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P R E A C H I N G T H E W O R D

1 & 2 PETER
AND JUDE

Sharing Christ's Sufferings

David R. Helm

R. Kent Hughes, General Editor

CROSSWAY BOOKS
WHEATON, ILLINOIS

1 & 2 Peter and Jude

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Published by Crossway Books
a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers
1300 Crescent Street
Wheaton, Illinois 60187

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Cover banner by Marge Gieser

Art Direction: Josh Dennis

First printing, 2008

Printed in the United States of America

Note: Key words and phrases in Scripture quotations have been distinguished by italics (roman type in all-italics block quotations).

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Helm, David R., 1961–

1 and 2 Peter and Jude : sharing Christ's sufferings / David R. Helm;

R. Kent Hughes, general editor.

p. cm. — (Preaching the word)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN-13: 978-1-58134-960-3 (hc)

I. Bible, N.T. Peter—Commentaries. 2. Bible, N.T. Jude—Commentaries.

I. Hughes, R. Kent. II. Title. III. Title: First and Second Peter and Jude.

IV. Series.

BS2795.53.H45 2008

227'.92077—dc22

2007031316

T S 18 17 15 14 13 12 11 10 09 08
15 14 13 12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

A Word to Those Who Preach the Word

There are times when I am preaching that I have especially sensed the pleasure of God. I usually become aware of it through the unnatural silence. The ever-present coughing ceases, and the pews stop creaking, bringing an almost physical quiet to the sanctuary — through which my words sail like arrows. I experience a heightened eloquence, so that the cadence and volume of my voice intensify the truth I am preaching.

There is nothing quite like it — the Holy Spirit filling one's sails, the sense of his pleasure, and the awareness that something is happening among one's hearers. This experience is, of course, not unique, for thousands of preachers have similar experiences, even greater ones.

What has happened when this takes place? How do we account for this sense of his smile? The answer for me has come from the ancient rhetorical categories of *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos*.

The first reason for his smile is the *logos* — in terms of preaching, God's Word. This means that as we stand before God's people to proclaim his Word, we have done our homework. We have exegeted the passage, mined the significance of its words in their context, and applied sound hermeneutical principles in interpreting the text so that we understand what its words meant to its hearers. And it means that we have labored long until we can express in a sentence what the theme of the text is — so that our outline springs from the text. Then our preparation will be such that as we preach, we will not be preaching our own thoughts about God's Word, but God's actual Word, his *logos*. This is fundamental to pleasing him in preaching.

The second element in knowing God's smile in preaching is *ethos* — what you are as a person. There is a danger endemic to preaching, which is having your hands and heart cauterized by holy things. Phillips Brooks illustrated it by the analogy of a train conductor who comes to believe that he has been to the places he announces because of his long and loud heralding of them. And that is why Brooks insisted that preaching must be “the bringing of truth through personality.” Though we can never perfectly embody

the truth we preach, we must be subject to it, long for it, and make it as much a part of our ethos as possible. As the Puritan William Ames said, “Next to the Scriptures, nothing makes a sermon more to pierce, than when it comes out of the inward affection of the heart without any affectation.” When a preacher’s *ethos* backs up his *logos*, there will be the pleasure of God.

Last, there is *pathos* — personal passion and conviction. David Hume, the Scottish philosopher and skeptic, was once challenged as he was seen going to hear George Whitefield preach: “I thought you do not believe in the gospel.” Hume replied, “I don’t, but he does.” Just so! When a preacher believes what he preaches, there will be passion. And this belief and requisite passion will know the smile of God.

The pleasure of God is a matter of *logos* (the Word), *ethos* (what you are), and *pathos* (your passion). As you preach the Word may you experience his smile — the Holy Spirit in your sails!

R. Kent Hughes

1

Reading 1 Peter

Life is difficult. But this harsh truth has not always been understood by those following Jesus Christ. Many Christians today have trouble sorting out the complexity of their identity and calling in Christ. They were reared to believe that a Christian should only experience the joys of being one of God's elect. They have been taught nothing of our exilic state. With three simple words in the opening of this letter, Peter gives us the biblical corrective — a profound clue for finding life's true horizon. We are the "*elect exiles of the dispersion*" (1:1).

