

Classic Books on Preaching

An Annotated Bibliography

John W. Carlton

*Professor of Preaching, Southeastern
Baptist Theological Seminary*

The compilation of an annotated bibliography of twenty-five of the “classic” books in preaching is a presumptuous venture. The appended list is assembled with the true meaning of “classic” in mind—“of first rank or authority, standard, leading.” Most of the works listed are lectures given or books written prior to 1950. The Lyman Beecher Lectures in Preaching in America and the Warrack series in Scotland are liberally represented.

Here is a fascinating gallery of great personalities, most of them deceased, whose voices carry clearly across the years. They represent a rich variety of human nature and experience. They confer a halo of majesty and romance around the preacher’s high calling. They are all craftsmen of sermonic artistry.

These lectures and books reflect the tensions, turmoils, and fundamental social changes of the years and also reveal transformations of sermonic form from traditional oratory to direct, conversational speech. Readers of these volumes will also be impressed with a certain constancy—recurrent themes and affirmations that are a moving demonstration of “Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever.” These books represent a great homiletical heritage, and their authors are able mentors for us today. Henry Ward Beecher said in 1872: “True preaching is yet to come.” We shall see!

Barth, Karl. *The Preaching of the Gospel*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963.

In this small volume the eminent theologian devotes himself to the area of practical theology in a rich treatment of preaching in relation to revelation, the church, doctrine, Scripture, and to the congregation. The principles enunciated are illustrated in actual examples.

Black, James. *The Mystery of Preaching*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978.

These lectures, delivered originally in 1924 to the United Free Church Colleges in Scotland and later as the Sprunt Lectures at Union Theological Seminary, Richmond, Virginia, retain the liveliness and

free style that marked their delivery. They abound in a true sense of the “mystery” of preaching; yet they attend to matters of preparation and delivery with rare wisdom and insight. An element of real strength is the setting of the sermon within the context of worship.

Broadus, John A. *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*. New York: Harper and Row (Fourth Edition), 1979.

This book is the best known and the most widely used treatise on homiletics written by an American. It has passed through numerous editions and has been recently revised by Vernon L. Stanfield. The book is marked by urbanity, understanding, and sympathy, and it covers all aspects of the sermon building task, including selection of texts, subjects, and titles, the formal and functional elements of the sermon, style, imagination, and delivery. Dr. Broadus has made use of tested principles and procedures and of classical works that bear upon the act of preaching.

Brooks, Phillips. *Lectures on Preaching*. New York: E. P. Dutton Company, 1877.

These lectures, delivered in the Lyman Beecher series when Brooks was forty-two, remain, in nobility of utterance and in comprehension of preaching, an olympian achievement. They are aglow with gratitude and enthusiasm for the preacher’s vocation. The lectures reveal wide reading, wit, wisdom, and a profound grasp of the dynamics of preaching. The chapter on the congregation is a masterful exposition of the meaning of “union” of pastor and congregation.

Brown, Charles R. *The Art of Preaching*. New York: Macmillan and Company, 1949.

Prompted by the fact that for thirty years his predecessors in the Lyman Beecher series had not dealt directly with the technique of preaching, Dean Charles R. Brown of Yale devoted his energies to the offering of practical counsel in the crafting of sermons. With a style that is direct and lucid he gives expansive treatment in these lectures to both theory and practice in the homiletical art. Few lectures on preaching have spoken so directly to their hearers in substantive content and effective communication.

Browne, R. E. C. *The Ministry of the Word*. London: SCM Press, 1958.

Canon Browne, for many years Rector of St. Chrysostom in Manchester, England, has written in this tightly integrated book a remarkable treatise on preaching. The author savours poetry and drama and here leaves us with the thought that the preacher, like the biblical writers, is an instrumental agent using imagination and intelligence in obedience to divine promptings. This book is about the possibility of revelation itself, its authority, appropriation, and communication. The book imparts to the reader a new sense of the mystery and splendor of the gospel.

Bushnell, Horace. *Building Eras in Religion*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1881.

