

O. Wesley Allen, Jr. *Preaching in the Era of Trump*. St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2017. 117 pages. \$11.

The election of Donald Trump on November 9, 2016, was met with a salvo of questions from Christian ministers and laity alike dumbfounded by the prospect of finding something to say in the aftermath. “How could this have happened?” “What do we do now?” “How can I preach when I am so overwhelmed and devastated by the results of this election?” Fortunately, Wes Allen immediately set to the task of tackling these questions and produced a much-needed handbook for preaching in this new era.

The first half of the book is a series of essays exploring how our nation arrived at this point. Like a physician diagnosing a very sick patient, Allen explains the confluence of conditions that have led to the morally septic state of the body politic. From postmodernism taken to its chaotic extremes, to the hypocritical endorsement of Trump by most Republican Christians, to the virulent divisiveness between straight, white Christians and all those deemed “other” (and thus inferior, or, worse, dangerous), the preexisting conditions of American society now seem to have made Trump’s rise inevitable.

Chapters 5 and 6 remind us of the need to avoid being pulled into the funnel of hatred that has been characteristic of the Trump regime. The title of Chapter 5 may cause some wincing, but is an important reminder: “Love Trumps Hate, But Only if We Love Trump.” Allen is not speaking of some kind of sentimental love, however. Rather, he works with Martin Luther King, Jr.’s and Gustavo Gutiérrez’s understanding of love – that which resists participation in oppression, and thus works to free both the oppressor and the oppressed. Chapter 6 outlines what will be necessary for “making the church great again” in this ethically bereft time, and the role preaching must have in such a monumental task.

In the effort not to demonize and drive away Trump supporters within our congregations, Allen encourages “approaching difficult subjects in a hospitable manner – inviting hearers into the sermons as honored guests to converse about the topic instead of using the topic as a weapon against them . . .” (20). However, in the wake of incidents like the KKK and neo-Nazi march in Charlottesville that resulted in one death and many injuries, as well as countless other acts of violence and hate crimes since the election, Allen’s position raises an uncomfortable question. Are we to be hospitable to those in our congregations who are affiliated with the KKK or fascists? Are advocates of hatred and violence really to be treated as honored guests? As a lesbian colleague of mine reminded me, “You can’t expect me to be hospitable to someone who wants me silenced, stripped of my rights, sent away, or dead.” So where do we as preachers draw the line of hospitality? At what point does a congregation say to an unapologetically aggressive hate-spewing parishioner, “This behavior is not welcome in this church”?

The second half of the book deals with these questions by providing strategies for addressing four specific issues that have come to the fore during the era of Trump – race, gender, LGBT issues, and Islam. Each of these four chapters begins with lists of examples of the ways in which Trump, his staff, and supporters have engaged in speech and actions that threaten vulnerable populations. The remainder of each chapter consists of a brief analysis of the issue, and helpful suggestions of ways to approach these topics in sermons.

Reading the book less than a year out from the election with the Trump administration embroiled in scandal and potential accusations of treason, one may wonder (hope?) if *Preaching in the Era of Trump* will become obsolete sooner rather than later. But regardless of the length of Trump’s term, the consequences of the 2016 campaign and Trump’s presidency will have long-

lasting effects. Allen's book will, unfortunately, remain required reading for the foreseeable future.

If nothing else, the book captures an historical moment in the homiletic world where the existential threats to historically marginalized and oppressed peoples were so urgent, Allen's speedily-written book was both necessary and useful. Regardless of the historical markers, the charge to clergy to avoid quietism in the face of injustice is timeless: "We cannot claim to serve a God of justice and be silent about such things in the pulpit" (25). Indeed, prophetic preaching will be all the more necessary as our nation attempts to recover from this era. Ideally, the church will rise to the task of facilitating healing. And clergy who function as public servants of moral and ethical re-centering will find Allen's book to be a valuable tool to encourage and equip preachers for their prophetic task.

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