

## New Approaches for Old Testament Preaching

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**Abstract:** *Despite numerous developments within homiletics over the last several decades, those who preach the Old Testament often find themselves caught in a 19th century historical-Christological binary. This article analyzes five Old Testament sermons drawn from contemporary homiletic works as potential approaches for freeing the preacher from such a binary. While each sermon presents a distinct option for Old Testament preaching, all five share a common interest in challenging hermeneutics of power, re-envisioning Christology, and portraying the Old Testament as a word that speaks today. These three foci help shape an alternative and constructive approach for the development and evaluation of Old Testament sermons today.*

Recently I had the opportunity to take and teach “Preaching the Old Testament” in significantly different settings—the first as a graduate student at a large mainline seminary in the Southeastern United States, and the second as a visiting instructor at a German theological school. In both locations I was surprised to discover that the students seemed to share a working hermeneutic assumption: preaching the Old Testament demands either the preaching of Christ or a focus on the historical background of the text. What is striking here is not that those who have begun to reflect on the practices of preaching in the church and in introductory courses were somehow unaware of homiletical developments after the 19th century. Rather, what is surprising is that *despite* some homiletical education and reflection, two of the dominant choices from that era—namely allegorical Christology and historical criticism—continue to shape the creative space of inchoate practitioners of preaching. This suggests that homileticians may need to dedicate more time and attention to the subject of preaching the Old Testament. And, further, we would do well to lift up some new approaches that better stretch students beyond the historical/Christological binary.

In speaking of new approaches I am not referring to chronological location. While most of the sermons examined in this article come from the last decade, the roots of these approaches date back to well before the 19th century.<sup>1</sup> They are not new within the hermeneutic/homiletic realm of possibility. Rather, they are new in the sense that except for Walter Brueggemann, all the scholars examined in this article are not typically recognized as contributing to the American conversation about OT homiletics. While there are many fine insights from books written

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<sup>1</sup> e.g. Brueggemann locates his approach in the Old Testament itself, Campbell inverts a form that dates to at least the patristic age, Turman employs a homiletic from the earliest known slave preaching, Deeg draws on rabbinic Jewish hermeneutics, and Kim locates the roots of her approach in Confucianism, Buddhism, and Shamanism.

explicitly about preaching the Old Testament,<sup>2</sup> what has been neglected is attention to the way works dedicated to other homiletical foci can inform the preaching of the Old Testament.

This article analyzes sermons from five such foci: preaching as testimony (Walter Brueggemann), cultural-linguistic and “holy fools” preaching (Charles Campbell), womanist preaching (Ebony Marshall Turman), dialogical preaching (Alexander Deeg), and Asian American preaching (Eunjoo Kim). This list is suggestive. Many more approaches could and should be analyzed for the insights they offer for preaching the Old Testament. These approaches were selected because they demonstrate a distinct form, theology, and OT presentation that corresponds to their respective homiletical foci. I have labeled these approaches to preaching the Old Testament: Christological-Allusion, Inverted Typology, Scriptural Mash-up, Intertextual Dialogue, and Transcontextual Spiral.

### **Christological Allusion—Walter Brueggemann, “Power for Life Flown in By a Bird”<sup>3</sup>**

While Walter Brueggemann is perhaps the most obvious source for an Old Testament homiletic, his approach to preaching the Old Testament in this sermon deserves more attention than it has been given. Here Brueggemann recounts the story and surrounding context of Elijah reviving the son of the widow of Zarephath. He also narrates this biblical account within the purview of Ash Wednesday, noting that the day is the beginning of Lent—a season leading to Easter.<sup>4</sup> Brueggemann connects this progression to the scriptural progression where Elijah spends a season fed by ravens before raising the widow’s son. Because Elijah is free of the “royal junk food,” he is able to receive from God “energy and courage and freedom and authority”—in short, “power to transform life.”<sup>5</sup> So, too, Christians in Lent seek “another diet, another nourishment, another loyalty,” as we long for the life-transforming gift of God.<sup>6</sup>

What makes this sermon deserving of attention is the way Brueggemann homiletically demonstrates elements from his *Theology of the Old Testament* (1997) and *Finally Comes the Poet* (1989). First, Brueggemann invites the congregation to reflect on *one* piece of Israel’s core testimony.<sup>7</sup> The goal of this kind of OT preaching is not to say everything about scripture or to announce all of the good news that could be mentioned. Rather, the goal is to describe the text in

