

role of the HCM? It “can play an important role in *limiting* the range of interpretations possible when reading a text.” But what does this mean practically? Is it wrong to suppose, the HCM being what it is, that it will rule Bultmann’s view of bodily resurrection in and Donald Carson’s out? Also, it “can help protect the rights of the text.” But that, according to structuralism, is just what it does not do. “It is one of the voices to which we must listen if we are truly to hear God’s Word in this ancient collection of texts.” But has God’s Word not been bracketed out to begin with? Troeltsch seems to have thought so: “Give the historical method an inch and it will take a mile. From a strictly orthodox standpoint, therefore, it seems to bear a certain similarity to the devil.”⁴

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Timothy Keller. *Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism*. New York: Viking, 2015. Pp. 309.

Timothy Keller was instrumental in planting Redeemer Presbyterian Church (PCA), a multisite congregation in New York City and has served there ever since it began in 1989. Since the success of his books *The Reason for God* and *The Prodigal God* in 2008, Keller has published over two books a year. One of his latest endeavors, *Preaching*, will likely be influential because of the significant growth of Redeemer Presbyterian under his ministry.

The book is a good read. Keller writes well. His thoughts are vigorous and his sentences simple. He expresses himself with both depth and clarity. He uses gripping word-pictures: “A good sermon is not like a club that beats upon the will but like a sword that cuts to the heart” (p. 21). Thus there is value in this book merely for the benefit of exposure to excellent communication, which every preacher needs.

The endnotes are a small book unto themselves (69 pages!). The notes demonstrate Keller’s interaction with a wide body of relevant literature ranging from John Calvin and William Perkins to the latest books on homiletics and culture. However, the endnotes also contain a number of Keller’s comments, some of which extend to multi-page essays. If Keller

⁴ Ernst Troeltsch, “Historical and Dogmatic Method in Theology” (1900), in *Religion in History*, Essays translated by James Luther Adams and Walter E. Bense (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 46.

deems these valuable, it would have been better to incorporate them into the text and to reserve endnotes for citations and brief asides.

The outline of the book, explained in the prologue, presents a threefold view of good preaching. First, we must preach the Word of God, the Holy Scriptures. Second, we must preach to the people, “engaging the culture, and touching hearts” (p. 21). Third, we must preach with dependence on the Holy Spirit, for the Spirit alone can make preaching great.

However, I would propose another outline, for there is a sense in which this is two books. In the first, we hear Keller the Reformed theologian and lover of the Puritans (chs. 1–3, 6–7). In the second, we hear Keller the apologist to the secular world (chs. 4–5), though with a cameo appearance from Jonathan Edwards (p. 101).

The first “book” is a very profitable discussion of preaching Christ from the Scriptures to the hearts of those who hear. This material is rich in Scripture and draws extensively from the Reformed and Puritan tradition. In the early chapters, Keller acknowledges that both expository and topical preaching are needed, but he argues that the regular diet of the church should consist of expository preaching. His counsel to avoid long expository series (as in a year or more) based on the high mobility of our culture seems more applicable to his context in New York City than to small town pastors in, say, western Nebraska or upper Michigan.

Since the Word centers on Christ, to preach the Word is to preach Christ. Keller helpfully illustrates this with an example of two different approaches to preaching the healing of the demoniac (pp. 63–65). These chapters contain a wealth of insights into how to faithfully preach Christ from the Scriptures and list a number of helpful resources in its endnotes for further reading. In the last chapters of the book, Keller gives helpful directions on preaching to the heart and preaching in the Spirit’s power. He links the latter to the spiritual character of the preacher and asks searching questions of whether we preach for the glory of our church, ourselves, or Christ (pp. 201–5). This Christ-exalting, heart-searching material is Keller at his best.

Contained within the first “book” in *Preaching* are the two chapters on preaching to the culture and “the (late) modern mind”—the physical center of the book, consisting of a quarter of his text. The shift in focus is so palpable that we might consider this a second book within his book. Here too he offers much sane and helpful advice, calling for a contextualization of the message, which he describes not as compromise but as “adapting in order to confront” (p. 96). He challenges preachers to avoid unnecessary evangelical jargon and to define terms like *covenant* so that hearers in our post-Christian

society can understand us. He calls preachers to acknowledge and address the doubts and questions that secular people have.

However, Keller's strength as an apologist to intellectuals places unwise expectations on the preacher. One of Keller's strategies for contextualization is quoting "respected authorities" that unconverted listeners trust. He offers an impressive collection of quotations that tend to support fragments of biblical truth, mostly drawn from atheists (pp. 106–10). This implies that the preacher must read widely and deeply in atheistic literature—unless he is to repeat from a list of quotations pulled out of context, which runs serious risks of misunderstanding or misattribution. Few preachers are called to be cultural apologists of this kind; the others would do better to invest their limited time in reading in the Scriptures and books on Christian doctrine, experience, and practice.

Though Keller's cultural analysis is penetrating, this central section of the book leans most heavily not on Scripture or Reformed writers, but on writers outside the core of Evangelical orthodoxy such as P. T. Forsyth (pp. 96–99, 121, 279–80), ecumenist Miroslav Volf (p. 114), and Roman Catholic philosopher Charles Taylor (pp. 125ff.). While these may be brilliant men, we must ask whether there are no cultural analyses available from the Reformed perspective, for surely one's analysis of the culture around one will be shaped by the worldview one holds. This suggests a danger in his apologetic method: deep engagement with unbiblical thinkers may begin to shift our minds from the foundation of the Word of God. For instance, some Reformed and Evangelical Christians are concerned about Keller's involvement with the *Biologos* organization and with it some kind of biological evolution. However, no such doctrinal shifts appear in this book.

Keller's *Preaching* is a tremendous encouragement for preaching Christ from the Scriptures. It also contains much insight into contemporary American culture, particularly in the intellectual circles in which Keller moves. Though it is not a primary textbook for homiletics, ministerial students and active pastors will find much here for fruitful consideration.

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