

## Preface

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Anybody who lives in the church, who practices ministry, and who studies Scripture must inevitably think about preaching and engage with questions about the preaching enterprise. So it is with me. I have been thinking about preaching since I first sat and listened to my father-preacher, my first instructor on the subject. In seminary I received my lowest grades in preaching classes, not being reckoned overly competent at practical ministerial tasks. Through seminary my classmates of fifty years ago and I were taught, in great trepidation on our part, about the wonder of preaching by Frederick Schroeder and Ernest Nolte. After that I was introduced to Gerhard von Rad's leading thesis on the book of Deuteronomy as early "preaching" in ancient Israel, the subject of my doctoral dissertation. The rest unfolded for me in the daring world of Karl Barth.

Preaching is such an odd, recurring, face-to-face transaction that carries with it impossible responsibilities for the preacher. And if we were more attentive to the dialogic quality of the transaction, we would recognize that there are commensurate burdens for the listening congregation. It is odd and undoubtedly true that there is almost no consensus among us about the nature of preaching, so that every preacher exercises freedom, often with quite idiosyncratic notions of preaching. What is clear is that if there is news from out beyond us, it must be *uttered aloud* and it must be *heard face-to-face*. No adequate substitute or equivalent for face-to-face utterance is available to us (see Rom 10:14-17). It is peculiarly uttered face-to-faceness that carries with it something from beyond us. This inexplicable assurance from God is transmitted by the preacher, who yields to the free gift of the gospel. Such preaching, of course, eschews both the therapeutic charm of social "chaplains" and the urgent coerciveness of conservatives or liberals.

This collection of essays has grown over time, as my thinking has developed and matured. I have tried to pay attention to recent work in Old

Testament studies and hermeneutics, and I have been engaged in what I see as the deepening crisis of the church in U.S. society as we drift toward empire. Clearly, the preacher must be as well schooled as possible in the central disciplines that concern our critical context for preaching. In the end, however, the biblical text is likely to be more pertinent and interesting and compelling than anything else we may offer.

I am glad for the company of preachers with whom I work and from whom I continue to learn. I am grateful to Neil Elliott and his crew at Fortress Press for their patience with the process of getting the collection together. I am grateful, yet one more time, to Patrick Miller for his initial counsel about the volume. I am appreciative of Will Willimon for his generous words of introduction, as I count him a comrade in these matters. And my thanks go to Tia Foley who, again, has worked my jottings into some coherence for this volume.

My own work in exegesis and preaching, like that of every preacher, is surrounded by a great cloud of sustaining witnesses. Of long-term importance to me have been my classmates at Eden Theological Seminary, Class of '58. I am glad to remember and salute them—some retired like my well-beloved brother Ed, some still active in preaching, and some deceased, notably the dearly remembered Ray Buck. To all of them I express glad thanks and congratulations for fifty years of preaching.