

5-1-1992

Preaching in the Patristic Age: Studies in Honor of Walter J Burghardt

Eduard R. Riegert

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholars.wlu.ca/consensus>

Recommended Citation

Riegert, Eduard R. (1992) "Preaching in the Patristic Age: Studies in Honor of Walter J Burghardt," *Consensus*: Vol. 18 : Iss. 1 , Article 24.

Available at: <http://scholars.wlu.ca/consensus/vol18/iss1/24>

This Book Reviews is brought to you for free and open access by Scholars Commons @ Laurier. It has been accepted for inclusion in Consensus by an authorized editor of Scholars Commons @ Laurier. For more information, please contact scholarscommons@wlu.ca.

This book could be a valuable companion to *A Teachable Spirit* (Recovering the Teaching Office in the Church) by Richard R. Osmer (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990). Osmer analyzes the shortcomings and pitfalls of rampant individualism and of rigid authoritarianism in dealing with the contemporary malaise of Protestant mainline churches.

Arnold D. Weigel
Waterloo Lutheran Seminary

Preaching in the Patristic Age: Studies in Honor of Walter J. Burghardt, S.J.

David G. Hunter, editor
New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1989
vi + 217 pp.

Here is a truly fine volume serving the interests of both students of Patristics and students of the history of preaching! On the occasion of his 75th birthday, Burghardt is honored as scholar of Patristics and preacher of note in a series of essays devoted most adeptly to an examination of preaching in the Patristic age.

An opening "Appreciation" by Gerald P. Fogarty, S.J., presents portraits of Burghardt as man, theologian, teacher and preacher. In the scholarly world Burghardt is best known for his editorship of the journal *Theological Studies*, his intense involvement in Vatican II and the turmoil in American Roman Catholicism prior to and after that landmark, and his long and appreciative work in the U.S. Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogues. In the homiletical world he is deeply respected for his several volumes of homilies and the primer, *Preaching: The Art and the Craft* (New York: Paulist Press, 1987). He taught at Woodstock College, Maryland and at Georgetown University.

The individual essays are all of high quality, though of course some are more gripping than others. "Preaching in the Apostolic and Subapostolic Age" by Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J. explores St. Paul's awareness of his apostolic preaching and the Lucan portraits of apostolic preachers and draws some comparisons. "Origen as Homilist" by Joseph T. Lienhard, S.J. is one of the best essays. Origen is the first Christian biblical scholar and homilist, and his homilies "give us a clear and fascinating picture of biblical preaching in the third century" (36). He set the pace and style of preaching as being liturgical ("it belonged in the order of Christian worship"), exegetical (it explained a text), and prophetic ("it demonstrated the significance of the text for the hearers") (37). Lienhard examines each of these elements as well as Origen's personal preaching style, and draws some striking comparisons to contemporary preaching.

Agnes Cunningham, S.S.C.M., investigates "Women and Preaching in the Patristic Age" by asking three questions: "What evidence exists to indicate that women were recognized as full members of the community in the patristic era?" "What signs of attention to the concerns and interests of women do we find in the preaching of the early church fathers?" "How are we to interpret what the fathers say to and about women in a mode of preaching that seems discriminatory and chauvinistic today?"

Charles Kannengiesser, S.J., takes a look at "The Homiletic Festal Letters of Athanasius", bishop of Alexandria 328-373. These were originally homilies which he turned into annual letters to his congregations to inform them of the dates of Lent, Easter, and Pentecost. The letter for Easter, 367, contains the oldest list of Old and New Testament writings. "The Orations of Gregory of Nazianzus: A Study in Rhetoric and Personality" by Gerard H. Ettliger, S.J., reveals a preacher schooled as a classical rhetorician yet "always astutely aware of his own humanity and limitations" in a position (bishop) he had neither desired nor sought (102). While always orthodox in doctrine, he is sensitively aware of double-standards in marriage, divorce, and sexuality.

