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Feature: Annual Survey of Bibles and Bible Reference for Preachers

Scripture is to preaching as wood is to a carpenter. It is the stuff we are all about; it is the material we work with, we craft, and we present to others. The analogy does break down, of course. While the carpenter cuts and shapes the wood, it is more often the Word which cuts and shapes us.

The biblical Word is at the heart of the preached word. Most of our study, then, will inherently focus on the Bible. We read it again and again, usually in different translations; we ponder the meaning of its words and phrases; we look to the counsel of others for new insights into its interpretation and application. Preachers are people of the Word.

Thus, there is a natural interest in resources which will help us better understand and proclaim the Bible. That is why Preaching offers a brief survey each year of some of the publications of the past year which will be of interest to preachers.

Bibles

Of translations, there is no end. Or at least so it seems.

Unlike 1995, 1996 has produced no major new translation of general interest to preachers. Last year's hot topic (at least for a couple of weeks) was the Inclusive Version of the New Testament and Psalms, published by Oxford University Press and a favorite of radio talk shows. No such controversy this year.

What 1996 has seen is the repackaging of existing translations. For example, Thomas Nelson Publishers release *The Promise*, a new package for the Contemporary English Version previously released by the American Bible Society. The CEV is written at a 5.4 grade level, and is a successor to the Society's previous successful paraphrase, *Today's English Version* (often sold as *Good News for Modern Man*).

While *The Promise* is not likely to be a major study resource for most preachers, it may be valuable for churches in leading youth and adult Bible study groups and for evangelism.

Another example of such repackaging is the *True Love Waits Bible*, a softcover New International Version produced for young people by Broadman & Holman. The title alludes to the successful program which encourages young people to commit themselves to sexual abstinence until marriage. Several introductory articles and helps scattered throughout the text are written for teenagers. For example, right there between II Samuel 2 and II Samuel 4 is a colorful insert on "So You're Tired of Pizza and Movies?" and offering wholesome ideas for dates. How that particularly fits with the story of Joab murdering Abner (II Samuel 3:22-38) is a bit confusing, but I'm sure these colorful pages will prove winsome to any number of young people looking for something to think about besides their Sunday School lesson.

Broadman & Holman has also produced a series of pocket-size Bibles (KJV, NIV, and a Spanish-language edition) which could prove quite popular with preachers. Light, easy to read, and convenient to slip into a coat or pants pocket -- it may not represent a new translation, but there's also something to be said for a convenient format.

Commentaries

As in most years, commentaries compose the majority of recently-published biblical resources for preachers.

One of the most outstanding series available is the Word Biblical Commentary. A recent volume is on Jeremiah 26-52, written by Gerald L. Keown, Pamela J. Scalise, and Thomas G. Smothers. All three are Old Testament professors -- Keown at Gardner-Webb Divinity School, Scalise at Fuller Seminary, and Smothers at Southern Baptist Seminary.

One of the commentary sets I turn to frequently in my own study is the New American Commentary, published by Broadman & Holman. Two new volumes were released this year: Genesis 1-11:26 by Kenneth A. Matthews, and John 1-11 by Gerald L. Borchert. Matthews teaches at Beeson Divinity School, Borchert at Southern Baptist Seminary. Both are excellent expositions and exegetical treatments by fine scholars.

An interesting smaller volume is The Gospels, volume 6 in the Mercer Commentary on the Bible (Mercer University Press). Apparently designed primarily for classroom use, it contains four brief commentaries on the canonical gospels, plus several introductory articles taken from the larger Mercer Dictionary of the Bible. It would be nice if the publisher included some biographical information on the authors of the various commentaries and articles; those names I recognized are primarily Baptist college and seminary professors.

Another fine resource for preachers is the Preaching the Word series of volumes by R. Kent Hughes, pastor of College Church in Wheaton, IL (published by Crossway Books). Hughes' volume on Romans has just been published, and will be a worthy aid to preachers approaching this rich theological text for preaching.

InterVarsity Press has published a small volume which will make for interesting reading for biblical preachers who are also students of contemporary culture. Edited by Elmer Dyck, *The Act of Bible Reading: A Multi-Disciplinary Approach to Biblical Interpretation* includes articles by Gordon Fee, J.I. Packer, Eugene Peterson and others on the Regent College faculty. Students of hermeneutics will particularly enjoy this helpful book.

Software

More and more Bible study is being done on the personal computer; that's why Preaching provides a survey of such products each year in our September-October issue. A few interesting items just missed the deadline for this year's survey, so allow me to mention them here.

Baker Books has created a software line -- Baker Bytes -- and has just released several interesting and worthwhile works on CD-ROM: *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible*; *Topical Analysis of the Bible*; *Baker Illustration Library*, volume 1; and *Hymn and Scripture Selection Guide*. Each individual work is compatible with the Logos 2.0 Bible study software.

Word Media has just released an interactive Bible game which you may find useful in leading a class or just playing with the family. *A Disciple's Diary* contains two essential features: *The Quest* is a treasure hunt game which takes players across ancient Israel; *Virtual Archives* is a collection of multimedia resources about the life of Jesus, including video clips, 3-D animation, and illustrated articles. A good addition to your church library!