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<sup>2</sup> c.f. Rein Bos, *We Have Heard that God is With You: Preaching the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2008); Elizabeth Achtemeier, *Preaching from the Old Testament* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1989); Ron Allen & John Holbert, *Holy Root, Holy Branches: Christian Preaching from the Old Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995); Fleming Rutledge, *And God Spoke to Abraham: Preaching from the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011); Patrick Miller, *Stewards of the Mysteries of God: Preaching the Old Testament—and the New* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2013); Ellen Davis, *Wondrous Depth: Preaching the Old Testament* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005) and *Preaching the Luminous Word: Biblical Sermons and Homiletical Essays* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016).

<sup>3</sup> Walter Brueggemann, “Power for Life Flown in By a Bird (1 Kgs 17:17-24),” in *The Threat of Life: Sermons on Pain, Power, and Weakness* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 41–46. This text is based on a sermon Brueggemann preached on Ash Wednesday at Columbia Theological Seminary Chapel.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>7</sup> Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997). I classify 1 Kings 17 as core testimony rather than counter, unsolicited, or embodied testimony. However, Brueggemann includes a note of counter testimony in his sermon when he refers to Elijah’s accusation against God in 1 Kings 17:20 (Brueggemann, “Power for Life,” 43).

specific, detailed, honest, and evocative terms. Often Brueggemann's sermon accomplishes this task via intentional anachronism. The drought in Israel is an ancient "energy crisis"; the widow's son functions as a sort of "welfare system."<sup>8</sup> The prophet comes as an "uncredentialed" minister<sup>9</sup> to serve and to offer an alternative to a dysfunctional regime.<sup>10</sup> Far from simply equating Israel in 1 Kings 17 with Georgia in the late 20th century, Brueggemann's approach invites the congregation to imagine living in Elijah's world, and then to envision Elijah and Elijah's God living in our own world. As Anna Carter Florence explains, Brueggemann's kind of testimony invites us to "hear" the biblical text, "welcome it and host it in our lives and bodies."<sup>11</sup>

Second, Brueggemann's articulation of the good news evokes insights from *Finally Comes the Poet*. In that book, he argues that poetry's power is a "shattering, evocative speech that breaks fixed conclusions and presses us always toward new, dangerous, imaginative possibilities."<sup>12</sup> This poetic speech is prophetic. Those who know Brueggemann's work would not be surprised that in this sermon he challenges the powers of the world as unjust, inept, and corrupting. Such powers cannot enact life; they cannot do what God can do.

But it is precisely at the moment of articulating God's alternative world that Brueggemann's sermon surprises. Here he interrupts the dominant *religious* conclusion. Never once does Brueggemann mention Christ. The good news is not populated with "Jesus," though Mark 5:35-43 was read in the worship service. Instead, Brueggemann follows the language of the text, speaking about "God" and "Yahweh." This move is not the result of the overly-attenuated gaze of a Hebrew Bible scholar, nor is this a mere theological oversight. Brueggemann is concerned, as he states in *Finally Comes the Poet*, that the "gospel is too readily heard and taken for granted, as though it contained no unsettling news and no unwelcome threat."<sup>13</sup> He is concerned, as he states in his sermon, with the way "we are all seduced, domesticated, and bought off" religiously.<sup>14</sup> So, in a religious context where every scripture finds (too facilely) its end in the Gospels and where every question is answered (too banally) with Jesus, Brueggemann keeps "Jesus" out of the manuscript.

This is not to say that he keeps Jesus out of the sermon. The occasion is Ash Wednesday, and, as Brueggemann acknowledges, that day points already to Easter. Furthermore, though Christ is not named, Brueggemann consistently alludes to the Christ story. The widow, he says, had "one thing, her beloved son."<sup>15</sup> And, Brueggemann calls this dead-now-living son a "new birthed boy."<sup>16</sup> The good news he proclaims is that "God holds the power for life."<sup>17</sup> And this gospel, Brueggemann announces, comes as "new news...carried by a human agent."<sup>18</sup>

The combined effect of Brueggemann's poetic use of omission and allusion is that Christ appears as a sort of elephant in the room. Christ is never acknowledged but glaringly present.

<sup>8</sup> Brueggemann, "Power for Life," 42.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>11</sup> Anna Carter Florence, *Preaching as Testimony* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 76.

