

Scott Black Johnston, Ted A. Smith, and Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, eds. *Questions Preachers Ask: Essays in Honor of Thomas G. Long*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2016. 224 pages. \$20.

In honor of the many contributions Thomas G. Long has made to the field of homiletics, three of his former students and colleagues have put together a collection of essays that address a subject to which he has devoted most of his career: providing resources for pastors and equipping them to be better preachers. Because of his interest in addressing questions preachers ask, the editors decided to poll a diverse group of about thirty preachers asking them what were some of the most pressing questions on their minds about the practice of preaching. Each chapter begins with a question selected from this pool and then responds to that question. The book clusters the questions into five sections: Bible, Theology, Changing Congregational Contexts, Church and Culture, and Hopeful Signs. The contributors include Gail R. O'Day, Alyce M. McKenzie, Barbara Brown Taylor, Ted A. Smith, Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, Anna Carter Florence, Richard Lischer, John S. McClure, Teresa Fry Brown, Sally A Brown and Thomas Lynch. I will highlight one or two chapters from each of the five sections.

In Part I, "Bible," in the opening chapter, Gail O'Day responds to the question, "How do we preach in a time when Christians are biblically illiterate?" (3). Her response is to ask a counter question: "What level of literacy is necessary for us to effectively preach and proclaim the gospel? Is there a gold standard?" (3). Does effective proclaiming of the word hinge on the level of knowledge of the listeners?

Alyce McKenzie traces the development of sermon form in chapter two and Long's influence on that development. She concludes by proposing what she calls "scenic" preaching which is a sermon that uses narrative plot, breaking the story into bit-sized pieces (23). The preacher teaches, inspires, and encourages out of each scene.

Part II responds to questions around the topic of theology. Barbara Brown Taylor responds to the question, "How do we preach in a way that affirms Christian theology while also honoring the insights of other faith traditions?" (43). She does so by delving into the place of the religious stranger in the Bible (e.g., Melchizedek, Ruth, Jethro, Cyrus, the Syrophoenician woman, the Samaritan leper, and the Good Samaritan). She maintains that interacting with people from other faiths "strengthens Christian witness instead of weakening it" (52).

In the opening chapter of Part III, "Changing Congregational Contexts," Anna Carter Florence probes the question, "How do we proclaim good news to young adults who are on the margins of church or have left it?" (91). She looks at Paul's encounter with the Athenians in Acts 17:16–34. Paul became a student of their culture, found common ground, and spoke out of that common ground.

Part IV focuses on the theme of "Church and Culture." In chapter nine, John McClure takes on the question, "How do we preach effectively to a people who are used to sound bites, Twitter, and a visual entertainment culture?" (113). How do you create a real sense of community in a social networking environment? McClure springboards off of Long's "Out of the Loop" essay, published in 2008, where Long develops the idea of episodic preaching. McClure speaks of the episodic elements of the Social Networking Services and shows in a positive way how their episodic quality can enhance the community life of the church (124).

Part V, entitled "Hopeful Signs," includes a chapter by Sally Brown devoted to the question, "Where do we find signs of hope for preaching today?" After surveying the homiletic landscape and describing what is going on in preaching with different traditions (including: Pentecostals, Evangelicals, Mainline Protestant, African American, the Roman Catholic homily,

Korean-American, Mexican-American, etc.), she offers three promising signs of hope on the horizon: the Internet as a useful learning environment, the riches of African American preaching, and popular rhetorical forms that are culturally embraced, like TED Talks.

These contributors do not intend for the responses to the questions to be the last word but for them to generate further conversation. This book exemplifies practical theology at its best, grounded in the lived experiences of preachers, informed by the theology of Scripture, and reflected on by those who have their feet in both worlds. As such, it truly honors the legacy of Tom Long.

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