

Jared E. Alcántara. *Crossover Preaching: Intercultural-Improvisational Homiletics in Conversation with Gardner C. Taylor*. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2015. 309 pages. \$32.

In his timely book, *Crossover Preaching*, Jared E. Alcántara addresses a matter of dire importance for the theological academy and the church, namely, preaching that honors difference. In light of projected demographic shifts already taking shape in North America, Alcántara convincingly makes the case that preachers need to develop (or deepen) their intercultural competencies and employ such in their preaching ministries.

Written primarily for North American preaching professors, this book posits two central claims. First, in light of the tectonic shifts taking place in North American Christianity, preachers must develop the capacity to “crossover”; that is, “to foster dispositional commitment to improvisational-intercultural proficiency as a way of being and acting” (28). Second, Alcántara argues that the unique social location and preaching style of Gardner C. Taylor models just such a “crossover homiletic.”

Following an Introduction that highlights sociological shifts on the ecclesial horizon, Alcántara’s argument unfolds over five chapters. Chapter 1 presents Taylor as a “case study” for crossover preaching, with Alcántara defending his claim that Taylor’s preaching style anticipates the needs of 21st century preaching. Chapter 2 stresses the importance of performative improvisation, highlighting such in Taylor’s preaching.

In Chapter 3, Alcántara directs the reader to contemporary developments in race theory in route to a helpful typology of African American homiletics that resists reductionism by honoring the plurivocality of this rich tradition. Alcántara’s four-fold typology includes *structuralists* (Harris, Massey, Moyd), *experimentalists* (Crawford, Mitchell—I would add Frank Thomas), *hermeneuts* (LaRue, Jones, Gilbert), and *improvisationalists* (Taylor, Forbes, King Jr.). As helpful as this typology is, Alcántara’s “survey” of African American homiletics (171) calls for expansion (no mention is made of Teresa Fry Brown, Gennifer Brooks, Otis Moss III, or Brian Blount—to name but a few).

Chapters 4 and 5 engage the work of intercultural competency and improvisation theorists, respectively. These lay the theoretical groundwork for Alcántara’s practical contributions to preaching instruction. It is in his final chapter that I find Alcántara most helpful. He offers numerous homiletical strategies for developing an intercultural-improvisational disposition in preaching students—strategies I will soon employ in my own teaching ministry.

Even as I celebrate the aim of Alcántara’s text, I find his thesis unconvincing. For theological as well as sociological reasons, homileticians must equip preaching students to respect difference in and through their preaching ministries. Regrettably, Alcántara fails to substantiate his thesis that Taylor’s intercultural-improvisational homiletic epitomizes Taylor’s contemporary importance (238). At day’s end, this is a problem of method. Alcántara does not present enough evidence of Taylor’s actual preaching to demonstrate how Taylor is the crossover preacher *sine pari*. Similarly, Alcántara does not demonstrate clearly how Taylor’s delivery style is altogether different or exceptional in comparison to other great African American preachers.

Alcántara’s text leaves me with additional concerns. First, he contends that literature on preaching and intercultural competence is “*nonexistent*,” a deficiency that his book aims to remedy (89). A case could be made, however, that the work of John McClure, Eunjoo Kim, Christine Smith, and Donna Allen provide just such a framework. Curiously, Alcántara overlooks such homiletical contributions. Second, he notes in passing that at one point Taylor’s

church had 14,000 members; but by the time Taylor retired, Concord Baptist had only 5000 members (50). By no means would I wish to challenge Taylor's homiletical significance, nor question his status as "the Prince of the *American* pulpit" (Mitchell's phrase); and yet, such attenuation raises potential questions regarding the extent of Taylor's intercultural "effectiveness." It seems that factors beyond Taylor's "negotiation of blackness" (164) merit consideration. Third, I am disturbed by Alcántara's characterization of manuscript preachers (136, 252). I would not necessarily characterize my own preaching as "crossover preaching," even less would I laud my intercultural intelligence as a paragon, but neither do I blithely regurgitate my sermon manuscript verbatim. Fourth, Alcántara is right to articulate a certain nuance in the way in which Taylor "wields blackness," but no mention is made about how Taylor wields his gender, sexuality, or other identity markers. Even more troubling is the implicit claim that to be an "effective" preacher—to *crossover* like Taylor—is to assimilate one's thinking and speaking to the dominant culture. This ignores the fact that the onus of responsibility has been placed historically upon men and women of color to "crossover" to hegemonic modes of discourse, discourses that are often resistant to liberation.

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