<sup>12</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Finally Comes the Poet* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 6.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>14</sup> Brueggemann, "Power for Life," 45.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

Brueggemann's poetic/prophetic voice "evokes new possibility in the listening assembly."<sup>19</sup> In essence, Brueggemann assumes that each Christian listener will make a sermonic turn to Jesus in their own minds. He seeks to unsettle the listener's gospel assumptions by forcing his congregation to read what God has done in Jesus through this account of what God did in Elijah. In so doing, Brueggemann offers a deep look into the text and a fresh hearing for the good news.

### **Inverted Typology—Charles Campbell, *Societas Homiletica* Sermon<sup>20</sup>**

Charles Campbell reflects in his sermon on a verse where God rouses the prophet Isaiah: "Morning by morning he wakens—wakens my ear to listen as those who are taught."<sup>21</sup> Campbell describes Isaiah's experience, initially ignoring source and redaction criticism to portray a long and turbulent life of prophetic preaching. This he compares with Martin Luther King, Jr.'s experience of growing "bone tired." Campbell further connects Isaiah (and MLK) with the prophetic weariness shared by others during the *Societas* meeting as they wrestled with immigration, climate change, and the injustices of global economic systems. Then, as now, "God calls: 'Wake up! Wake up! I have a word for you today.' And some days it's affirmation, and some days it's provocation, some days it's migration, and other days it's anticipation. Always a specific word for a specific time and a specific place—*this day*."<sup>22</sup> However, Campbell acknowledges that this word is rarely accepted easily. Even the good news of "Second Isaiah"<sup>23</sup> and of Jesus is rejected as unsettling.

At this point one might expect the preacher to lean in to the turn to Christ. For instance, in *Preaching Jesus* Campbell argues that the cultural-linguistic world of the Old Testament is connected to the Church through the story of Jesus.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, Campbell appears to envision this connection as unidirectional: "[I]n typological preaching the move is from the story of Israel through Jesus Christ to the Church."<sup>25</sup> Perhaps playing on exceptions from his earlier work, Campbell employs this unidirectional, typological homiletic in the first two-thirds of his sermon.

But then he changes tack. Campbell concludes his sermon by inverting the typological connection as he seeks to empower the congregation to continue their work against the powers.<sup>26</sup> Thus, while Jesus is *one of several* justifications for the weary prophet type in Campbell's sermon, Isaiah is the *fulfillment* of the type. Inverted typology recognizes, first, that an obsessive Christo-telic focus can miss—or at least minimize—the most natural connection that a congregation might have with scripture. In this case it is Isaiah, Campbell proclaims, who is the

<sup>19</sup> Brueggemann, *Finally Comes the Poet*, 4.

<sup>20</sup> Charles Campbell, "Isaiah 50:4-9a," *Societas Homiletica*, Stellenbosch, South Africa, March 16, 2016. This sermon will be available through a forthcoming *Societas* Papers publication. My citations are drawn from the manuscript for publication.

<sup>21</sup> Isa 50:4b (NRSV).

<sup>22</sup> Campbell, "Isaiah 50:4-9a."

<sup>23</sup> Note Campbell's use of source and redaction criticism here.

<sup>24</sup> Campbell, *Preaching Jesus: New Directions for Homiletics in Hans Frei's Postliberal Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006) 254-5.

<sup>25</sup> Campbell, *Preaching Jesus*, 254.

<sup>26</sup> Campbell preaches: "Our persistent and unmanageable God keeps on *interrupting*, keeps on *unsettling*, keeps on *waking us up* to preach another day" ("Isaiah 50:4-9a," emphasis added). Compare these highlighted verbs with Campbell's counsel for confronting the powers in *The Word Before the Powers: An Ethic of Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002).

model for “all of us who take up the preaching office.”<sup>27</sup> Isaiah, when faced with the challenges of prophetic ministry, does not give into our temptations to either “roll over and go back to sleep,” or trudge forward “for another dreary day of preaching.” Nor does Isaiah take on the mantle of the suffering savior. Instead, he “meditates. He prays”:

The Lord helps me, therefore I have not been disgraced; The Lord helps me, therefore I have set my face like flint, and I know I shall not be put to shame; the one who vindicates me is near. Who will contend with me? Let us stand up together. Who are my adversaries? Let them confront me. It is the Lord who helps me; Who will declare me guilty? Amen.<sup>28</sup>

