

Lemaire's hypothesis of the canonization process of the schools' *text-books* remains itself questionable: Did the biblical texts become normative—hence canonical—as a result of their didactic function? Or, on the contrary, did they receive their didactic function because of their normative value?

In the final analysis, there is indeed cause to fear that the author's hypothesis, consciously referred to all along in his inquiry (cf. p. 84), has unduly affected and ultimately oriented his conclusions and interpretations so as to give birth to a highly speculative reconstruction of a history of the biblical texts. This history still remains, after all, without (if not beyond) control.

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Meuser, Fred W. *Luther the Preacher*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1983. 94 pages. Paperback, \$4.50.

It would have been strange indeed if the 500th anniversary of the birth of Martin Luther (the year 1983) had gone unnoticed by the Protestant churches. It was not so strange, given today's frantic ecumenical spirit, that a Roman Pope would join in celebrating that anniversary in a Lutheran church. But what is really strange is that centuries of Luther research have not yet produced significant literature on Luther as a preacher. To the bridging of this vast literary chasm, Meuser makes a modest, albeit good and happy, contribution.

This book is divided into three chapters, in which are discussed Luther's passion for preaching, his style of preaching, and his gift for preaching. The presentation is a marvelous stimulant to thinking about that always-dynamic and sometimes-bombastic pulpiteer of Wittenberg.

Whatever else Luther was, he was first and foremost a preacher. His appointment by Staupitz to preach to the monks of the Augustinian cloister at Wittenberg, a task which at first terrified him, is what made him a theologian. That is the way it ought to be. One can be a good theologian and a bad preacher (of which there are many), but one can never be a good preacher if he or she is a bad theologian. It was the challenge and responsibility of the pulpit that drove Luther to the theologian's desk. He discovered early what every preacher and theologian must discover: that the best theology does not exist for itself, but is in the service of the pulpit.

One of Luther's major contributions was the deep conviction that God is present in the Word, in the preached Word. The sermon is the Word of God when the preacher preaches what the Bible says. In fact,

Christ himself speaks in it. His presence is tied to the message, and not to the messenger. Was such a view radical? Only to unbelief. It was certainly biblical, for Jesus said to his disciples: "He who hears you hears me" (Luke 10:16), and Paul believed that the word he preached was the Word of God (1 Thess 2:13). By such preaching, Christ battles the devil until the end; thus, preaching was always understood eschatologically by Luther. The sermon is the battleground on which Christ and Satan contend for the souls of men and women.

Because preaching is this, it is dangerous for both preacher and hearer. The preacher must be certain that he preaches the Word, what the Bible says; and hearers must listen with reverence and attention. Because preaching is this, and is set in the context of corporate worship, it was Luther's highest offering of praise to God. Thus, true Christian preaching was not for the lazy, slothful pastor, who sleeps and snores his way through ministry without reading, studying, and praying over the Scriptures. As Meuser says: "Not only was his [Luther's] conscience captive to the written Word of God, so was his preaching" (p. 41).

And what was the purpose, the goal, of preaching for Luther? Certainly not to impress the congregation with his homiletical ability. Certainly not to achieve popularity, which to him was "the preacher's deathtrap." But rather, it was to "help hearers understand the *text*, not just a religious truth. Its goal is that God may speak a gracious word through a text so that the people may be given faith or be strengthened in faith by the Holy Spirit. Its method is to take a given segment of Scripture, find the key thought within it, and make that unmistakably clear. The text is to control the sermon" (p. 47).

The author has done the whole of Christianity a service by calling attention to Luther as a preacher. Perhaps if the pulpits of today's churches were filled with more Luthers, the people of today's churches would be filled with more of Luther's faith.

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Schein, Bruce E. *Following the Way: The Setting of John's Gospel*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg Publishing House, 1980. 223 pp. \$12.50.

The author's Preface reveals that the purpose of this volume is "to describe the setting [of John's Gospel] as if one is present in first-century Palestine" (p. 8). Having lived in Jerusalem for fifteen years—"walking" the areas mentioned in the Gospel many times—affords Schein the unique opportunity of writing as one who is sharing his own experiences. This