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# Dinner with Jesus and Other Left-Handed Story-Sermons

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Often writing autobiographically, Carroll provides much testimony and reflection through personal experience in ministry, as well as vignettes of others' pastoral or lay ministry; all this engaging narrative gives the reader ample opportunity to engage her/his faith and ministry stories reflectively. This is a text which will be of great value to all leaders in the church, whether clergy or laity. It is also a book which will serve as an excellent study text, whether in seminary courses on ministry and leadership or congregational adult study groups desiring to strengthen their ministries.

Arnold D. Weigel  
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### **Dinner With Jesus and Other Left-handed Story-sermons**

Donald F. Chatfield  
Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988  
128 pp. \$9.50

This book is a collection of twelve story-sermons composed by Donald Chatfield, a Presbyterian minister and Professor of Preaching at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary in Evanston, Illinois. The title matches the author's imagination. He describes a left-handed sermon as "one that encourages the right side of the brain to take the lead for a while" (9). Congregations not used to the story-sermon or narrative style of preaching may need some help in listening; apparently the congregations Chatfield served responded enthusiastically. Chatfield introduces each sermon, telling us something of its genesis, the intentions he had for it, and how it developed.

The first sermon, "Dinner with Jesus", takes the form of an inter-office memo from Matthew to his supervisor in the tax office, explaining his abrupt departure and submitting his resignation. Chatfield is at his best here in the use of humor and creative anachronism. "The Greatest Gift" is a story of Christmas. A single, middle-aged, Protestant woman sets out to purchase a Christmas gift for herself and discovers, in a Roman Catholic church, the greatest gift of all. "The Sign of Jonah" was meant for children, and so Jonah is a youngster who is convinced the Ninevites have stolen his Swiss Army knife. A fine yarn especially in a youth retreat or camp setting. "So It Was You All the Time" is an engrossing pacing through Abraham's life. It is safe to say that all people have experienced God without being aware of God's presence; here is a poignant reminder of that presence, encouraging reflective searching for those times when God was indeed present, yet silently so. "The Pilgrim's River" is in the "fantasy" mode, or perhaps the allegorical mode. The Christ motif is evident, but following the river

as a paradigm of discipleship (if that is what is meant) was less than effective. "What If...?" is a startling reversal of Jesus' determination "to go to Jerusalem": Peter, in spite of Jesus' rebuke, persuades him *not* to go! "The Fastest Gun in The West" is an allegory about messianic expectations. "Who is the Least?" is also an allegory, though very closely tied to the parable of the last judgment. Though somewhat abstract, it is powerfully moving and cause for honest self-examination. In "Michal" David's wife tells her story of life with David and of how her jealousy has cost her everything. The sermon seems a bit contrived, yet a youth retreat setting may prove a useful setting for this retelling of the biblical narrative. In "The Godless Agreement" Moses' public relations man remonstrates about Moses' invisible God and how difficult this God will be to "sell". It is a refreshing and poignant approach to the first commandment—and very challenging! Cain ("Cain's Story") tells how he finally came to accept his "mark" as a sign of God's mercy and love. And in "The Day Jesus Came to the City" several persons, including the donkey, share their experience of Palm Sunday; some of the endings get a bit mushy, and one feels the need to get beyond the characters.

These story-sermons are the product of an imaginative mind. They are examples of several ways to shape the plots of such sermons, and motivate one to attempt such preaching. Above all, they demonstrate nicely the contrast between right-brain and left-brain preaching.

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### **The Teaching Minister**

Clark M. Williamson and Ronald J. Allen  
Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991  
138 pp.

Two teachers at Christian Theological Seminary, Indianapolis, namely, Clark M. Williamson, Professor of Theology, and Ronald J. Allen, Assistant Professor of Preaching, have co-authored a provocative, searching and challenging text which incorporates insightful sociological, theological and pastoral scholarship.

In response to a set of critical questions facing the church today: "What should be the image, model or role of the clergy? How should Christian pastors understand what the church properly expects and needs from them? What is the central task of the ministry?" (7), the authors state plainly and emphatically: "The *central* task of ministry is *teaching* the Christian faith" (7).