Campbell’s use of Isaiah’s prayer points to a second function of inverted typology. It demonstrates to the congregation that the Old Testament is, in itself, a significant part of the Christian cultural-linguistic world. In *Preaching Fools*, Campbell and Johan Cilliers assert, “Whenever we are tempted to settle down into secure, rigid identities, the preaching fool holds up the murky, fragmented mirror before our eyes to remind us that we are always on the way.”<sup>29</sup> Here Campbell lifts up Isaiah as a holy fool, praying while on the way. Without rejecting Israel, requiring Christ, resorting to individualistic pietism, or otherwise rigidly securing the text, Campbell shows that *Isaiah’s* words are worth emulating. And, by twice enacting the prophet’s rhetoric near the end of his sermon, Campbell seeks to form his hearers in this culture and language of prayer so that today’s prophetic preachers may be empowered like Isaiah to get out of bed, take a deep breath, tend their wounds, and go out to preach another day.<sup>30</sup>

### Scriptural Mash-up—Eboni Marshall Turman, “Hagar’s Tears”<sup>31</sup>

Eboni Turman invites the congregation into Hagar’s story, moving from the heat of a North Carolina summer to the heat of the desert of Beer-Sheba. Turman locates Hagar in this desert—a slave facing gender, ethnic, and economic bias. She is a “poor woman of African descent.”<sup>32</sup> Here Turman embodies, homiletically, womanist theology and critique.<sup>33</sup> Abraham, the “slaver,” yet also the man chosen by God, has sent Hagar and Ishmael away, per Sarah’s request. About this act, Turman observes, “Sometimes even God’s people are wrong—dead wrong—especially when it comes to race.”<sup>34</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Campbell “Isaiah 50:4-9a.”

<sup>28</sup> This is Campbell’s rephrasing of Isa 50:7-9a.

<sup>29</sup> Charles Campbell and Johann Cilliers, *Preaching Fools: The Gospel as a Rhetoric of Folly* (Waco, TX: Baylor 2012), 169.

<sup>30</sup> These last lines are taken from the closing paragraph of “Isaiah 50:4-9a.”

<sup>31</sup> Sermon on Gen 21:8-21, preached at Duke chapel on June 22, 2014, <https://youtu.be/RPy-c1aLTN0?t=36m38s>, accessed 8/24/2017.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> See Eboni Marshall Turman, *Toward a Womanist Ethic of Incarnation: Black Bodies, the Black Church, and the Council of Chalcedon* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013). As Turman preaches, one recognizes that Hagar and Ishmael are problematic bodies for Abraham and Sarah. They are also problematic bodies for the Church—bodies that especially challenge an uncritical white, male, cisgendered theology.

<sup>34</sup> Turman, “Hagar’s Tears.”

But in the midst of this wrong Turman looks for God’s intervention. She recounts a litany of moments where, despite human brokenness, “God had a plan.” So, Abraham was wrong, but God worked something good anyway. David was a rapist, but God led him to pray, “Create in me a clean heart.” The widow at Zarephath did not have cake, but God had a plan. Esther was scared for her life, but she confronted the king. Mary “came up out of the ghetto,” but we know what good can come out of Nazareth. Jesus lived and died on that “old rugged cross...but I love that old cross where the dearest and best for a world of lost sinners was slain.”<sup>35</sup> This Old Testament, New Testament, and Christian cultural mash-up<sup>36</sup> is meant to punctuate the point: “God can take our worst and turn it into God’s best.”<sup>37</sup>

Here the gospel—the good news—is found in many distinct iterations and locations. Gennifer Brooks argues in *Good News Preaching* that “The good news preacher willingly delves into *all of scripture* to unearth the enlivening, sustaining presence of God in the past, connects it with the present lives of the people, and presents it as future promise and hope.”<sup>38</sup> What Turman proclaims is a past, present, and future (non-linear) mash-up. She shows how God enacts God’s contingency plan for what “man means for evil.”<sup>39</sup> Near the close of her sermon, Turman further announces transformative good news of God’s intervention, referring in quick succession to Isaiah, Amos, Matthew, Isaiah, Langston Hughes, a Psalm, John, and African slave women singing “Wade in the Water.”<sup>40</sup>

