

Bruce Barber. *Lanterns at Dusk: Preaching after Modernity*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2016. 228 pages. \$28.

Australian theologian and preacher Bruce Barber begins his work on preaching after modernity with a vigorous nod toward Friederich Nietzsche. He acknowledges, with Nietzsche's parabolic help in *The Gay Science*, the absurd difficulty of a madman lighting a lantern at noon day to find God. This disorienting parable helps name the very death of God impulses that surface in modernity's wake. Barber as a theologian is clearly not enamored with modernity. Like many a postliberal theologian, he is concerned that modernity and today's culture have vitiated Christian faith in the name of relevance, a flattening of truth, and a valorizing of privatized religion in the name of secularism. Barber pushes back against these modern tendencies by noting the gathering darkness of what is now the end of the day of modernity. The question in the title is the one that really governs the homiletical-theological reflections and several sermons that make up the book: How can preaching be a site for carrying "lanterns at dusk," preaching *after* modernity?

The first quarter of the book is devoted to careful theological work. Barber spends some time here considering how theology and culture relate specifically in different formations: pre-modern, modern, and post-modern. The most compelling insights come later in this first section, in chapter 6: "Three Questions for Preachers After Modernity." In this section the questions focus on the hearers (Who might they become?), the gospel (Where is reality found?) and the Bible (Who is Doing What to Whom?). In reviewing these questions Barber turns modernist conceptions of preaching on their heads and thus invites preachers to think more deeply about our work. The first two questions yield for the most part postliberal responses; the third advocates a way thinking about the Bible that the new hermeneutic of a Fuchs or Ebeling would likely endorse—with a special emphasis on the text's priority of explaining us, rather than our explaining the text.

The sermons, which make up 75% of the book, exemplify Barber's approach fairly well. Barber is quite willing in his preaching to goad hearers out of unreflective modern presuppositions. With some frequency, atheistic critics take the stage—though in most cases (Hawkins and Hitchens) they do so as a kind of foil to Barber's theology. The sermons themselves tend to work from the lectionary and often move thematically across lectionary texts to make Barber's theological case. I found the sermons "It All Happens in the Sermon," "Dry Bones Living," and "Jesus Means Freedom" were the most splendid examples of his overall vision. I also appreciated his careful thought about the apocalyptic nature of early Christianity as a way of thinking about the new thing God is doing—especially well done in the final two sermons of the collection "God's City and Ours" and "The Cosmic Drama." On occasion, some of the sermons are lacking in oral quality—they end up placing demands on hearers that go beyond the challenge of intellectual depth alone.

I am not convinced that a lot of new ground is broken here homiletically. There have been more than just a few books inviting preachers to think and preach beyond modernism. At the same time, I appreciate the depth with which Barber wrestles with the issues in Part 2: "The Word and Its World: A Theological Inventory." I think particularly here homiletical theology is enriched by his work. In this way, in particular Barber can help us to become better preacher theologians. In that respect, *Lanterns at Dusk* is quite illuminating.

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