

‘Know the Lord,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”

In the end, it can be concluded that this book by pastor Denault is an important contribution to the development of contemporary Protestant theological thought in general and Baptist federalism in particular. This is a time of great theological wanderings, even in Bible-respecting conservative thought. For example, similar questions to these have been raised by Presbyterian theologians (Kline vs. Murray/Gaffin debate), and then there is also the emergence of the *Progressive Dispensationalism* and the *New Covenant Theology*, indicating that there is a certain discontentment with existing theological systems. Since “there is nothing new under the sun” (Ecc. 1:9), all students of theology and the Bible can benefit from reading *The Distinctiveness of Baptist Covenant Theology* and historical Particular Baptist writings, and perhaps find some contemporary questions already answered.

Miroslav Balint-Feudvarski

Cornelius Plantinga, Jr.

**Reading for Preaching: the preacher in conversation with storytellers, biographers, poets, and journalists**

William B. Eerdmans publishing company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2013, 133 pp.

The way to a human heart is an expedition with a quest to find the true meaning of life. That is why many Christian preachers over and over again have a task to find precious diamonds and to share them with their listeners. To touch listeners deep in their souls, shake their spirit, awaken an interest, to identify things that bother them, to start a reaction—these are only some of the goals that a preacher is trying to accomplish. In the book, *Reading for Preaching*, Cornelius Plantinga states that reading is a good tool to be used to reach the hearts of listeners.

Plantinga is president emeritus of Calvin Theological Seminary and research fellow at the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship. He writes books and articles that are published in well-known Christian magazines such as *Christianity Today* and *Christian Century*. In 2003, together with some of his colleagues, he started teaching seminars on the subject „*reading for preaching*“, available to students, teachers, preachers, as well as to a wider audience. This book is a result of those seminars.

The book is short, only 133 pages. Besides the preface, a list of further readings (recommendations) and conclusion message, it is divided into six chapters, the last three of which could easily fit into one chapter.

In the first chapter, *Introduction to the conversation*, the author sees the preacher as someone who needs to be first of all a listener. From listening there is the possibility that a good sermon will emerge. By listening to Scripture and the experiences of its characters the preacher can relate it to his listeners. However, in order to present the Gospel in a way that will touch the listeners it is sometimes necessary to do a presentation in a new and different way. Because of this the author believes it is good to use works of world-renowned authors, because their writings and ideas can fill the holes where the Bible speaks less. Literature has a special place in this. And that is why a preacher needs to read.

The focus in the second chapter is on how to enrich sermons with illustrations that are found in literature. Good illustrations can reveal motivations and deepen perspectives. The author sees that preachers often use very simple stories which are sometimes shallow, without depth. He rather recommends that in order to get good illustrations for sermons preachers should be reading works of quality writers and thinkers. What struck me in the second chapter was the author's recommendation that those who preach should read at least one literary work a year. And the question arose, can a preacher improve his preaching and sermons if he reads only one book a year? With this recommendation the author partly destroys the case around which he is writing his book.

In chapter three the author reminds us of the importance of communication. Just as a good meal depends on the quality of the ingredients, the quality of a sermon depends on the quality of communication. A preacher must know how to master his communication. Verbal economy is important; it is necessary to have big scissors to remove all useless words and thoughts. That is why the author lists a few rules the preacher must observe—don't frustrate your listeners, don't waste their time, from time to time make them happy (satisfied), try to touch their hearts—these are some of those rules.

The last three chapters can be combined into one larger chapter, namely the role of wisdom in preaching and living. The author is aware that in congregations there are specific differences which require wisdom to address. He reminds us that in this case it is important that a preacher demonstrate versatility (universality). He should have a wide range of knowledge, from Mozart to hip hop music. He should have discernment and emotional intelligence. That is how he will understand the needs of his congregation.

The book is written in a simple literary style and it is obvious that author wants this book to be available to a wide audience. The best audience for it will be those who are preaching as well as all others who want to know more about preaching. The purpose of the work is to motivate preachers to read in order to improve their preaching. He especially suggests that preachers read works of storytellers, biographers, poets and journalists, as the book's subtitle suggests.

With this suggestion he does not underestimate the classical ways in which sermons are prepared, such as the use of Bible commentaries, the role of the Holy Spirit, personal experience gained in Christian ministry, and the thoughts of known theologians. Rather, he sees his suggestions as complementary to these.

Although the book's subtitle suggests that preachers must be in conversation with storytellers, biographers, poets and journalists, it is obvious that in most of this book the author leans on storytellers. Chapters are interlaced with literature from world-renowned authors. He often uses stories from Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, Hugo's *Les Miserables*, *Harry Potter*, works of Dostoyevski, Tolstoy, Khaled Hosseini, and others. He sees these works and authors as quality ones that can be used in constructing sermons. At times his recommendations sound like they are aimed at high schoolers rather than preachers. In addition to storytellers, biographers can also provide inspiration, mostly because listeners can easily identify with the characters in biographies. The author gives to poets the least of his attention, not because they are not important, but he believes it is hard to fit poetry into sermons. Preachers should rather use poetry to improve their verbal abilities.

In the end, this book can be reduced to a basic premise: Preachers must read. It is a way to enrich self and others. When Plantinga invites preachers to read, he does not imply that they are not biblically equipped or that they lack experience in their walk with Lord. He only wants to motivate them to give more attention to a world they may not have thought about. It is a world of storytellers, biographers, poets and journalists. It will enrich their sermons and help them to be more affective with their listeners.

Ivan Karadža

Brent A. Strawn (ed.)

### **The Bible and the Pursuit of Happiness**

New York: Oxford University Press, 2012, 430 pp.

With such a straightforward title the potential reader is by no means left wondering what this book is about. Anyone interested in what the Scriptures have to say about happiness in general and the pursuit of it in particular will find it hard to leave this book on the shelf and continue searching for a more fitting volume.

The content is quite logically and expectedly divided into three parts. The first one deals with the Old Testament, the second with the New Testament, and the third steps outside the limits of the biblical canon and offers to connect the biblical data with other related disciplines.

Within the three parts themselves, the book covers the topic in a broad, yet effec-