

REVIEWS

Jeffrey D. Arthurs. *Preaching with Variety: How to Re-create the Dynamics of Biblical Genres*. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007. 238 pp. \$15.99 (paper).
Reviewed by Keith Essex, Assistant Professor of Bible Exposition.

“I believe that a sermon’s *content* should explain and apply the Word of God as it is found in a biblical text, and a sermon’s *form* should unleash the impact of that text. The second part of that declaration is the special province of this book” (13). So begins Jeffrey Arthurs, associate professor of preaching and communication at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in the sixth and latest volume of Kregel’s *Preaching With* series. One of the earlier books in this series is *Preaching with Passion* by Alex Montoya from TMS. In the present work, Arthurs describes six biblical genres and suggests how they can guide contemporary expositors in developing variety in their preaching.

The author creatively borrows from Martin Luther with an introduction that states 9.5 theses which clarify the presuppositions of this book (13-20). In essence, variety in preaching is important because Jesus and other biblical preachers used various forms, and both listeners and preachers could use some variety too. However, while variety is *necessary*, it is not *sufficient*; a sermon must herald God’s Word, flow from a clean heart, and have as its purpose the glory of God. When these characteristics are present, the preacher has the freedom to choose from a variety of sermon forms to communicate his message. Arthurs explains the most important thesis for his book: “The defining essence of an expository sermon lies primarily in its content, not in its form” (16). That principle is foundational for the author’s argument and his advice to preachers though the rest of the volume. He even suggests to preachers that “[w]e must patiently help people distinguish between biblical doctrine and communicative procedure” (17), a task made easier because “most North Americans in the twenty-first century have been socialized to expect variety and multiple perspectives” (17).

Nine chapters form the heart of the book. Chapters 1 and 2 defend Arthurs’ theory that variety in preaching is biblical and it can enhance receptivity. The first chapter declares that God is “the great communicator” who used a variety of literary forms in His special revelation, the Bible, because He is both an artist and a persuader.

This is the first and basic reason we should preach with variety (21-28).

The second chapter gives the other reason for variety in preaching: the need to adapt our sermons to the way contemporary hearers listen. The preacher needs to learn how to “speak Bantu to channel surfers” (29-37). The author concludes, “Why preach with variety? Not because we’re trying to exalt self, but because we want to exalt God; not because we call the shots, but because God sets the pattern as the Great Communicator; not because we want to manipulate listeners, but because they speak Bantu” (37).

Chapters 3 to 9 are devoted to a discussion of six biblical genres [psalms, narratives, parables, proverbs, epistles, and apocalyptic] (38-199). Each genre is allotted one chapter, except narrative, which has two. The author first describes the genre. He then suggests ways the genre can be preached. He concludes with a checklist to aid the preacher in both his exegesis and exposition of the genre under consideration. Arthurs does give this caveat: “I do not assert that we must slavishly and minutely copy the exact genre of the text. . . . The key to genre sensitive preaching is to replicate the impact of the text, not its exact techniques, although technique is the best place to start” (27-28). The author concludes with a one-page epilogue that summarizes the essence of the book (201). Endnotes (203-20) and a bibliography (221-38) complete the volume.

Preaching with Variety is a stimulating read for the biblical expositor. Its strength is in its descriptions of the biblical genres discussed and its suggestions of the various ways the preacher can enhance his variety. The different biblical genres remind expositors of the necessity of such elements as evocative language, the lean story, lead-in statements, summary statements, pithy statements, end stress, rhetorical questions. Arthurs cautions the preacher not to go too far or too fast in reduplicating the exact biblical genre in a sermon, although he gives only broad suggestions and not specific directions on how to accomplish this. However, he does make it clear that the goal is always to explain the content of the text to the listener, not to show the creative skill of the preacher.

William P. Brown. *Ecclesiastes*. Interpretation. Louisville, Ky.: John Knox, 2000. xiii + 143 pp. \$21.95 (cloth). Reviewed by William D. Barrick, Professor of Old Testament.

William P. Brown is professor of Old Testament at Union Theological Seminary/PSCE in Virginia. As the subtitle for the series (A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching) indicates, the Interpretation commentaries seek to present a contemporary exposition integrating history and theology. Each commentary is based upon the RSV or (more recently) the NRSV.

The volume is a very readable exposition throughout, in which the author freely expresses his own thinking and feeling. In his preface he wonders whether any traditional commentary on Ecclesiastes could be considered a legitimate undertaking



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