God gives us true stories of Queens and princesses, of love affairs and drama, and that God promises to send a great Prince one day to meet us in person. My son loves the soldiers and the battles, the horses and chariots, and that God is stronger than anyone and anything and that this God loves him. I love the fact that God's Word is living and active and can cut through the busy lives of little children as well as big adults and can, at the same time, speak to all of us afresh.

Illustrations in children's Bible's run two risks, they are either so magnificent they eclipse the text completely and children's attentions are drawn away from the story and to the images, or they are so poorly done they put children off the story altogether. Jago, the illustrator, has got the balance right in this book, if my two children are anything to go by. They love the illustrations – but not too much. While Reformed folk will not like the fact that Jesus is pictured throughout the book, Baptists will have no problems with such symbolic representation. The colours are bright, the format is creative, and the length of stories keeps the attention of little minds, stimulating further discussion based upon what was read.

One drawback mars the work throughout and it is this – it is too short and too many parts of Scripture are left out. One simply hopes and prays that a second volume will appear in due course that takes us through the Psalms and Proverbs, for instance, and the other parts of God's Word that still need to speak to us today. If you have young children and want to hear God speak to you through his Word as a family, then this is a God-given resource. Enjoy!

Myk Habets

The Early Preaching of Karl Barth: Fourteen Sermons with Commentary by William H. Willimon. **Karl Barth and William H. Willimon. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009. (xvii + 171 pp.) [ISBN: 978-0-664-23367-9]**

The Early Preaching of Karl Barth is concerned with the practice of preaching and is directed to church based preachers. It is comprised of fourteen sermons selected from Barth's parish

ministry at Safenwil, which are accompanied by a commentary provided by William H. Willimon. The commentary assists the reader to make sense of the sometimes confusing expositions by highlighting the significance of the sermons against their historical context. Not only are the circumstances of the Great War and its aftermath noted, but the less known theological context is also described for the reader. This is helpful because it explains the factors which shaped Barth's theology in the earlier sermons in this collection – the influence of his liberal theological education is apparent, but wanes as Barth discovers the immanence of God in Scripture. These sermons are historically useful, as they allow us to observe Barth at a formative stage in his development as a theologian. They are also useful for shaping our own preaching, as Willimon candidly draws out the challenges that Barth's preaching presents to preachers at the beginning of the twenty-first century. This review shall pay closer attention to two sermons selected from this collection, Colossians 2.15 and Psalm 23.

An earlier sermon in the collection is on Colossians 2.15: 'Christ has led out the rulers and those with power and made a public example of them, triumphing over them' (April 8, 1917). With lucid language depicting the everyday cares and concerns of village life, Barth expounds the text as a word from God that casts these into insignificance, in the light of what God himself has done. Barth presents God's resurrection of Jesus as the crux of Easter, and his victory in the world over all that would make human existence meaningless, loveless, and purposeless. Countering any suggestions in the minds of his congregation that the case might be otherwise, he conjures up the thoughts of the forces which would prove to them to be the case. It is in this situation of human helplessness that Barth allows the force of Colossians 2.15 to speak to his church at Safenwil. The temptation to rest in religion without God is contradicted and dismissed, since human beings on their own are helpless in the face of the world's 'powers' that are arrayed against them. The remainder of this sermon exults over the triumph of God in Christ's crucifixion and resurrection – a sustained burst of rejoicing in the confidence of a new world of existence begun at this victorious moment. Significantly, Barth does not exhort his hearers to action. His chief concern from this text is that his

listeners join this triumph by being 'spectators' – they can be nothing more, since it is God who has acted and it is only his action that really matters. It is only in this light that they are invited to celebrate and to do good deeds.

Willimon helpfully draws attention to points of significance, especially with relation to the historical context of the sermon. Of note from this sermon's commentary is the attention paid to the emergence of the study of the human subconscious amongst European intellectuals at this time. Within this climate, where it may be expected that Barth would direct his listeners to search for subjective experiences of God as the means of connecting with him, he instead points them to the event of the resurrection as an objective triumph of God. When considering this point, together with the fact of the Great War in Europe, Willimon's commentary puts Barth's message (or, for Barth more appropriately, 'God's word') in stark contrast with the world in which Barth lived. Willimon highlights the note of triumph already explicit in the sermon for the reader of today.

Barth's sermon on the twenty-third Psalm, preached almost a year later on New Year's Day (January 1, 1919) illustrates something of the emerging creative genius of the young theologian. It also demonstrates Barth's theology of Scripture, as it sets the text up as a word from God that stands over and against humanity. Rather than simply assuming that humanity may consider that 'the Lord is my Shepherd', he finds a call to repentance.

Strangely, Barth does not even mention the text he is preaching from until about a quarter of the way through his sermon. However, he utilizes a theological point of view which drives the entire sermon, which Willimon points out means that this sermon maintains 'focus and tension throughout' the entire monologue (p. 107). The point of view which Barth works with is the antithesis which he sets up between the opening words of the psalm, 'The Lord is my Shepherd', and his Swiss congregation. The first quarter of the sermon is spent developing the point of reference which stands against the affirmation of the Psalm and where Barth locates humanity as represented by the Swiss nation: believing in the paths the world had taken which led the rest of Europe into war, paths

that the defeated nations were perhaps learning to abandon. Barth does not allow his hearers to identify themselves with the affirmation of the Psalm. Instead he places them, and himself, on the other side of the antithesis, and sets on the 'psalmist's' side an imaginary figure who can articulate what it means to have the Lord as one's Shepherd. This figure is given a large portion of the sermon to speak in, almost three full pages of the book, and his words occupy the centre of the sermon. The imaginary speaker faces the temptations and assaults of living in the world, even belonging to it, while at the same time assured that he is protected and will not be overcome. He recognises his finitude and yet sees hope beyond his existence to have confidence that his short life is not lived in vain. He is able to say 'I live in the dark and unknown future as one consoled, courageous, and full of hope' (p. 95).

In the twenty-third Psalm Barth finds the reason why Christ was born: so that it would be possible for us to make the same affirmation that the psalmist made. This sermon displays a creative use of Scripture which can and should remind preachers today that Scripture is a word from God to the world. Willimon's comment sums up an important lesson for preachers: 'Perhaps I am wrong in saying that we preachers don't have enough good ideas driving our sermons. It is perhaps more true to say that we lack a theological point of view that gives us anything much of interest to see in the biblical text and say in the sermon. Bad theology breeds homiletical boredom' (p. 109). Barth's 'exposition' of Psalm 23 is a refreshing exemplar for preaching Scripture as a word from God.

Karl Barth is not a straightforward theologian to understand. *The Early Preaching of Karl Barth* helpfully shows Barth as a young preacher and allows the reader to see his later theological themes developing. Willimon's commentary provides the vital context of the young Barth and allows him to be understood and appreciated as a product of his own time transcending the paradigm set by his predecessors. The immanence of God in Scripture for Barth is clear. These sermons, more than only being of interest for the historical theologian, also entail an impressive challenge for preachers to take up and recover in their own preaching.

Chris Northcott