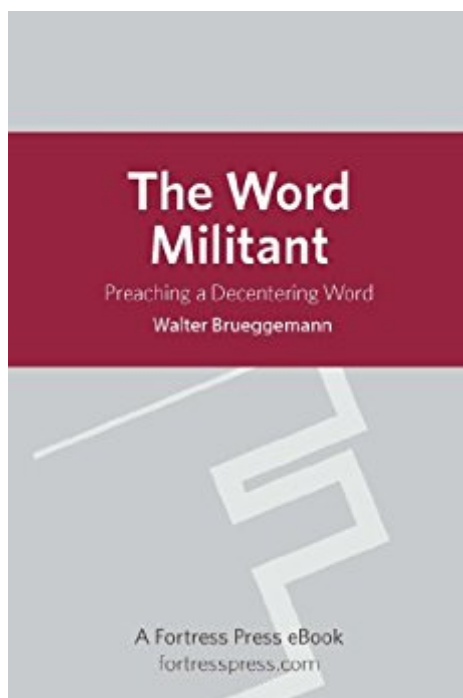


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# The Word Militant: Preaching A Decentering Word



## Synopsis

Against the easy assurance of a too-enculturated religion, Walter Brueggemann refocuses the preaching task around the decentering, destabilizing, always risky Word that confronts us in Scripture. If we have the courage to hear.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

For those of us that eat books like food, some taste like straw; others taste like dark chocolate. Walter Brueggemann's recent book, *The Word Militant: Preaching a Decentered Word*, is the latter. The plight of the modern Christian is best captured in an analogy to a dialog in Chaim Potok's classic book, *The Chosen* (Chawcett Books; Greenwich, CT, 1967) where the Hasidic rabbi Reb Saunders explains why he raised his brilliant son, Daniel, in silence. He [Daniel] was a mind in a body without a soul...A heart I need for a son, a soul I need for a son, compassion I want from my son, righteousness, mercy, strength to suffer, and carry pain, that I want from my son, not a mind without a soul (pp. 263-64). We, moderns, taken together are brilliant but we lack compassion, lack soul. I find solace in Brueggemann's writing because he helps break the silence of God in this

place. Brueggemann's book is broken into eleven chapters: 1. Preaching as Reimagination 2. The Preacher, the Text, and the People 3. Ancient Utterance and Contemporary Hearing 4. An Imaginative "Or" 5. That the World May be Redescribed 6. The Social Nature of the Biblical Text for Preaching 7. The Shrill Voice of the Wounded Party 8. Life or Death: De-Privileged Communication 9. Preaching to Exiles 10. Preaching a Sub-Version 11. Truth-Telling as Subversive Obedience. The introduction is aptly entitled: At Risk in the Text. While the audience for this book is the preacher, the text is as much a work in hermeneutics as homiletics. How are we to read the text in view of how we read the times? In this sense, one can see the influence of Karl Barth and his newspaper in Brueggemann's writing as well as his references. Brueggemann's hermeneutic is metaphoric in the rabbinic tradition. Brueggemann interprets poetically gliding seamlessly among the perspectives of the author, canon, and reader. My fear as a reader is not that he has been faithful to the text. Rather, my fear is that my meager attempts to articulate such thoughts come across as one-dimensional because I am uncomfortable traveling in metaphor. How does a child of the Enlightenment (I am an economist) trained to think linearly express nonlinearity? I toy with thoughts that I have trouble reproducing. The metaphor of the exile is most intriguing. I feel the marginalization of faith in an atheistic world. The moral drift in society threatens my sense of well-being. The loss of the sacred tears at my heart. The lament of exiles is my lament even if I find the words to express my thoughts hard to gather. The subversive nature of the homiletic task arises only once the preacher realizes that he/she is not a guardian of the established order. What does it mean to be a modern? How does that differ from being a Christian? What does postmodern mean? How are we to deconstruct all this? Discomfort with one's role as a preacher comes easily to an inquisitive mind. Harder is the question of what to do about it. Fortunately, Brueggemann guides us down this road. Brueggemann starts by observing that a close reading of scripture leads to the uncomfortable conclusion that God may be unhappy with us in ways that would disturb most American congregations. How does the preacher deal with this? Triangulate. Let the text speak for itself by interpreting it in view of the canon. Stand as preacher with the congregation. Slice off a bite. Chew. Let the doxology and the traditions of the church play as background music. The holy café of the church provides many dimensions of thought and expression. Use them. I find myself under the influence of Brueggemann's writing more and more. I suspect that you will too.

This book is a deep look into the process of post liberal preaching. It is not a how to on this style, but a explain of preaching or teaching the word that is decentering. The book is definitely not a easy read manuscript, not that the words are big, well some, and well you need to know some Hebrew as

well, but mostly anyone can understand the communication. The book is scholarly articles that have been written by the author. The book is an enjoyable read because of the richness of the material. Over reviewing this book for this blog post, I realized I made a ton of notes. This means that I found the book wonderfully rewarding with material. There are nuggets of truth through this text. Of course, the read will not agree with all the statements, but there is some really deep material and perspectives. There is the idea of preaching from the outside, looking from the perspective of the sinned against, faith seeking sense-making, the debate of normlessness and conformity, and the desire to be a Babylon Jew. The book mostly deals with the Old Testament text and culture, which is a needed change from the ever constant focus on the New Testament text. If you are looking for some meat in the word, or for a deeper book that has some real calories, this is a good text for you. But if you prefer the devotional material only, that you have to constantly be dining on because it never fills you, this might be a little too much for you.

This is Walter Brueggemann at his best. It gave me a new understanding and appreciation for Old Testament scriptures and the society that produced those documents. I shall not read the OT again without remembering the information in this book. In particular, his comments about the character of the Hebrew language being one that allowed for wide interpretation, helped me to understand the whole concept of the Midrash and Kaballah.

A theological challenge to us preacher types to actually preach the Word and not what congregations necessarily want to hear!!

This book is a scholarly work offering those who are engaged in preaching to further their craft. It is a perspective which enables the reader to seriously engage in the texts of scripture by exploring the implications and similarities to experiences of spirituality in the contemporary age of preaching.

Brueggemann's poetic style makes the work seem as though it has something definitive to say. What it is, though, is actually a work of deconstruction that renders the Bible and the pulpit impotent. Let's not mince words about what Brueggemann really thinks. The Bible's historical accounts are "not factual reportage" (144), non-historical (93), and should not raise questions about the events described really happened (38). He has bought whole-heartedly into the relativism of postmodernity. As a consequence, preaching is now de-privileged communication (131) that has moved from the judge's bench to the witness box (125). Preaching's role is to offer alternative

visions of reality to the dominant visions of a culture (a well-worn theme from Brueggemann's other books). It is an utterance that has the power to make people reconsider what they believe and live for. Unfortunately, Brueggemann has embraced that which pulls the rug out from under the power of the alternative view. We might as well say that Grimm's Fairy Tales offers an alternative vision of reality. It does. One in which we have no reason to believe and for which no reason to give our lives. The Bible deserves no different status in Brueggemann's fatalistic affirmation of subjectivity and relativity. Brueggemann can continually preach this message without foundation safely in his context: a seminary which depends on churches to generate students interested in going into the ministry. Those who cannot similarly preach without foundation: those churches. If you affirm Brueggemann's position, there is ironically very little reason to read this book.

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