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Reviewer: Rev J C van der Merwe (Kemptonpark)

Robert Farrar Capon is an Episcopal priest and the author of many popular books such as *The mystery of Christ*, *The romance of the Word*, *The astonished heart*, *The parables of the kingdom*, *The parables of grace*, and *The parables of judgment*. However, his books are not just for Episcopalians but for both clergy and lay persons who live in other households as well. He has in mind not only the few star preachers who have a consuming interest in preparing sermons but also the working stiff (sometimes eleventh-hour workers, and sometimes literally stiff) who must stand in the pulpit every Sunday and try to say something useful in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

In *The foolishness of preaching*, he addresses a couple of questions most frequently asked by preachers 'in whatever Church they find themselves, such as: what is the cornerstone of good preaching? How should preachers go about to prepare themselves to preach effectively and true to the meaning of the Holy Spirit?' One aspect that makes the book exceptionally valuable is that Capon also addresses the congregants and explains to them what they can expect from their preachers. The fact that he tackles these questions in a fresh and honest manner makes reading the book not only a joyful but also a very good learning experience for both the clergy and the laity. I am sure that the book will give the laity a better idea of what's supposed to be involved in the preparations of sermons.

The book has two parts. In part one Capon addresses 'The bedrock of preaching', and in part two 'The practice of preaching.'

In Part One a number of issues are discussed. Chapter 2 deals with how essential it is to have a passion for the Passion. One thing is clear: nothing counts but the cross. Therefore Capon pleads for a passion for the Passion. If I can make up your mind, when you go into the pulpit, to forget everything except Jesus Christ and him crucified, you'll have nothing to give them but the good news. Chapter 3 tackles the stumbling blocks in the way of genuinely accepting grace, for example religion pills, spirituality pills and morality pills. It is a stern but timely warning that the church, by and large, has drugged itself into thinking that proper human behaviour is the key to its relationship with God. What preachers need to do is force themselves to go cold turkey, with nothing but the word of the cross. Chapter 4 poses

the issue of the biggest obstacle, namely our dread of being branded losers because of our sins — and above all, our fear of admitting to ourselves that we're nothing but what Ephesians 2:1 says we are: dead in our trespasses and sins. In this chapter Capon addresses the issue of the preacher's faith in a manner that might sound harsh to modern ears. Unless we're willing to admit we're sinners, and welcome the annihilation of our glittering images of moral success and clerical respectability, our words will be nothing more than the words of fakers, and we'll never come within a million miles of that astonishment at grace which alone can make the words come alive. Chapter 5 addresses the 'Grim Pills', religion, spirituality and morality. Capon calls them grim pills that we take to kill the agony of not having control over our lives. Religion is described as our attempt to seize the management of history and to defend our usurpation of it in order to control creation. Religion has three constituent elements: cult, creed and conduct. In a most entertaining manner Capon explains that cult is the ceremonial rigmarole that you have to go through in order to persuade God to continue being pleasant to you. Creed on the other hand is all the things you have to think correctly about in order to be religious, while conduct is the struggle to comply with the long lists of spiritual or ethical requirements you have to fulfil if you want to be in God's good books. Chapter 6 consists of antidotes. Capon states that the best preachers work in the dark. They never try to get their old religious vision back; they learn to walk through Scripture by listening — and by being empty enough to let the Word they hear speak through them. In Part 2, 'The practice of preaching', the emphasis falls on the 'mechanics' of preaching. Capon starts with a discussion of the ingredients of preaching. Of the utmost importance is to actually hear the Word in the original Greek and Hebrew. This is followed by an illustration of how to preach effectively using notes, giving instructions for day by day preparation. Especially those preachers who are familiar with personal computers will find the suggestions Capon makes helpful.

This is a well-written and well-reasoned book, and is definitely worthwhile reading, although the freshness and frankness of both the style and approach may be a bit strange to some. It is to be recommended, to all who are in the business of preaching. It may also be recommended for any form of group discussions held by preachers. It will definitely stimulate the debate on preaching by its challenging approach.

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