How did this phrase come to describe the true state of Christians in every age? "According to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood" (1:2). Our soul rises in praise and falls in sorrow on the same afternoon "*according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.*" We are God's beloved, and yet we are carried off into exile like Daniel of old "*in the sanctification of the Spirit.*" We remain on the outside of the world in which we live "*for obedience to Jesus Christ.*" And we are all these things as a fragrant offering in Christ's "blood." According to Peter, we owe our full identity as "elect exiles" to the mysterious plan of God.

Throughout the Scriptures, the way up comes by going down; restoration comes after trials (5:10). It is this inversion in attaining glory that marks Peter's theme throughout this letter. Christians' future inheritance and exaltation — our eternal share in the glory of Christ — will be awarded to us on the day of his appearing (1:13; 2:12; 4:13; 5:1, 4, 10). But that promised day only comes *after* this brief season of present-day sufferings. For suffering always precedes subsequent glories. As it was for God's Son, so it will be for all of us who are in him.

This bringing together of two seemingly incompatible truths — our status in Christ *and* our sufferings on earth — is how Peter's letter begins (1:1, 2). And in the body of the letter these incompatible ideas are continually

joined to one another. In 1:3-12 we see that an eternal inheritance is linked to various trials. In other words, salvation's future goal (vv. 3-5) is built upon the present trials (vv. 6-9) as well as the past glories (vv. 10-12).

Beginning with verse 13, Peter begins to establish answers to some pending questions. In light of these present trials, how are Christians supposed to bear witness to Christ's glory? How are we to live in this wilderness world? Peter's prescriptive answer centers on the Christian's *conduct* (v. 15). The word translated "conduct" in this verse is used only twenty-four times in the entire New Testament. And yet nearly half of those come from Peter. He uses it eleven times (see 1:15, 17, 18; 2:12; 3:1, 2, 16; 2 Peter 2:7, 18; 3:11). In essence, Peter's strategy for Christian conduct, rooted in a settled hope, comes from a focus on:

- Sanctification (1:13-21)
- A sincere love for others both in and out of the church (1:22 — 2:12)
- Submission to unjust leaders out of a love for Christ (2:13 — 3:7)
- A willingness to suffer (3:8 — 4:6), and
- Service to God's new family (4:7 — 5:14)

These are the elements of Christian conduct.

Peter goes on to develop this theme of Christian identity and conduct in light of a settled hope. Reaching a turning point in 2:11, 12, we find a concise *exhortation* to live lives worthy of our unique calling. *Examples* of what this looks like abound (2:13, 18; 3:1). And in case Peter's early readers have trouble grasping this gracious truth, he will go so far as to argue that Jesus Christ was the supreme *example* of this teaching (2:21-25). Aware of the high demands this will place upon his readers, Peter encourages them by setting forward the exilic-like wandering years of King David, the anointed one who suffered, in an effort to help them press on (3:9-17). Finally, in 3:18-22, he returns to Christ and grounds the irony of his divine logic in the demonstration of Christ's ultimate vindication as proof of our future hope and present calling (4:19).

In these later chapters Peter continues to encourage his readers with the example of Christ overcoming extraordinary trials. He concludes by making an appeal to the elders specifically (5:1-5) and then to everyone more generally (5:6-14) to fulfill their unique callings in humility and grace. The divine principle of "true grace" (5:12) is this: God has established our salvation, given us our identity, confirmed our present-day calling, and secured our future inheritance by means of an inverted irony — namely, the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ. Therefore, just as the exaltation of Jesus followed a season of humiliation, so too our share in his eternal glory will appear after we have learned to follow in his true and gracious ways.