It is perhaps no coincidence that a mash-up of good news ends with a spiritual. Allen Callahan notes that spirituals frequently present a hermeneutic that merges Old Testament and New Testament. “In the old Negro spirituals,” he writes, “the New does not supersede the Old. The two Testaments, Old and New, are correlated to each other...Both bear witness—eternally, equally valid witness—to what God has done and is doing in the world.”<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, spirituals—like the mash-up sections of Turman’s sermon—present a lyrical, impressionistic experience of hope in the face of death. As Luke Powery argues in his work on the spirituals, “This kind of preaching—like singing—doesn’t merely explain something; it does something.”<sup>42</sup> Thus, by use of scriptural mash-up, Turman embodies an Old Testament text as God’s ongoing, hopeful, good news for her North Carolina congregation and, especially, for the Hagers of today.

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> My use of this term is drawn from John McClure, who argues that “theological invention is a matter of stylistically layering four central authorities (tracks): Scripture, culture, theology, and reason,” (*Mashup Religion: Pop Music and Theological Invention* (Waco, TX: Baylor, 2011), 9). While Turman follows this layering in her sermon, I refer to her mash-up as “scriptural” as a way to draw focus upon the inter-testamental hermeneutic of this approach.

<sup>37</sup> Turman, “Hagar’s Tears.”

<sup>38</sup> Brooks, *Good News Preaching* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2009), 112, emphasis added. While Brooks does not envision a preacher drawing upon multiple texts in one sermon, her emphasis on finding good news in all of scripture—rather than in limited portions—provides a theological and homiletic grounding for Turman’s mash-up.

<sup>39</sup> Turman, “Hagar’s Tears.”

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Allen Callahan, *The Talking Book* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), 189. As an example, Callahan cites the spiritual, “O Mary Don’t You Weep,” where the Old Testament actually bears witness to the New Testament: “O, Mary, don’t you weep, don’t you mourn; *Pharaoh’s army got drowned*” (190).

<sup>42</sup> *Dem Dry Bones: Preaching, Death, and Hope* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 102.

### Intertextual Dialogue—Alexander Deeg, “O du fröhliche...”<sup>43</sup>

German homiletician Alexander Deeg focuses much of his research on what Christians can learn from Jewish hermeneutics.<sup>44</sup> He is a key contributor to the Jewish-Christian dialogue group KLAKE, which inspired the working group for the revised lectionary in Germany to increase Old Testament readings by 100 percent for the 2018 revision.<sup>45</sup> While Deeg largely writes about preaching the Old Testament, his Christmas Eve sermon, examined below, draws on John 3:16-21. This sermon was selected for two reasons. First, Deeg’s homiletic—and indeed each homiletic featured in this article—is not merely Old Testament homiletics. Rather they are homiletics that also impact and interpret the New Testament. Second, this particular Deeg sermon frames the Johannine gospel reading with the story of Hanukkah (c.f. 2 Mac 10:1-8). In so doing, the sermon highlights important elements of Deeg’s OT homiletic.

Deeg begins his sermon by commenting on how challenging it is in 2016 to sing the old hymn, “O du fröhliche.” With the tragic events in Aleppo, Cairo, Nice, and Berlin, and with the rise of post-factual reality-denying (“postfaktische Realitätsverweigerung”) that enabled Brexit and Donald Trump, it is difficult to sing, “O, you happy ones....”<sup>46</sup> And yet, people of God are called time and again recount “The history of the love of God, his irrational, radical love.”<sup>47</sup> Scriptures like John 3:16-21 and feasts like Christmas invite us to seek the light. They remind us, “God so loved the world that [God] does not leave us in our world... God interferes.”<sup>48</sup> At the same time, Christmas and John 3 highlight a human bent to “skotophilia,” a love of darkness.<sup>49</sup>

Where Deeg’s sermon becomes interesting for OT homiletics is when he introduces a new interlocutor to the hymn/John/Christmas conversation. Here Deeg refers to Hanukkah as a way of disrupting his congregation’s assumptions.<sup>50</sup> Deeg draws attention to the *Jewish* presence

<sup>43</sup> Alexander Deeg, “O du fröhliche... oder: Also hat Gott die Welt geliebt, dass er es auch 2016 Weihnachten werden lässt” (John 3:16–21). Preached December 24, 2016 in Nikolaikirche, Leipzig, Germany, <https://gottesdienst.theol.uni-leipzig.de/predigten/>, accessed August 28, 2017.

