

Lance B. Pape. *The Scandal of Having Something to Say: Ricoeur and the Possibility of Postliberal Preaching*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2013. 173 pages. \$39.95.

I love this book! It is well-researched—and just as importantly, well-explained—and it is the first major contribution to postliberal homiletics since Campbell’s ground-breaking book, *Preaching Jesus*. Where Campbell and Pape diverge, however, is in regard to which theorist best empowers preachers to carry forward the theological and narratological thrust of the gospel. Campbell elects Yale theologian Hans Frei; Pape makes a compelling case for the eminent French philosopher Paul Ricoeur.

The Scandal of Having Something to Say, is a highly edited version of Pape’s doctoral dissertation at Emory University. Written under the direction of Thomas G. Long, Pape follows in his mentor’s footsteps, both in his deep appreciation for Ricoeur’s philosophy and, more importantly, in his conviction that the (narrative) arch of Scripture ought to determine the focus, form, and function of sermons. Pape does much to bolster the Longian school of homiletics with this fantastic study. It is a gift to preachers searching for a fresh wind to fan the flames of sermon creation; but even more, it is a gift to those who teach preaching, offering a viable text-to-sermon process buttressed with sound theory and written with cogency and conviction.

Pape begins with an eloquent reflection on the “impossible possibility” of preaching: the *scandal* of trying to participate in God’s Word. Arguing for a cruciform homiletic (7), Pape insists that we must embrace the scandal of the cross by radically submitting our words to God’s Word. Challenging Barth’s declaration that between the radical otherness of God’s Word and the human attempts to bear witness to that word there is no “third thing,” Pape identifies a *tertium quid* along a promising—albeit perilous—Ricoeurian path. Pape resonates with the spirit of Barth’s homiletic, but finds its practice ultimately “unworkable” (10). The gospel is not reducible to its propositional content—the kernel is inextricable from its husk; form and content are apiece. This necessitates a lens through which Scripture is to be read for Christian preaching. Pape begins by carefully unpacking just such a framework in the work of Hans Frei, rightly noting that Frei’s Barthian-inspired theory of biblical interpretation has been influential in recent homiletical theory.

Frei’s hermeneutical bracketing of the question of truth with regard to narrative details is all well and good when considered in light of the realistic novel; but Pape argues that truth can be held in abeyance only so long. For the contemporary interpreter—and preacher—the truthfulness of the Gospel is inseparable from the narration of biblical events. Pape notes that however fascinating Frei’s early hermeneutical proposal that brackets matters of history and fact may be, at day’s end, it “will not preach” (35). What is needed is an account for how Scripture refers ostensibly without falling into the philosophical quagmires of fundamentalism or liberalism. The rest of Pape’s project is a quest for a hermeneutical and homiletical framework that is both meaningful and true.

Ricoeur’s hermeneutical theory provides Pape with a “bridge” between Barth’s “strange world of the Bible” and the context of contemporary pew-sitters who are desperate to hear a Word from the Lord. The bulk of Pape’s text is a careful treatment of Ricoeur’s theory of interpretation, which Pape appropriates for homiletical theory. Pape deftly leads the reader through Ricoeur’s “long route” from metaphor theory—as the point of entry into language, and particularly, meaning-making—to narrative theory. The primary homiletical take-aways from Ricoeur’s philosophy of language and narrative are the powers it unleashes to “disclose the real” (49)—a feature that Frei’s theory fails to deliver—and the capacity of (biblical) narrative to

disclose a “world” *in front of the text* inviting the reader/listener to enter. Without sacrificing philosophical precision, Pape explicates Ricoeur’s work and its significance for preaching. The key to a Barthian, cruciform homiletic that embraces the scandal of preaching is found in Ricoeur’s notion of “letting go.” It is only by divesting herself of her autonomous status (as subject) before the text (as object) that the preacher is able to participate in the Wor(l)d projected in front of the text. Pape concludes his study with an explicit treatment of Ricoeur’s import for homiletical theory, displaying how Ricoeur’s concept of threefold *mimesis* offers a text-to-sermon process that honors a Barthian theology.

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