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who are elect exiles of the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you. (1:1, 2)

2

A Letter to Elect Exiles

1 PETER 1:1, 2

If you were to walk home with me from work, you would travel a few short blocks — down an alley, through an iron gate, and up seven or eight stairs to a landing. Then, with a turn of the key and a push of a door, you would find yourself in one of Chicago’s throwback, turn-of-the-century, southside six-flats, standing in my kitchen. Once the door was shut behind us (no small task given the number of shoes that seem to collect there), you would see me greet Lisa and the kids, and then, on a normal day, you would hear me ask, “Any good mail?”

Two things constitute a “good mail” day in the Helm household. First, good mail is that which comes from a friend or family member. No bills! And second, good mail means that the note was not only handwritten but written well. Well, although you didn’t walk home with me, you have nevertheless found your way to this book; you have come in through the door, so to speak, and have gotten yourself situated. And, yes, it is a very good mail day.

THE AUTHOR

A letter has arrived, and it is from one of the members of God’s family. According to verse 1 it claims Peter, the great and gregarious follower of Jesus, as its author. It is signed “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ.” Later on, as if to leave no doubt as to his identity, the writer confirms himself as Peter the Apostle by stating, “I exhort the elders among you, as a . . . witness of the sufferings of Christ” (5:1). So, from the opening words to the final chapter internal testimony supports the notion that the letter we are studying is from

none other than Peter, a disciple of Jesus, an elder in the early church, an apostle, and a witness of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Of course, there are, and forever will be, melancholy Eeyores standing around, many who are prepared to pour rain on a good mail day. When it comes to reading 1 Peter, learned detractors intrude into our kitchen and say, “Are you so sure, simpleminded pastor? Is the letter actually from the hand of Peter? After all, it might not be, you know. In fact, many of us don’t believe in the notion of Petrine authorship. For proof we make our appeal to your own criteria on what constitutes a good mail day. This letter is simply too well written to come from Peter the Apostle.”

So we arrive, even before we begin, at a contemporary charge against this piece of divine mail. There is nothing to be gained by hiding this from you. A veritable gaggle of scholars feel that the Greek used in this letter is too elevated for Peter — the vocabulary too rich and uncommon — the engaging rhetorical flow too far above the intellectual capacity of an uneducated first-century fisherman like Peter. Our very own Eeyores shake their heads from side to side as if to say, “I am so sorry to disappoint you, but this letter was written later in time. It comes from the hand of one well acquainted with the literary tools necessary for this kind of ascendant discourse.” To support their claim, they appeal to Acts 4 where Peter is referred to as an “uneducated [and] common” man.¹

The effect, of course, is devastating. Our initial excitement over a good mail day begins falling to the ground like a balloon losing the air that once kept it afloat. Well, don’t be overly discouraged just yet. There is a great irony in the charge, and like a knife, it cuts both ways.

Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus. (Acts 4:13)

The charge that Peter and John were “uneducated, common men” can certainly be perceived as a derogatory one. Yet, and this is important, these words were not used by the biblical scholars of Peter’s day to level a negative verdict on whether or not the man standing before them was actually Peter the Apostle. Rather, these precise terms were the only ones available to adequately express their astonished surprise at the superior ability and elevated style of *this man*, Peter. In other words, these men were amazed that one so ordinary could also be one so well-spoken.

Now, with that knowledge in place, the irony of the contemporary charge leveled against apostolic authorship for our letter is unmasked. If the terms *uneducated* and *common* were the ones employed by the elite of Peter’s day to support — not to deny — his person, then certainly the pundits of our day should be willing to consider that this same Peter could

possess the ability to write well. In fact, if we are honest, all of us should be willing to admit that someone who is so well-spoken might also have the capability of becoming so well-written.

And what is it that makes good writing? Well, C. S. Lewis, in correspondence with a young American girl on June 26, 1956, wrote:

What really matters is:

Always try to use the language so as to make quite clear what you mean, and make sure your sentence couldn't mean anything else.

Always prefer the plain direct word to the long vague one. Don't "implement" promises, but "keep" them.

Never use abstract nouns when concrete ones will do. If you mean "more people died," don't say "mortality rose."