<sup>44</sup> For examples of his English language work, see “Word Workers: The Rabbinic and the Protestant Pastoral Office in Dialogue” in *Rabbi – Pastor – Priest: Their Roles and Profiles Through the Ages. Studia Judaica 64* (edited by Walter Homolka and Heinz-Günther Schöttler, 303–326. Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2013), and especially, “Imagination and Meticulousness: Haggadah and Halakhah in Judaism and Christian Preaching,” *Homiletic* Vol 34, No. 1, 2009. Deeg is also a co-editor for the International Journal of Homiletics (<http://ijhomiletics.org>).

<sup>45</sup> See the Konferenz Landeskirchlicher Arbeitskreise Christen und Juden (KLAKE), <http://www.perikopenmodell.de/index.html>, accessed August 28, 2017. Note: Deeg is also a member of the lectionary revision working group.

<sup>46</sup> Deeg “O du fröhliche” 1. All translations are my own.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>50</sup> While one could imagine a Christian preacher speaking about light and illustrating the point by referring to Hanukkah, or including the festival in a mash-up of “light” passages beginning with Genesis, Deeg intends for Hanukkah to interrupt the congregations expectations. In a lecture at the University of Copenhagen, Deeg asserts that “What matters [for preaching] is the disruption which teaches a new way of perceiving, the introduction [to scripture] which leads us into the words, metaphors and stories of the Bible, and the staging of that intertextuality which transcends and changes our world” (“Disruption, Initiation, and Staging: The Theological Challenge of Christian Preaching,” Paper presented at the University of Copenhagen, Copenhagen, Denmark, October 5, 2011, 15).

in Leipzig, in Christian liturgy, and in celebrations of light.<sup>51</sup> In his article on worship and Israel's presence, Deeg argues that the liturgist/preacher should not ignore Jewish texts or treat them with synchronic reductions that replace "Israel" with "Church."<sup>52</sup> Rather, he presents a homiletic that seeks to orchestrate an encounter open to Israel's presence,<sup>53</sup> allowing and even encouraging it to be a disturbance to Christian theological assumptions.<sup>54</sup> In his sermon, Deeg emphasizes that in 2016, the Weihnachtsfest and the jüdische Chanukka-Fest begin on the same day.<sup>55</sup> Christians are not the only, nor even the first, to celebrate God's gift of light. Neither are Christians the first to grapple with trying times. Jews struggled nearly 200 years before Christ with the greed and destruction of Antiochus IV.

These observations lead Deeg to rewrite John 3:16: "God so loved the world that he gave a new beginning and brought back the light in politically confusing times. Ultimately, chances are bad for darkness and evil. Ultimately, it has long since been lost in the face of the love story of God."<sup>56</sup> Notice here that Deeg reframes Christmas as one part of God's Hanukkah light intervention. Notice also that the "only begotten Son" has been disturbed from its location in the verse. This is not a rejection of the Messiah but an attempt to unsettle Christian messianic assumptions. As Deeg argues elsewhere,

To assert the fulfillment of Messianic promise in the face of the unsolved world can only be done if the message of the Old Testament is allegorized and spiritualized—or if the Old Testament is completely disposed of, and it is no longer significantly recognized as the Christian canon. Conversely, the Jewish "no" to the Christian confession of the Messiah is in the overflow of the promise and thus becomes the basis of a renewed and common hope for and work in this world.... At the same time, Christians are placed on the side of Israel.<sup>57</sup>

Deeg's goal here is to complicate the congregation's ideas of messianic *fulfillment*—and at Christmas no less! However, he intends no scrooge-like Christological "humbug." Rather, he wants to lead the congregation to commit to join with Jews in an ongoing politically-acting, messiah-awaiting movement, not beholden to a progress project but open to God's surprising interruption of time.<sup>58</sup> Deeg punctuates this point at the end of his sermon with references to

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<sup>51</sup> Deeg, "Gottesdienst in Israels Gegenwart—Liturgie als intertextuelles Phänomen," *Liturgisches Jahrbuch*, 54 (2004): 34-52. As he seeks to show in much of his work, Christian awareness of Jewish presence is not only a post-Shoah responsibility but also a recognition of theological and liturgical reality. Christian liturgy has Jewish roots and heritage (40).

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>55</sup> Deeg, "O du fröhliche," 2.

