

J. Dwayne Howell, ed. *Preaching and the Personal*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2013. 158 pages. \$20.00.

In this volume editor Dwayne Howell assembles a series of papers delivered at the Society of Biblical Literature and hosted by the Homiletics and Biblical Studies group. Howell writes an introductory chapter as well as an epilogue. The papers explore how the quality of the personal comes through in the biblical text, the preacher, and the congregation. Scripture itself contains a strong personal dimension. Biblical authors brought their personal experiences to bear on Scripture. When preachers interpret the text they too bring their own experiences to bear on what they prepare and preach. Finally as the congregation comes to Scripture, each individual hears the preacher through his or her personal experiences and prejudices.

In chapter two Anna Carter Florence describes how preachers constantly battle the temptation to move from speaking about God to speaking about self. Preachers can navigate the tension between these two poles through the tradition and practice of testimony. She says, “The preacher tells what she has seen and heard *in the biblical text and in life*, and then confesses what she believes about it” (13).

In chapter three Ruthanna B. Hooke takes issue with Barth’s view of a preacher as “a hollow tube through which the Word comes” (32). She believes that “the personal element of preaching, the preacher herself, is a necessary aspect of the preaching event and should not be minimized” (20). The most personal element of worship, she observes, is the sermon and suggests that performance theory provides important insight for properly engaging the personal (24). In performance theory performance is always done *for* someone. The task of the preacher is to restore the work of the text that represents God.

Walter Brueggemann in chapter four develops the metaphor of testimony as an image of preaching using Deutero-Isaiah as a dramatic example of testimony. Testimony brings to light the falsehood of the practice of hegemony. Deutero-Isaiah erupts out of the silence of Babylonian captivity, calls into question that way of life, and announces an alternative future calling for others to join in the testimony. Brueggemann maintains that the task of the preacher is analogous. The preacher identifies the dominant narrative that rules our lives as Americans promising safety and happiness and testifies to an alternative narrative that sets us free from the dominion of the empire’s world view.

John McClure enters the conversation by addressing the personal dimension through the experiences of ordinary people interpreting Scripture (chapter five). After critiquing different models of preaching that respond to postmodern decentering of listener identity, McClure proposes that collaborative preaching is the most effective way of engaging in listener memory by putting the preacher in the thick of the action, listening to diverse listeners as memory is performed on the reading of different texts. The preacher is not a prophet, herald, witness or storyteller. Rather the preacher serves as conversation host about biblical texts (64).

Valerie Bridgeman wrestles with the personal in the context of how Womanist Theory interprets Scripture. In her chapter she grapples with identifying “texts that continue to support and promote oppression of any peoples” (74). She writes, “It is just as important to know the destructive tendencies of the text as it is to know the salvific ones” (74).

David Cortes-Fuentes approaches the personal in still another cultural context in chapter seven. Cortes-Fuentes describes how hermeneutics and homiletics is personalized in the Hispanic and Latino cultures. He surfaces general themes and characteristics that identify the way this culture engages in the practice of interpreting and preaching Scripture.

In the remaining chapters Karoline Lewis, Charles Aaron, and Dwayne Howell all illustrate the personal investment of the preacher in interpreting particular texts. In the Gospel of John scholars often see a Jesus who is distant. In chapter eight, Lewis identifies the prologue of John as a lens through which to see a more personal Jesus (95). She invites interpreters to engage the practice of “rereading” (95-98), a reader response type of method. In rereading the Gospel of John the reader comes to a more intimate relationship with the Christ of the Fourth Gospel.

In chapter nine Charles Aaron probes into how pastors and scholars “approach biblical texts in different ways” (104). He investigates how the scholar’s “objective” and the pastor’s “subjective” approaches can work together to assist preachers in the task of preaching. He explores these two approaches by examining a text in John 12:1-11 using two subjective-type methods (from Florence’s methods described in *Preaching as Testimony*) and two objective-types (redaction and narrative analysis). In combining these methods he discovers new insights from the text in John 12.

As a white Anglo-Saxon middle class Protestant, Dwayne Howell needed help in understanding the text in Leviticus 19:33-34 and what it meant to be an immigrant in Israel. Howell organized several small groups from a rural church, a multi-racial urban church, a group of international college students, and personal conversations with missionaries (128). These groups provided him with insight he otherwise would not have had.

One distracting element in the volume is that a small section from page 74 is repeated verbatim on page 76, making the reading confusing. In addition, even though the thread running through all of these chapters addresses the theme of the personal, that thread is not always evident. Readers must regularly remind themselves of how a particular chapter carries forth the book’s motif. This collection contains provocative discussions from capable scholars and practitioners. It provides a significant contribution to the field of homiletics and contains heuristic seed for future studies.

Dave Bland, Harding School of Theology, Memphis, TN