Don't use adjectives which merely tell us how you want us to feel about the thing you are describing. I mean, instead of telling us a thing was "terrible," describe it in such a way that we'll be terrified. Don't say it was "delightful," make *us* say "delightful" when we've read the description. You see, all those words, (horrifying, wonderful, hideous, exquisite) are only saying to your readers "please will you do my job for me."

Don't use words too big for the subject. Don't say "infinitely" when you really mean "very"; otherwise you'll have no word left when you want to talk about something *really* infinite.²

Isn't that great? Good writing, after all, is clear, simple, and direct. It contains what Lewis called "concrete" nouns. As we make our way through this letter, we will see Peter put all of Lewis's dictums into practice. This letter is good because it is clear, simple, direct.

THE AUDIENCE

Peter doesn't waste any time in utilizing concrete nouns to identify the ones to whom he is writing. In verse 1 he writes:

To those who are elect exiles of the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.

He uses three strong nouns to describe his audience: "*elect exiles of the dispersion.*" In time you will see that these three words function as floor joists to the book. They undergird and support everything Peter wants to say. Like flowers in a garden, the ideas and concepts hidden in these strong nouns will open in full bloom. In fact, one could argue that everything in 1 Peter flows from the force of these three simple words.

The Elect

The word translated “elect” simply means “chosen.” Throughout the Bible *chosen* is the intimate term most often used to speak of those whom God loves. To grasp the relational intimacy behind the term, consider the exalted picture Ezekiel paints when speaking of God’s electing choice of Israel:

“And as for your birth, on the day you were born your cord was not cut, nor were you washed with water to cleanse you, nor rubbed with salt, nor wrapped in swaddling cloths. No eye pitied you, to do any of these things to you out of compassion for you, but you were cast out on the open field, for you were abhorred, on the day that you were born. And when I passed by you and saw you wallowing in your blood, I said to you in your blood, ‘Live!’ I said to you in your blood, ‘Live!’ I made you flourish like a plant of the field. And you grew up and became tall and arrived at full adornment. Your breasts were formed, and your hair had grown; yet you were naked and bare.

“When I passed by you again and saw you, behold, you were at the age for love, and I spread the corner of my garment over you and covered your nakedness; I made my vow to you and entered into a covenant with you, declares the Lord God, and you became mine. Then I bathed you with water and washed off your blood from you and anointed you with oil. I clothed you also with embroidered cloth and shod you with fine leather. I wrapped you in fine linen and covered you with silk. And I adorned you with ornaments and put bracelets on your wrists and a chain on your neck. And I put a ring on your nose and earrings in your ears and a beautiful crown on your head. Thus you were adorned with gold and silver, and your clothing was of fine linen and silk and embroidered cloth. You ate fine flour and honey and oil. You grew exceedingly beautiful and advanced to royalty. And your renown went forth among the nations because of your beauty, for it was perfect through the splendor that I had bestowed on you, declares the Lord God.” (16:4-14)

What a special picture describing God’s electing love! Israel became God’s chosen. They were his elect. Although born helpless and vulnerable, they were given life through God’s electing love. Do you see the comfort associated with this word *elect*? The term *elect* is meant to encourage the church. It is to remind the people of God of his great love. It is not a term to be waved in front of those who don’t yet know God.³ It should be used to bring comfort for those in the faith. Peter intended to assure his early dispersed readers of God’s steadfast love. And certainly they would have basked in the reassuring strength of the word.

Exiles of the Dispersion

We have already seen that the term *elect*, in all its grandeur, was given to the entire household of Israel. Unfortunately, history shows that Israel began to presume upon God's good grace. As special objects of his love, they believed they would always know his goodness. Over time their familiarity with God worked against them. They felt that they were entitled to the good life even when their affections for God fell off. Presumptuous sin became the unfortunate companion of God's elect. During the days of the kings, they turned away from God and forfeited the glory of his approval. As a result, the great nation was carried off into *exile*; they were *dispersed* by God. The term *exiles of the dispersion* was now, for the first time, joined to the term *elect*. In Shakespeare's *Henry VI* we read of the tragedy of glory dispersed.

