

Joel Green & Michael Pasquarello III (ed), *Narrative Reading, Narrative Preaching* (Baker, 2003)

This is not a book for beginners!

The authors use the word "narrative" to refer to a specific biblical genre but as the distinguishing mark of the Bible from Genesis-to-Revelation, the story which provides the Bible with its coherence and theological unity. It is their contention that every biblical genre requires a "narrative reading" and a "narrative preaching"

The book selects three New Testament genre: Gospel/Acts, Letters, Apocalypse. Each genre receives an article from a biblical scholar, then one by a preacher, where both examine how their genre looks from the perspective of this grand-er narrative before going on to suggest ways to preach with this perspective in mind. They each use the same text as their case study (Acts 2: 42-47; 2 Corinthians 5; Revelation 4 & 5) with the preacher going on to provide the manuscript of a sermon on the passage.

The opening and closing book-end chapters by the editors are helpful. However the highlight of the book is the treatment of the Apocalypse. Stanley Saunders makes a case for Revelation as a "narrative of resistance" . marked by worship and word . where there is created "an imaginative space for discourse and social practice that pose a sharp alternative to "empire"(118). I read the book in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and China where the "empire" is obvious and in-your-face. I wanted to gather preachers together and say "have a go at Revelation and do it like this and see what happens!" Then when I think of the worldview conglomerate of economism-pluralism-narcissism at work in NZ and I wonder if there are empires in our midst as well that need to be met with a "narrative of resistance" Then Charles Campbell is the "preacher" who provides the second chapter. I am a bit of a fan because he is the one who exposed some of the flaws in the inductive preaching movement for me . the way wanting to preach like Jesus easily trumps preaching Jesus full-stop (see Campbell, *Preaching Jesus* (Eerdmans, 1997) . a brilliant book). So if you have a bit of theological education and a bit of experience and want to give Revelation a crack . these are helpful pages.

"Gospel/Acts" is also done well . but "Letters", is a bit of a disappointment, only partially redeemed by having William Willimon in the "preacher" role!

It seems to me that the outcomes of the book are similar to those speaking from within the biblical theology movement. Don't dare preach a part of the Bible without thinking about the whole of the Bible! No exegetical method or homiletical technique can ever substitute "for the cultivation of an imagination shaped by the biblical story"(54). They are critical of an approach which views the preacher as some pioneer venturing into the old world of the text in order to "subdue it, bring back the meaning, now transformed, domesticated for his world and the world of his congregation"(20). No! Take your people to live in the Genesis-Revelation narrative so that it can become "the alternative framework within which to construe their lives"(17).

I appreciated the critique of that idolatry of our time: relevance. They warn of dislocating a part of the biblical story and "accommodating it into secular visions of reality"(54) in that misguided quest to make the Bible relevant. It is *not* about transforming it to fit into our world . but allowing us to be transformed so that we can fit into its world. So much of the impulse today flows the wrong way and we miss the opportunity to be "re-made"(56).

Paul Windsor