The famous John Chrysostom's *Homilies on the Statues* are examined by David G. Hunter in "Preaching and Propaganda in Fourth Century Antioch". These 21 homilies were composed during Lent, 387, on the occasion of a popular uprising upon the imposition of an imperial tax. They argue "that Christianity, and not pagan culture, forms people in the virtues most necessary for public life" overagainst Chrysostom's pagan teacher, Libanius, who composed his own orations on these events. Here is a fine glimpse of pagan and Christian locked in struggle on the level of culture and ethics.

In the first half of the fifth century barbarian invasions terrified and baffled Roman Christians. Robert B. Eno, S.S., probes "Christian Reaction to the Barbarian Invasions and the Sermons of Quodvultdeus". A contemporary of Augustine who became bishop of Carthage in about 437, Quodvultdeus preached during the Vandal siege but was exiled in 439 when Carthage fell. He followed the traditional (and Augustinian) theme that the barbarians were the punishment of sins. Augustine is represented in a detailed and heavy essay examining his sacramental realism: "The Eucharistic Gift: Augustine of Hippo's Tractate 27 on John 6:60-72" by Edward J. Kilmartin, S.J. In the same century another great preacher appears, Leo, the 43rd Bishop of Rome. "The Sermons of Leo the Great: Content and Style" by Francis X. Murphy, C.S.S.R., presents him as a devoted preacher whose use of clear-cut yet rhythmic Latin helps explain his lament over the loss of Latin in the church.

The last essay by Joseph F. Kelly is a delight: "The Bible in Early Medieval Ireland". Ireland was never part of the Roman Empire and retained its oral culture. The written revelation of Christianity brought a whole new value system to Ireland: this new god communicated in *writing*! As a consequence the Irish developed a deep veneration for the Bible which consequently influenced every aspect of Irish Christianity, and made of them prolific interpreters.

This is a worthy book. A fine introduction to major church "fathers", it allows one to compare them, e.g., the ethereal and dense Athanasius and the refreshing Gregory of Nazianzus who is not afraid to reveal himself—even his angers and hurts. The homilies themselves provide glimpses into the times and the opportunity to observe Christianity engaged in apologetic, polemical, and definitive struggles. Perhaps most of all, we see here the roots of our own preaching and preaching traditions, and revel in the great company of the divine Word.

Eduard R. Riegert
Waterloo Lutheran Seminary

Imagination of the Heart: New Understandings in Preaching

Paul Scott Wilson
Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988
265 pp. \$20.25

There are any number of books in print that tell you to be more creative homiletically. This is the first one that actually attempts to teach you how! Paul Wilson, Associate Professor of homiletics at Toronto's Emmanuel College, a seminary of the United Church of Canada, is also a novelist, a fact which brings an added dimension to his writing.

His book has a twofold purpose: "to develop a method for biblical preaching that incorporates recent learnings from a variety of disciplines including homiletics", and "to help preachers who share my ongoing struggle to spread the wings of imagination when exploring the Bible" (12). An additional purpose given is "to develop some guidelines for preaching that will assist those exploring current homiletical developments" (25).

Wilson acknowledges his indebtedness to David Tracy, Gerhard Ebeling, George and David Buttrick, John Dominic Crossan, Sallie McFague, and a number of other lesser modern scholars. In pragmatic terms, Wilson promises that his method "can help reduce the time needed to prepare for preaching, improve the quality of preaching, and can easily be adapted by those doing simpler forms of preaching" (18). What is the method and imaginative force behind these amazing claims?

Wilson explains the key to his title in this way: imagination is "the bringing together of two ideas that might not otherwise be connected, and developing the creative energy they create" (32). This, he claims, is his unique contribution. Imagination, then, has to do with the insight generated between polarities in language, experience, and thought. And the spark of imagination occurs when ideas that are "poles apart" and entirely distinct, "spark" to create a new connection. Like our successful personal