

One New Book for the Preacher

David Neil Mosser

First United Methodist Church, Georgetown, Texas

KEEPING THE FAITH: ESSAYS TO MARK THE CENTENARY OF *LUX MUNDI*, ed., Geoffrey Wainwright. Fortress Press/Pickwick Publications, 1988. Cloth, \$34.95.

Lux Mundi, of course, means “light of the world.” A century ago eleven Oxford dons wrote a series of theological essays, as they put it, “to put the Catholic faith into its right relation to modern intellectual and moral problems” (p. xix). These were published and circulated under the Latin title *Lux Mundi* both in Great Britain and abroad. The current collection of essays, *Keeping the Faith*, celebrates the one hundred year anniversary of *Lux Mundi*. It attempts to engage the same agenda, though with less optimism than the late nineteenth century theologians mustered.

Framed by a preface and a bibliographical epilogue, *Keeping the Faith* is fourteen essays exploring theological aspects of the Christian faith. Most of these essays take their cue, and in many cases their titles, from the predecessor essays one hundred years ago. As one might suspect, however, many modern topics were added in such fields as anthropology, eschatology, and “the relations of the Christian faith to the natural sciences and the world religions” (p. xxiii). Topics common to the two sets of essays are set in chapters on faith, the church, the Holy Spirit, doctrine of God, and the problem of evil.

The essayists are from mainline North American and British churches. By way of warning to American readers, the writing reads formal and very “English.” The essayists have been significant participants in the ecumenical discourse taking place among the world’s churches since the Second World War’s conclusion. Among the denominations represented are Lutheran, Anglican, Episcopal, Catholic, Reformed, and Methodist. The essays reflect discussions rarely accessible unless one reads reports from World Council of Churches meetings and the like. This book gives insight to the vast ground covered between communions, as well as to theological issues around which work remains. This is the book’s greatest strength: making current ecumenical conversation accessible to general readership in a single volume.

Those having ecumenical familiarity and interest will benefit much from these essays. The essays rarely present striking new material, but do creditable work surveying central topics and issues. For those less familiar with the ecumenical exchange of faith ideas, these essays help orient one to the conversation, though in a more substantial way than most introductions.

The book’s greatest weakness is one only recently granted by a scholarly consensus. These essays are from a strictly white Western male point of view. For those readers seeking the liberationist’s or other alternative theological

perspectives, none will be found. From a critic's perspective, however, it is difficult to envision a twentieth century theology not taking into account evangelical, third world, or other points of view.

The question remains: is this "one new book for the preacher" or not? This is a difficult decision. On one side of the ledger, this set of essays is on the whole, well done. In fact, as an editor's collection, its quality is exceptional. The fourteen chapters cover an array of topics germane to any twentieth century theological discussion. For preachers who need an in-depth review of the orthodox theological landscape this book recommends itself.

Ultimately, on the other side of the ledger however, the price of this book is prohibitive—at least for many local church pastors. For even in a time of expensive books, \$34.95 is still quite an investment for a single book purchase. Many pastors, conscious of stewardship, might be better served by buying several other good books for the price of this one. At any rate, this is the kind of purchase libraries might want to make. For despite its cost, it is a good overview of current theological discussions to which all of us can and should be privy. For those utility minded parsons this book provides a good summary of current theology—and all within one cover!