This distinguished theological pioneer of the last century, whose entire professional career was devoted to preaching as minister of North Church, Hartford, Connecticut, produced several brilliant essays on preaching that are contained in this volume. Bushnell, with his emphasis upon moral intuition and religious feeling, saw the gospel as “a gift to the imagination.” The essays on “Pulpit Talent” and “Training for the Pulpit Manward” are timeless contributions to the preaching enterprise.

Buttrick, George A. *Jesus Came Preaching*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1931.

In literary workmanship alone this volume is a masterful expression of the author's exegetical and expository gifts, together with his vast knowledge of books, poetry, pictures, and music. Buttrick well understood the spiritual malaise and pulse of his time. He views the collective mind of his day as “worthy, in revolt, scientific, and sceptical.” He offers a superb analysis of all that is involved in preaching Christ to such a mind.

Calvin, John. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. IV, 3. Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Christian Education, n.d.

John Calvin had a high sense of the dignity of the call to the Christian ministry. This section of the *Institutes* deals perceptively with the nature and meaning of the minister's call.

Cleland, James T. *Preaching to be Understood*. New York: Abingdon Press, 1965.

The late Dean of the Chapel at Duke University expounds in this volume his theory of “bifocal” preaching and sets forth approaches by which the reader can be faithful both to the Word of God and to the human situation. An apt communicator in handling “the true and lively word,” Dr. Cleland discusses the relationship between sound biblical exposition, significant content, and effective form.

Coffin, Henry Sloane. *Communion through Preaching*. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1952.

The sub-title of these lectures, “The Monstrance of the Gospel,” will reveal the author’s conviction that “both Word and sacraments mediate God’s communion with His responsive people.” Dr. Coffin, former minister of the Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church in New York and later President of Union Theological Seminary, pleads in these lectures for “sacramental” preaching that “will render human speech a means of grace.” He gives full attention to “the craftsmanship of the monstrance,” likening both art and sermon construction to “a struggle with formlessness.” There are pertinent gems of quoted material.

Coggan, Donald. *Stewards of Grace*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1958.

Donald Coggan, Archbishop of Canterbury, begins this slender volume with Bernard Manning’s definition of preaching as “a manifestation of the Incarnate Word, from the written Word, by the spoken word.” From a chapter on “The Artist at Work” Coggan moves to a consideration of the preacher as “trustee,” as “interpreter,” and as “a man of God.” This book gives great weight to the preacher’s responsibility, in Pauline terms, to “guard the deposit” as a steward of the “many-colored variegated wisdom of God.”

Cowan, Arthur A. *The Primacy of Preaching Today*. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1955.

These lectures in the Warrack series are a timeless presentation of the need for expository preaching from the Old and New Testament. The author has an incisive understanding of the prophetic spirit and of the biblical message that “delivers us from the tyrannizing impressions of the moment.” He gives excellent counsel on preaching the Christian

year in a fashion that will “come alive, glow, pulsate.”

Farmer, H. H. *The Servant of the Word*. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1942.

This series of lectures by the distinguished British theologian and preacher is grounded in the supposition that effective preaching is the mutual enterprise of minister and people, that preaching is effective only in the sense that it does God’s work and participates in human situations and needs. The spoken word is that medium through which God’s great activity of redemption focuses itself in challenge and succour on the persons who hear the preacher’s words. The chapter on “The Need for Concreteness” should be required reading.

Fenelon, Francois. *Dialogues on Eloquence*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951.

This is an outstanding seventeenth century work that is not simply a treatise on preaching. The work goes beyond the sermon to survey the entire subject of speaking and writing. The author protests against the ornamental discourses of his time and stresses rhetoric as a social instrument. He has a remarkable understanding of the role of reason, imagination, and feeling in the enterprise of communication.

Forsyth, P. T. *Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1907.

These Lyman Beecher lectures by a great theologian of the Free Church remain a classic treatment of the nature and function of preaching. The lectures are set within a sound doctrine of the Church and of the sacraments. Forsyth regarded preaching as a sacramental function. He anticipated many of the results of later scholarship and appealed for a “positive and modernized theology.” He viewed the gospel as dynamic and maintained that church and sacraments must be understood in the realm of *action*.

Gossip, Arthur John. *In Christ’s Stead*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1925.

