what he is doing and how what he has read should be achieved. If every minister were able to work thoughtfully through this volume, then the quality of expository sermons must increase to the glory of God.

A.W. Tozer, *Rut, Rot or Revival*.<sup>11</sup>

Reading sermons by preachers that God has blessed is always profitable, and Tozer was one who was always stimulating. This selection has been compiled from sermons preached in Toronto, and illustrate well Tozer's gift for getting to the heart of the message and for putting into practice the advice contained in the books above.

## Conclusion

These books have all been written by those who enjoy the privileged position of being Lecturers, Itinerant preachers or Pastors in large Churches.

One glaring omission is the lack of material written by anyone who pastors a Church with a regular congregation of fifty or less people. This is an area that needs to be addressed, for the majority of Churches are small and the Pastor has of necessity to be a jack of all trades. So the sad reality is that he is probably too busy to read this review let alone write a book!

Perhaps then there is a brave publisher who will be bold enough to approach such a man, so that a full and rounded picture can be obtained of how men in those situations manage to compose and preach their material, and it can then be added to all the other fine volumes available.

One reason that preachers do not read enough is a lack of finance, but with many fine resources available like the local or The Evangelical Library that should not be an excuse used by anyone today for not obtaining the volumes listed above.

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