*Glory is like a circle in the water,
Which never ceaseth to enlarge itself
Till by broad spreading it disperse to naught.
With Henry's death the English circle ends;
Dispersed are the glories it included.⁴*

Israel knew something of lost glory. They knew, all too well, that the term *elect* does at times stand beside the phrase *exiles of the dispersion* — beloved by God, yet seemingly left alone in the world. In this letter Peter does not hesitate to place these terms alongside one another to identify his readers. They are called the “elect exiles of the dispersion.” How strange. One would have thought that putting these words together would be like mixing oil with water. Yet for Peter, it is no trouble at all.

There is one major difference, however, in the way Peter uses the terms. As the letter unfolds, it will become clear to us that Peter believes that his readers are exiles of a different sort. Their exilic identity has nothing to do with ancient Israel's sin — or their own. Their *exilic* state is not the result of disobedience to God. In fact, all the evidence in the letter demonstrates that they were living faithful and fruitful lives in obedience to Christ (1:2). For Peter then — and this is most important — the phrase “exiles of the dispersion” depicts the normative state of any follower of Jesus, so long as he or she remains in this world.⁵

In this sense Peter's early readers were not very different from you and me. They were men and women who had come into a relationship with God through faith in Christ and as such remained on the outside of everything in this world. C. S. Lewis stated the normative condition of the Christian as *elect exiles* this way:

At present we are on the outside of the world, the wrong side of the door. We discern the freshness and purity of morning, but they do not make us fresh and pure. We cannot mingle with the splendors we see. But all of the leaves of the New Testament are rustling with the rumor that it will not always be so. Some day, God willing, we shall get in.⁶

So we have established this much: we have a lot in common with Peter's first readers. In Christ we are God's chosen, his elect in all the earth. And yet we are living our lives out in a complex and often confusing context. We are capable of waking up each morning in joyful praise *and* going to bed dejected in spirit.

Toni Morrison closes her gripping novel *Sula* with an emotional scene depicting both love and loss. Two women, Sula and Nel, had been friends. But now Sula has passed away, and Nel is forced to come to grips with her equal sense of loss and feeling alone in the world.

Suddenly Nel stopped. Her eye twitched and burned a little.

"Sula?" She whispered, gazing at the tops of trees.

"Sula?" Leaves stirred; mud shifted; there was the smell of over-ripe green things. A soft ball of fur broke and scattered like dandelion spores in the breeze . . . the loss pressed down on her chest and came up into her throat. "We was girls together," she said as though explaining something.

"O Lord, Sula," she cried, "girl, girl, girlgirlgirl."

It was a fine cry — loud and long — but it had no bottom and it had no top, just circles and circles of sorrow.⁷

Who doesn't know that wrenching sense of isolation and sorrow? In getting to know Peter's audience, know this — they were men and women of faith who knew it too. They knew what it was to have "a fine cry — loud and long," one without bottom or top, "just circles and circles of sorrow."

AN OPENING WORD OF ENCOURAGEMENT

Many Christians today have trouble sorting out the complexity of their identity in Christ. They were reared to believe that a Christian should only experience the joys of being one of God's elect. They have been taught nothing of our exilic state. With three simple words in the opening of this letter, Peter has given us the biblical corrective. We are "the elect exiles of the dispersion."

How did this phrase come to describe the true state of Christians in every age? Peter tells us.

According to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood. (v. 2)

Our soul rises in praise and falls in sorrow on the same afternoon “according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.” We became God’s beloved and yet are carried off into exile like Daniel of old “in the sanctification of the Spirit.” We remain on the outside of the world in which we live “for obedience to Jesus Christ.” And we are all these things as a fragrant offering in Christ’s blood.

