

David Schnasa Jacobsen, ed. *Homiletical Theology: Preaching as Doing Theology*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015. 186 pages. \$23.

This collection of nine essays includes three by its editor, David Schnasa Jacobsen, with one providing an introductory “Background to Homiletical Theology,” and the other two joining those of John S. McClure and Luke A. Powery in offering respective “Constructive Visions.” Two essays, one by Alyce M. McKenzie and the other by Michael Pasquarello III, discuss “Homiletical Theology as Practical Wisdom.” Two further essays on “Homiletical Theology and Method,” one by Ronald J. Allen and the other by Teresa Stricklen Eisenlohr, conclude this first volume of a projected series on “The Promise of Homiletical Theology.” Professor Jacobsen is Director of the Homiletical Theology Project at Boston University School of Theology. The other contributors participated with him in a 2013 Consultation on Homiletical Theology hosted by the Academy of Homiletics, whose members and their students are this book’s most likely audience.

Debates about what defines “homiletical theology” are acknowledged as integral to this fledgling field, perhaps necessarily so to the degree it aspires both to academic acceptability and practical utility. For this reason, Jacobsen’s tracing the use of the term is helpful, stretching from Johannes Quenstedt in 17<sup>th</sup>-century Lutheran dogmatics to more recent appropriations following David Buttrick’s redeployment of the term in 1987. Jacobsen shows how divergent definitions and approaches depend on whether the modes of reflection are “dogmatic,” “practical-theological,” or “constructive.”

If for his part Jacobsen prefers a homiletical theology that is “both practical and constructive theology by virtue of reflecting on the gospel in connection to the hearers” (39), McClure places the emphasis primarily on its “constructive” task as a “theology of communication” rooted in the Liturgy of the Word, but not confined to it (70). He brings forward philosophically articulated communication theories, such as those of Roland Barthes, Paul Ricoeur, and Walter Benjamin to illumine how preaching transforms elements of human communication to “make them adequate to the larger theological task of human–divine communication” (56).

By contrast, Powery advocates a “Pentecostalization of Homiletical Theology.” By lifting up Acts 2:1-13 for close reading, Powery’s essay elides into a sermon on the dogmatic priority of divine agency in human proclamation, the divine giftedness of pneumatic speech, and the Spirit as incarnational provider of an understandable word in a particular culture or context. He concludes by calling for the correlative responses of invocatory prayer as essential for preaching, of cultural embodiment in preaching, and of “hospitable conversation that is inclusive of many tongues” (82).

McKenzie, who has spent much of her academic career exploring the homiletical possibilities in Wisdom traditions, proposes “Homiletical Theology as a Sapiential Hermeneutic.” With Jacobsen, she accents its “practical and constructive” tasks, since “homiletical theology is the exercise of practical wisdom” (88). Thus, the emphasis is on the priority of prudential reasoning, generatively modeled by a preacher-sage, but reciprocally embodied by the community as a whole in faithfully confronting life’s moral complexities.

As practical wisdom, Pasquarello finds the orienting literature of homiletical theology not in the sagacious sayings and poetry of the Bible, but in its “foundational narratives” culminating in the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is these privileged narratives that are humanly rehearsed and divinely actualized within the liturgical assembly. That this traditional

Reformation construal can lead to practical wisdom, Pasquarello finds illustrated in the anti-Nazi witness of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. He argues that Bonhoeffer's ecclesiology, identifying the visible church as the sociological embodiment of Jesus Christ today, identifies the context of preaching and the impulse for mission over against cultural co-optations.

The collection concludes with discussions of method. Allen identifies homiletical theology as intentional reflection at every stage in the spiral movement of sermonic construction, so that preaching is an interpretive work of the reflective and self-reflective theological practitioner in dialogue with the experience and theology of the congregation. Similarly, Stricklen Eisenlohr declares, "*Most simply, homiletic [sic] theology is a way of thinking theologically through the preparation of any given sermon*" (160). The difference is that Allen's spiral movement embraces not only sermonic *preparation*, but also "the moment of preaching" itself and "the congregation's response to the sermon afterward" (136). Thus, Allen's feedback loop potentially engenders and constructively tilts toward fresh theological discoveries.

In the compass of this brief review it is difficult to summarize fairly or assess responsibly the various, perhaps incommensurate, viewpoints coexisting in this volume. Those who think theology matters for preaching and preaching matters for theology can take heart by the attempts found in this volume to map their complex interplay. Likewise, those who remain puzzled or unpersuaded by the project as such can take note that there is apparently more to come.

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