These lectures by the eminent Scots minister and Professor of Practical Theology at the University of Glasgow illustrate Samuel Johnson’s dictum that “men more frequently require to be reminded than informed.” This is a seasoned exposition from a fertile mind of

the object and “bases” of preaching. The lectures are marked by felicity of expression, common-sense wisdom, vivid illustrations, and personal warmth.

Jefferson, Charles E. *The Preacher as Prophet*. New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1905.

Every minister should know Jefferson, the great preacher of Broadway Tabernacle in New York City, noted for his short, terse sentences, chaste style, and lucid insight. These lectures, given at the turn of the century, make a plea for the preaching of “dogma,” by which Jefferson means “doctrine clearly stated and ecclesiastically sanctioned.” He makes much of the maturation process in preaching, for “a sermon is a growth rather than a manufactured product.”

Jowett, John Henry. *The Preacher: His Life and Work*. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1912.

This masterful series of lectures, couched in Jowett’s “king’s English” and vibrant with his conviction, reveals the vision, methods, and themes of a great English preacher. There is a timeless depth and quality here that will replenish the mind and spirit of any reader.

Luccock, Halford E. *Communicating the Gospel*. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1954.

The inimitable Luccock style, with vivid imagination and humor, marks this volume by the late Professor of Homiletics at Yale Divinity School. The author deals with issues posed by the new theologies, and with the integral relationship between counseling and preaching. He gives helpful guidance in the study and use of the Bible as a preaching sourcebook and on technical aspects of sermon construction. The lectures shine with pungent wit, incisive thought, and inspired craftsmanship.

Macgregor, W. M. *The Making of a Preacher*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1946.

This dour Scot, whose face was once described by students at Trinity College, Glasgow (where he was Principal), as a “hatchet dipped in vinegar,” has produced in very brief compass of less than one hundred pages, five magnificent lectures on “the making of a preacher.” Here is pure English—clean, chaste, freshly minted. In these Warrack

Lectures Macgregor focuses deliberately, not upon matters of technique, but upon “a long experience of matters more intimate and personal.” The result for the reader is a remarkable concentration of skill, aptness, perception, and beauty of expression.

Oman, John. *Concerning the Ministry*. London: SCM Press, 1936.

This is a many-faceted treatment of the preaching task in its broader context of nourishing pastoral growth. The author, Principal of Westminster College, Cambridge, deals with matters of style, writing, illustrations, and reading, together with the reconciling and prophetic roles of the minister. The lectures are wide in scope and abound in a kind of terse, epigrammatic wisdom.

Scherer, Paul. *For We Have This Treasure*. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1944.

In these lectures the long time minister of the Lutheran Church of the Holy Trinity in New York City has produced a monumental work in which there is no deviation from loftiness of thought, artistic arrangement of material, and a sense of preaching as “the stewardship of God’s varied grace.” Pages are enlivened by striking rephrasings of familiar biblical texts. The early lectures attempt “an orientation in this defeated and bewildered world” and then assess “the weapons of our spiritual warfare.” Dr. Scherer gives sustained attention to the content and nature of the Christian gospel and then, without letdown, considers sources of ideas, the gathering of material, organization, style, and clarity.

Spurgeon, Charles H. *Lectures to My Students*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977.

Spurgeon, long regarded as a master of his craft, gave three series of lectures on the ministry. These lively presentations are often colloquial, anecdotal, humorous, and full of personal reminiscences. The lectures deal with the inner life, the call to the ministry, and all the practicalities of choosing texts, preparing and delivering sermons, and dealing with problems of spiritual depression. Readers will be glad that Spurgeon resolved, through publication, “to keep my counsels alive.”

Stewart, James S. *Heralds of God*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1946.

These lectures are tintured throughout by the assumption that “preaching exists, not for the propagating of views, opinions, and ideals, but for the proclamation of the mighty acts of God.” The five chapters in the book are superb expositions of “the world, the theme, and the technique” of the preacher, together with a treatment of the minister’s study and of his inner life. Lecturer and preacher often merge as Stewart’s cascading thoughts, insights, and emotions are fused in a profound treatment of the preaching task.

(Source: “Faith and Mission” *Journal of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary*, Fall, 1985)