

Jacques Derrida, *Adieu: To Emmanuel Levinas*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 123 pp. \$15.95.

Anyone desiring to think about preaching under the rubric of “testimony,” must take into account the life and writings of Emmanuel Levinas. Paul Ricoeur calls Levinas the “thinker of testimony,” and much of Ricoeur’s philosophy is a direct response to Levinas’ ideas. Levinas was a Lithuanian Jew who lived and wrote in France. He had a profound influence on Jaques Derrida, and the two men developed a long friendship and sustained an ongoing conversation in their writings. *Adieu: To Emmanuel Levinas* contains two essays written by Derrida after Levinas’ death in 1995. The first essay is a brief oration entitled “Adieu,” delivered at the cemetery in Pantin on December 27, 1995. The second essay, “A Word of Welcome,” was delivered one year later, on December 7, 1996 at the opening of a convocation entitled “Homage to Emmanuel Levinas” at the Sorbonne.

Beyond the delight of sharing glimpses of the wit and humor that existed in the interaction between Derrida and Levinas, these essays provide a good, brief distillation of one of the core ideas that is wrapped around Levinas’ thinking about testimony: the idea of “welcome” or “hospitality.” Levinas’ philosophy of hospitality has been directly and indirectly influential upon a variety of ethicists and theologians including Parker Palmer, Thomas W. Ogletree, Robert Gibbs, and Patrick Kiefert. Although Levinas’ philosophy of testimony has strongly influenced the writings of Walter Brueggemann (*Cadences of Home, Theology of the Old Testament*) and Rebecca Chopp (*The Power to Speak*), the relationship between testimony and welcome has gone largely un-addressed. For this reason, this brief summary of Levinas’ ideas about hospitality are an important resource.

In short, for Levinas, the very soul of testimony, without which testimony would not be testimony, is a profound form of hospitality, an opening toward “the face” that precedes and eludes all of the testifier’s words and themes. According to Derrida, this welcome is a “tending toward the other, attentive intention, intentional attention, *yes* to the other.” (22) This welcome occurs at precisely the point “where the other withdraws from the theme.” (23) It occurs at the point where (contra Kenneth Burke), the speaker experiences an absolute inability to identify with the hearer, in other words, where the “other” is allowed to be truly other. For Levinas, this is not only crucial to the ethics of testimony, but also to beginning to think about how it is that a “Word” is spoken in teaching or preaching that “does not come down to mauiotics” but “comes from the exterior and brings me more than I contain.” (27) In other words, the testimony of welcome, or testimony as welcome, is proto-theological, it implies the beginning of a theology of the Word of God.

The second half of Derrida’s essay is devoted to thinking Levinas’ ethic of hospitality toward the problem of peace in the Middle East. In this exercise, Derrida highlights the reversal that Levinas’ idea bring to the Kantian legacy. Whereas Kant assumed an original and natural hostility between human beings, Levinas “distinguishes ethical or originary peace (originary but not natural: it would be better to say pre-originary, an-archic)” (49) Instead of peace always reflecting an original state of war, therefore, war always suggests an original and eschatological peace. For Levinas, war is the interruption of peace, not vice versa. Hospitality, therefore, is more than refuge, and Jerusalem must express a deeper and more profound hospitality than existing as a refuge for exiles—even exiles of holocaust. “The Torah demands more; it demands more from Jerusalem, requires more in Jerusalem.” (109) Derrida, therefore, shows how Levinas points toward “a recognition of Torah before Sinai.” (65) For Levinas, before all revelation to a specific covenant people there exists a *recognition* of Torah in “the experience of the stranger, where the truth of the messianic universe exceeds not only the determined place and moment, but also the identity, especially the national identity of the bearer or messenger of the Torah, of the revealed Torah.” (69) Levinas calls this a “memory of the ‘Word of God’” (69) As a Jew,

Levinas offers a profound ethical critique of nationalist forms of Zionism which preclude the deepest form of testimony within Israel: the testimony of welcome.

This book is a significant book for homileticians concerned about testimonial epistemologies, and the nature of preaching as witness. It is also timely for preachers concerned about how to speak to congregations about Jerusalem in the face of increasing violence between Jews and Palestinians. Its title: *Adieu* ("to God") aptly expresses the essential direction of the life and witness of Emmanuel Levinas. Derrida, as a friend and as a scholar, does justice to this direction in all of Levinas' thought.

• John S. McClure