

W. Dow Edgerton. *Speak to Me That I May Speak: A Spirituality of Preaching*. Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 2006. 205 pages. \$23.

In Dow Edgerton's view, the work of the preacher begins "...before the book is opened, before there is a mark on the page, before there is a text in which to lose oneself, before all the composing and arranging of thoughts, words, and images..." (7). What he seeks to articulate in this book is something of the spiritual life of the preacher both in the work of sermon preparation and in the daily life that feeds this work. *Speak to Me That I May Speak* moves from the daily interactions that one experiences with members of a congregation to the task of biblical exegesis through a mix of theoretical exposition and short vignettes. This alternation not only offers reading variety, but helps to give voice to the struggle a preacher actually feels in trying to weave text and life together.

The life of the preacher, according to Edgerton, is best described in terms of discipline (20). The book thus takes on something of a programmatic or sequential feeling, though this strains against Edgerton's work to hold all the elements of life and exegesis together in a less structured consciousness. He begins in chapter one by drawing heavily from Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana* to describe the mix of trepidation, humility, and confidence in God's grace that accompany the drive to interpret the biblical text. Augustine provides Edgerton with an ultimate hermeneutical criterion for interpretation and all preaching: love of God and neighbor.

Chapter two shifts to the interpersonal relationships that shape the preaching task. The dominant figures here are Martin Buber and Emmanuel Levinas. Edgerton deftly handles these figures, demonstrating their importance to understanding the preacher's relationality without getting lost in the technical language that is especially characteristic of Levinas' thought. In the third chapter, he moves to a reflection on language, focusing especially on our life in an already-given world of language. Words, Edgerton argues, can be sources of death, but they can also be sources of life. God is at work in and through the *poesis* of humans building a world through language. Here Edgerton draws most heavily from poetry, and his language itself shifts into a more poetic mode as he describes the way in which images help human beings "re-member" the world. He touches on both the kataphatic and apophatic traditions and the struggle to use language in articulating the mystery of God.

In the fourth chapter Edgerton returns to the biblical text. The book here takes a somewhat Derridean turn as he describes the priority of writing over speaking before moving to a brief reflection on several literary types in the canon that depends heavily on Paul Ricoeur. Each of these genera provides the preacher with a different way of knowing and speaking about God. Finally, Edgerton turns toward the person of the preacher and the preaching act itself, drawing out the existential importance of preaching and the need for passion. Here Kierkegaard and Augustine meet as the three modes of rhetoric (teaching, persuasion, delight) become expressions of the preacher's own passion for the Word.

Speak to Me That I May Speak ranges broadly. It also makes some rather esoteric theorists accessible as guides for thinking through the life of the preacher. Granted, some of the nuances of thinkers like Ricoeur and Levinas may be lost, but they emerge as *relevant* to preachers in a way that can only be commended. This is not to say that the book is perfect. The "real life" vignettes Edgerton presents are not quite convincing enough to make the book feel as though it "touches down" to lived existence. Edgerton only rarely adopts a confessional, first-person tone, but those are the instances in which theory and praxis meet most powerfully. Edgerton also does not address the role of spiritual disciplines such as prayer or celebrating the

Eucharist. This lack is particularly notable in relationship to more “passive” or “receptive” spiritual disciplines such as *lectio divina* or meditation. It thus works best in conjunction with Kay Northcutt’s *Kindling Desire for God* (reviewed elsewhere in this issue). Taken together, these two texts would provide a good foundation for exploring the spiritual dimensions of the preaching life.

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