

John C. Holbert. *Preaching Creation: The Environment and the Pulpit*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books. 113 pages. \$15.

Preaching Creation is an engaging primer for preachers seeking to proclaim a faithful word in the midst of our environmental crisis. Drawing on his expertise in biblical interpretation, John Holbert, the Lois Craddock Perkins Professor of Homiletics at Perkins School of Theology, seeks to correct readings of Scripture that assert the domination of human beings over creation, and he hopes to convert preachers and the church into “lovers of and workers for the natural order” (82). Holbert emphasizes that human beings are one part of God’s creation, who are called to a stance of humility and care in the midst of the created order.

Holbert approaches this task by examining specific biblical texts. Following an introduction in which he sets out the importance of the topic and the “checkered history” of Christians’ relationship to creation, Holbert provides “environmental readings” of selected texts from eight sections of Scripture: the creation stories, Psalms, Job, the Hebrew prophets, the Wisdom literature, the New Testament epistles, the gospels, and Revelation. Each exegetical exploration is followed by a short sermon demonstrating one way this biblical material might be preached. The book concludes with a chapter providing general guidance for preaching on environmental issues, as well as an annotated bibliography of resources.

The book is a timely resource for preachers and churches. Holbert does an excellent job of challenging interpretations of Scripture that have been detrimental if not devastating to the environment. And through his careful exegetical studies he redeems Scripture from past interpretations and offers a new way for Christians to view creation and our place in it. While the brevity of the book makes his choice of texts necessarily quite selective, Holbert nevertheless provides some striking insights into the texts he explores, and he offers a lens that can guide preachers in approaching other passages of Scripture. His treatments of doxology in Genesis 1 and the praise of creation in Psalm 19 are beautiful and moving; he elicits praise as he writes about it. His redescription of power through the figure of Woman Wisdom is insightful and provocative. His recurring emphasis on the intimate connection between creation and redemption, particularly in the New Testament epistles, is theologically rich. Holbert’s theological and homiletical interpretations provide a model for the kind of biblical work preachers are called to do.

Preaching Creation is engagingly and accessibly written, with little technical terminology. Consequently, the book is not only a valuable resource for preachers, but also an excellent resource for church school classes and Bible studies. The vision Holbert offers may thus be carried beyond the preacher’s study and the pulpit into the life of the larger church community.

The sermons tend to be less interesting than the exegetical work. Because Holbert is an admirably exegetical preacher, sections of the sermons repeat much of the exegetical material that has already been discussed. It would have been helpful to see a bit more variety in the sermons, including ways sermons might build on the exegesis, rather than repeating it.

Holbert could also address more fully the enormous cultural, economic, and political forces that stand in the way of progress on environmental issues such as climate change. In the Introduction, for example, Holbert suggests that only a few straggling politicians and scientists are not yet convinced of “the human impact on the rising temperatures of earth” (2). However, he neglects to examine the political power wielded by these “straggling voices” and the consequent paralysis on environmental issues in the United States. In an election year in which climate

change was not even mentioned in the presidential campaign (until forced upon it in the final week by Hurricane Sandy), this political reality needs to be explored more deeply. In addition, while Holbert does name important social and economic forces in his exegetical studies, these forces are not addressed with any depth in the sermons. With enormous amounts of money pouring into the political system from oil magnates and corporations, this omission is significant.

Holbert thus makes a valuable exegetical and homiletical contribution toward a new vision of Christians' relationship to the environment. He could, however, examine more fully the extraordinary challenges Christians face as we seek to live into this new vision. The powers arrayed and organized against environmental progress are daunting. In addition to rich exegetical work, further political and economic analysis will also need to be part of the preacher's approach to environmental matters.

Charles L. Campbell, Duke Divinity School, Durham, NC