

Otis Moss, III. *Blue Note Preaching in a Post-Soul World: Finding Hope in an Age of Despair*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2015. 127 pages. \$18.

Intentionally written in an aural style so as to feel as close as possible to the Beecher lectures, which served as its inspiration, this book sits stylistically as a hybrid or as Moss might say, a “creole cross” between lecture and sermon. Moss includes cues (like “Can I get a witness?”) that many authors might remove from a printed version. As a nod to the digital age in which we live, Moss also includes a QR code at the end of each chapter that when scanned by the proper app on a smart phone will take the reader directly to the video of that particular lecture. These stylistic elements are important to foreground because Moss models through his lecture the kind of preaching that he believes has the ability to speak to this current generation, a “360 [degree] liturgical narrative” (57) that engages the congregation on multiple levels of knowing.

The heart of Moss’ work is a call for “Blue Note” preaching that takes seriously the sadness and tragedy of our world while also creatively imagining hope in the midst of this blues. Moss grounds this work in sources not always privileged in the academy. Demonstrating a broad familiarity with both classic homiletic literature and American literary traditions, Moss beautifully dances back and forth between authors and homileticians as epistemological sources for his work, allowing August Wilson and Zora Neale Hurston to share equal footing with Nora Tubbs Tisdale and Frank Thomas.

Chapter one begins by describing the current homiletical landscape as one that is found quite lacking of prophets. Moss suggests that the ability to deal with the blues of life has gone missing from much of preaching and that this ability to speak the blues must be recovered in order to offer real hope. Relying heavily on Wilson and Hurston, Moss names the call of the preacher as the ability “to stare in the darkness and speak the Blues with authority and witness the work of God in darkness and even in the abyss” (9). Chapter two shifts to a discussion of the hermeneutic necessary to preach the Blue Note Gospel. The Blue Note preacher must, according to Moss, understand the inherent blues in the Biblical text and “read the Bible with a Blue Note lens” (27). This hermeneutic merges artistic imagination with contextualization in order to understand a text that was written by those that were oppressed. Chapter three situates Blue Note preaching as the kind of preaching that is translatable to the postmodern and post soul world. Blue Note preaching then is the kind of preaching that can speak to both the “analog” and “digital” generations by using different ways of knowing. Moss suggests that the four pillars of hip hop (graffiti, breakdancing, Djing, and rapping) offer a way of thinking about both preaching and liturgy that speak to the many different kinds of people found within any congregation. The merging of both method and generation is done through what Moss calls a “Jazz methodology” as individuals are allowed to have their own solos while still playing together as a group. One of the most vivid examples is found within this third lecture, when Moss has two musicians play “Amazing Grace,” first one on an acoustic guitar and then the other on an electric guitar. Then without any rehearsal they play the song together, modeling how different genres and generations can improvise together when guided by the Spirit. The book concludes with four sermons preached by Moss that exemplify this Blue Note homiletic.

This text works quite well in concert with Luke Powery’s *Spirit Speech: Lament and Celebration in Preaching* as a corrective to the current trajectory of prosperity laden preaching found in black preaching traditions and more generally across the homiletical spectrum. Both authors call for a serious consideration of the reality of people’s existence before moving to joy

and celebration. I also hear echoes of Tom Troeger's *So That All Might Know: Preaching that Engages the Entire Congregation* that champions the use of multiple intelligences in preaching.

The Beecher Lectures have again called forth excellent work from one of the world's most renowned preachers. I appreciate how these lectures both model a merging of preaching and lecturing without sacrificing academic depth and how Moss is able to make these lectures accessible to both practitioners and academics. By cultivating an experience of this work instead of simply reading a book, Moss embodies the best of the Black prophetic tradition, inviting all to come along and hear the blues.

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