According to Peter, we owe our full identity as *elect exiles* to the mysterious plan of God. It is no accident that the three concrete nouns Peter used to identify his readers in verse 1 are followed by three descriptive phrases explaining how this came to be. To ensure that his readers don’t misunderstand him, Peter plants his thoughts in the soil of a Trinitarian formula.

- “According to the foreknowledge of God the *Father*,
- in the sanctification of the *Spirit*,
- for obedience to *Jesus Christ* and for sprinkling with his blood.”

In the strongest way possible, Peter has told us: The Lord God, the Creator of the heavens and the earth, is behind all of this. The hidden counsel of the Eternal Trinity has planned for us to be known as his “elect exiles.” And he has done all of this through the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus. So take heart. Be encouraged. Christians are those who are chosen by God *and* called to live in this world. There is something in this letter for every Christian. This is a fine mail day. As you read on, Peter’s desire is that you would experience God’s grace and know his peace. In fact, verse 2 says that he wants them to be yours in abundance (“May grace and peace be multiplied to you”).

Dear Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we thank you for this letter of 1 Peter. We thank you for clarifying our identity in this world. We praise you that you have called us for obedience to Jesus Christ. May his eternal glory be ever before us. May his season of earthly humiliation guide us. And may his vindication inspire us to press on through this wilderness world. It is in Jesus’ name that we pray. Amen.

Notes

CHAPTER TWO: A LETTER TO ELECT EXILES

1. In this chapter I only deal with the charge leveled against Petrine authorship that is made on the basis of the author's elevated ability with language, style, and rhetoric. There are, of course, other charges made against Peter as the author, the most significant among them being that the content of the letter requires some severe persecution along the lines of official Roman persecution, which from all we know of the history of the time period in which Peter was still alive and able to have written this just did not exist. I do deal with this second objection to Peter's authorship in chapter 4. I purposely waited until then to interact with this particular objection because that chapter addresses the type of persecution facing Peter's early readers.
2. C. S. Lewis as quoted in John Stott, *Between Two Worlds* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), p. 235.
3. See John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book III, Chapter II.
4. William Shakespeare, *The First Part of Henry VI* (Act I, Scene 3), as it is quoted in *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, ed. Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 158.
5. While some commentators make much of the phrase "exiles of the dispersion" in identifying the original audience as primarily comprised of Jewish Christians, I feel it is primarily used by Peter metaphorically to speak of both Jewish and Gentile believers (see 1:14; 4:3, 4).
6. C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*, as quoted in James Hewett's *Parables, Etc.*, Vol. 6, No. 1, March 1986, p. 8.
7. Toni Morrison, *Sula* (New York: Penguin, 1973), p. 174.

CHAPTER THREE: SALVATION'S FUTURE GOAL

1. Iain H. Murray, *D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The First Forty Years* (Southampton, UK: Camelot Press Ltd., 1983), pp. 23, 24.
2. Robert Louis Stevenson, as quoted in *The Christian Reader*, July-August, 1977, pp. 94, 95.
3. William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, Act V, Scene 1, ed. K. Muir (London: Methuen, 1985), pp. 143-146.
4. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Dirty Hands*, in *No Exit, and Three Other Plays* (New York: Vintage, 1946), pp. 216-218.

CHAPTER FOUR: SALVATION'S PRESENT TRIALS

1. These are thoughts that George Richmond is said to have written to Samuel Palmer three days after Blake's death. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Blake; accessed January 31, 2007.
2. William Blake, *Auguries of Innocence*, quoted in R. Kent Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, Preaching the Word series (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1996), p. 179.
3. See J. Ramsey Michaels, *Word Biblical Commentary: 1 Peter* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1988), p. 30 for an example. Many commentators unite this phrase with the later reference to "fiery trial" in 4:12 to suggest a late date for the book as a result.
4. "How Firm a Foundation," from John Rippon's *Selection of Hymns, 1787*, in *The Hymnal for Worship & Celebration, #275*, ed. Tom Fettke (Waco, TX: Word Music, 1986).
5. Malcolm Muggeridge, *A Twentieth Century Testimony* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1978).