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The Word is Life: An Anthology of Funeral Meditations

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the reader to keep one thing in mind. While Roland Cole-Turner does acknowledge that the pursuit of new technology can be an ethically ambiguous activity, this caution occasionally gets lost in the author's desire to affirm genetic engineering as a mode of God's creativity through humankind.

Nevertheless, I would recommend this book to anyone who wants to gain a general introduction to the topic. The author points to some very important concerns which will challenge us over the coming decades. Through his incisive summaries he provides the reader with a helpful doorway into the often confusing ethical dialogue surrounding genetic engineering. But most of all, his book demonstrates through its engagement with the topic of genetic engineering, that there exists a serious challenge for Christians. That is, Christians need to further develop a more adequate theology of healing, one that sees life as a whole and engages contemporary bioethical activities on an on-going basis.

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This New Life Together: An Anthology of Wedding Meditations

Lima, OH: C.S.S. Publishing Co., Inc., 1994

63 pp.

The Word is Life: An Anthology of Funeral Meditations

Lima, OH: C.S.S. Publishing Co., Inc., 1994

74 pp.

The publishing of either wedding or funeral sermons is rare and therefore much appreciated; homiletical and pastoral thanks are due to C.S.S. for presenting a volume of each!

The Foreword to each volume is by Michael L. Thompson, but he is not identified as the editor, nor is there any indication of how either anthology was composed. This seems to be part of general editorial carelessness at C.S.S.

Twenty-one wedding meditations are ostensibly offered—but three are not meditations at all: one is a marriage prayer (a good one!), one is a liturgical candle rite (it looks and sounds like a summary of something), one is a formula for a congregational pledge of support. One wonders where editorial control went! An ecumenical roster of preachers is represented, including one Roman Catholic. One meditation is for a Protestant-Catholic marriage; two are for older couples, both widowed; one is for a medical

student (though that fact fails to influence the meditation). Most rely on lections (Song of Solomon appears twice), though there is a carelessness in listing them (where, again, is editorial oversight?). Those meditations which are deliberately based on a passage of Scripture are far away the best; they are focussed, substantive, and worthy. One partial exception (it has a background of three lessons and a Psalm) uses the biblical theme of "memory and hope" to bring together the many elements present at the second marriage of a couple who are both widowed and whose respective families are present. Excellent! One learns here negatively as well as positively about preaching at weddings: the need to be brief; the need to resist didactic advice-giving; the need for tight thematic focus; the need for a central image (e.g., the house on the rock, #2; not, please, a boxing ring, #10!); the need for a creative text (the volume is a fine source of these); and, perhaps, the need to get off the theme of love: shall we put a moratorium on 1 Cor. 13?

The funeral meditations are considerably deeper in substance and pastoral care. Here again editorial carelessness includes two offerings of worship resources (one is a graveside poem, the other suggests lessons and gives some prayers for the funeral of a child lost through miscarriage), and two general sermons which seek to help congregations deal with death. The remaining 18 meditations helpfully address mourners grieving a variety of deaths: a business leader; sudden illness; a child; an older man; a 12-year-old with a history of medical problems; three suicides; an elderly cancer victim; a Hodgkin's disease victim; an Alzheimer victim; a murder victim; a farm accident victim; a stillborn child; an infant; a retired pastor's wife; a seamstress; and one identified oddly as "Christmas" (it appears the person died just before the Nativity). This variety is unquestionably the strength of the anthology, and we benefit from the preachers' struggles to address really tough situations.

Several learnings come clear. (1) Funeral meditations bring out some of the best dimensions of a preacher's pastoral care: keen attention to the deceased's story, sensitivity to and articulation of the mourners' feelings, the urgency to preach the gospel. (2) The need for ONE dominant image (e.g., God is like the seamstress who redesigned and fashioned new clothes from old, torn, and out-moded clothing). (3) The need to articulate ONE dominant question the mourners ask, and relate the gospel to it. (4) The need to stick to ONE text even when several lessons are read (inevitably, trying to include each of two or three lessons leads to a scattered focus, the tacking on of thoughts, the fogging of focus). (5) The need to incorporate the gospel of Jesus' death and resurrection into the event and the experience of the mourners. The preachers, one and all, work hard to proclaim the gospel; they are not uniformly successful. Sometimes it ends up being a recital that stands apart from the event (this had best be left to a recital of the Creed); sometimes it veers toward a nature religion (e.g., the image of life as a circle in which death is an exit to life is theologically questionable in that it smacks much more of soul-immortality than the miracle of

resurrection. "When you're dead," Tillich is supposed to have said, "you're dead all over." Only then can God's "new thing" be done.).

Robert Hughes (*A Trumpet in Darkness: Preaching to Mourners*, Fortress, 1985) advises that two things are essential in a funeral sermon: to communicate the reality of death; to communicate Christian hope. It is ultimately humbling to accompany these preachers as they valiantly address themselves to that task.

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The Mystery and the Passion: A Homiletic Reading of the Gospel Traditions

David Buttrick
Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992
x + 246 pp.

Dear Pastor: *Buy this book!* Read it every Epiphany in preparation for Lent-Easter. Buy it at once! I read it in Epiphany and now again in the Easter season, and each reading revealed fresh insight and provoked theological and imaginative thought. It is a boon to preachers, and a theological companion in any season. Buttrick is not afraid to ask and deal thoroughly with the vexing questions that overshadow the Resurrection and Passion narratives (e.g., Did the resurrection really happen? What does it mean that Christ died for us? What was Jesus's self-understanding? Does God suffer?), but he does this always from the homiletic perspective: "I am seeking to get at a word to be preached" (p. 54).

After a Prologue in which he describes the formation of the Resurrection and Passion narratives he devotes Part One to "The Mystery of the Resurrection" and Part Two to "The Passion of Jesus Christ". The Epilogue is a theological discussion of sin, how it is manifested, how it is dealt with on the cross, and what salvation means.

Buttrick has at least four concerns. One is to read the texts with integrity. He prepares for this in the Epilogue by noting how the early Christians worked their way backward from the Resurrection. Then in each Part he examines all the texts pertaining to Resurrection (he includes 1 Cor. 15) and Passion in the Synoptics and John. This is an invaluable lectionary resource in itself.

A second concern is to be theologically astute and disciplined. In Part One he devotes three chapters to a theological discussion of the Resurrection ("The Reality of the Resurrection", "A Risen Crucified Christ", and "Resurrection and God's New Order"); similarly, in Part Two he devotes three chapters to a theological discussion of the Passion ("The Patterns of