

Alexander Deeg, Walter Homolka and Heinz-Güther Schöttler, eds. *Preaching in Judaism and Christianity: Encounters and Developments from Biblical Times to Modernity*. Studia Judaica. Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 2008. 247 pages, \$118.

It is rare to encounter a book that breaks new ground in an academic discipline, religious practice and interfaith relations. This exceptional book does so for the field of homiletics, the practice of preaching and Jewish-Christian relations.

The essays included in this volume were presented at the first international conference on “Preaching in Judaism and Christianity” held in Bamberg, Germany in March 2007. Jointly organized by the Abraham Geiger College at the University of Potsdam, the Faculty of Catholic Theology at the University of Bamberg and the Faculty of Protestant Theology at the University of Erlangen, the conference included scholars, rabbis and pastors from several European nations, Israel and the U.S. As noted in the Introduction, the meeting did not seek to develop a common or consensual Jewish-Christian homiletic but “to ask questions together about the history of Jewish and Christian homiletics and their interrelation, about the relevance of the sermon today, about the relationship of preaching and liturgy, and about the hermeneutics of sacred texts” (4). Furthermore, preaching in the aftermath of the Holocaust demands critical self-reflection on the part of Christians who need to recognize and fairly represent Judaism in their preaching. As a means of reframing the relationship, in the Introduction Dr. Alexander Deeg draws on the biblical figures of Jacob and Esau to represent the inseparability of Jewish-Christian relations and our relationship as “homiletic twins” who have much to learn from one another (3).

Although readers will no doubt find some essays more helpful or interesting than others, scholarly insights and practical wisdom are imparted in equal measure throughout this collection. [Contributors include both Jewish and Christian scholars associated with the sponsoring universities as well as Hebrew Union College in Jerusalem, Christian-Albrechts-University in Kiel, Leo Baeck College in London, Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, Münster University, and the University of Vienna.] Most essays are followed by critical comments from a respondent who carefully probes the author’s arguments and/or continues the discussion in helpful ways.

Nearly two-thirds of the essays explore the rich and complex history of preaching in Judaism and Christianity from hellenistic and rabbinic times to the Middle Ages and the 19th-20th centuries. Among these, Prof. Dr. Günter Stemberger discusses the elusive quest for specific sermon forms during the early rabbinic period. In his chapter “The Derashah in Rabbinic Times,” Stemberger recognizes that most midrashic “homilies” are built not on the Torah reading alone but also on a prophetic reading, suggesting the underlying unity of the Hebrew Bible as the centerpiece of exegetical reflection in worship. In “The Sermon as an Invention of Hellenistic Judaism,” Prof. Dr. Folker Siegert asserts that among the various religions of antiquity, only Jewish worship demanded rhetorical ability adapted from Greek hermeneutics and rhetoric in order to explain and communicate the meaning of Scripture, a practice that was readily adopted by early Christians. Prof. Dr. Marc Saperstein underscores the “creative competition” between Judaism and Christianity in his essay “Medieval Jewish Preaching and Christian Homiletics.” Turning to the 20th century, Prof. Dr. Yehoyad Amir’s essay, “Towards Mutual Listening: The Notion of Sermon in Franz Rosenzweig’s Philosophy,” explores

how the philosopher teaches the community to listen through sermons that provide “a bridge between worship and learning, the emotional and the intellectual” (130).

Other essays explore more recent challenges and interests. In “Preaching the Hebrew Bible: A Christian Perspective,” Prof. Dr. Heinz-Günther Schöttler distinguishes between “prospective” and “retro-spective” approaches to the interpretation of Scripture and advocates the construction of “a theology which is located in the ‘gap’ between promise and fulfillment, a Christology in the ‘lack of fulfillment,’ which often is painful” (165). Similarly, “Jewish Hermeneutics and Christian Preaching: Scriptural Hermeneutics and its Homiletical Consequences” by Dr. Deeg and Prof. Dr. Martin Nicol differentiates between Jewish *scriptural hermeneutics* (a meticulous reading of Scripture with the expectation of finding “everything” needed within it) and Christian *metascriptural* approaches to preaching (reducing the plurality of meanings to one meaning that is applied to the world “outside” the text). As an Anabaptist who has critiqued and practiced various forms of congregational hermeneutics in worship, I found Prof. Dr. Uta Pohl-Patalong’s assessment of both the strengths and weaknesses of Bibliolog to be helpful.

It is surprising that the essays exploring Jewish medieval preaching did not touch on the commentaries and sermons of Nachmanides and disappointing that the Jewish mystical tradition of Hasidism is mentioned only in passing. Given the positive and extensive influence of the mystical tradition in the teaching and preaching of Judaism, I hope the next conference will invite consideration of these influences as well.

Nevertheless, I highly recommend this volume because it probes the rich and complex history of preaching in Judaism and Christianity and also suggests points of mutual challenge and reciprocity. Many of the essays will generate lively and worthwhile discussions in preaching or interfaith classes. Nearly all offer insights and inspiration for preachers who seek a deeper encounter with Scripture in Jewish and Christian worship.

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