<sup>56</sup> In German: "Also hat Gott die Welt geliebt, dass er in politisch verwirrenden Zeiten einen neuen Anfang schenkte und das Licht zurückbrachte. Letztlich stehen die Chancen schlecht für die Finsternis und das Böse. Letztlich hat es längst verloren angesichts der Liebesgeschichte Gottes" (Deeg, "O du fröhliche," 3).

<sup>57</sup> Deeg, "Die Kirche und das Alte Testament oder: Die Hebräische Bibel zwischen Lust, Last und Leidenschaft," *Evangelische Theologie* 77.2 (April 2017): 132-145, 142. My translation.

<sup>58</sup> c.f. Deeg's seven theses about messianic preaching in "Messianisch predigen: Ein Nachwort," Pages lix-lxviii in *Predigtmeditationen im christlich-jüdischen Kontext* (Wernsbach: Studium in Israel, 2016), lxvi-lxviii.

“today” and to the “future” where the *postfaktische* world will be interrupted by God’s “pre-factual reality,” and “We will live in light and the truth.”<sup>59</sup>

### **Transcontextual Spiral—Eunjoo Mary Kim, “Surprise, Surprise, Within and Beyond the Church”<sup>60</sup>**

Before analyzing Eunjoo Mary Kim’s sermon, a few words need to be said about her homiletic. In *Preaching the Presence of God*, Kim set about “dismantling the imperialism of Western Homiletics.”<sup>61</sup> As such, she critiques Barth’s homiletic as Christologically reductive,<sup>62</sup> and proposes a focus upon Asian American preaching that is spiritual, holistic, consensus-building, and Trinitarian in its language. The sermonic form she suggests is an inductive spiral that moves around and around a subject until it reaches the central point.<sup>63</sup> In *Preaching in an Age of Globalization*, Kim compares her approach to preaching to earlier projects on contextual theology (for instance, Tisdale’s *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art*). Without denying the importance of engaging the local context, though qualifying that there is no longer any local that has not been touched by “powerful outside forces,”<sup>64</sup> Kim asserts that preachers should focus upon the “interwovenness of the context between the local and the global.”<sup>65</sup> Her “transcontextual” approach “demands that the preacher read and interpret the text with others from various social points of reference.”<sup>66</sup> Kim offers here a homiletic that (1) invites listeners to become agents of change,<sup>67</sup> (2) is “sensitive to power dynamics among different readers,”<sup>68</sup> and (3) leads hearers to share others’ suffering and pain while envisioning a common future.<sup>69</sup> With this understanding of preaching, it is easy to see how Kim’s approach can shape an OT homiletic.

Kim begins her sermon with a nod to the diversity and unity of the Trinity as seen in scripture: Genesis 11:1-9 is read by a three-voice ensemble and Romans 12:1-8 by a single voice. From here Kim circles around events in Korea, the United States, the Old Testament, and the New Testament. Her central point is that God desires diversity and wants to free the world from controlling homogeneity, which often is accompanied by horrible consequences: “ethnic genocide, racial cleansing, and divisions within religious communities.”<sup>70</sup> In Korea, Kim notes her surprise that the country has become more multiracial and multicultural. At the same time, many churches have become gripped by a fear of diversity.<sup>71</sup> In Babel, people thought it good to build a tower to protect “their homogeneity in race and language,” but “God was not so happy

<sup>59</sup> Deeg, “O du fröhliche,” 3.

<sup>60</sup> A sermon on Gen 11:1-9 and Rom 12:1-8 in *Preaching in an Age of Globalization* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2010), 131–139.

<sup>61</sup> Kim, *Preaching the Presence of God: A Homiletic from an Asian American Perspective*. (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1999), 5.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>64</sup> Kim, *Preaching in an Age of Globalization* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2010), 41.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>70</sup> Kim, “Surprise, Surprise” in *Preaching in an Age of Globalization* 136.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

about the people's desire to be a unified group."<sup>72</sup> In Romans, Paul—"the apostle of Christian diversity"—seems to understand the story of the tower of Babel as good news of God's grace. Drawing upon the body metaphor, he announces that God in Jesus has destroyed "the controlling power of the tower of Babel," and created a diverse community linked with and dependent upon the Spirit's *charismata*.<sup>73</sup> Here all three persons of the Trinity are shown dancing to the same salvific tune: "Jesus Christ threatens our traditional identities, which are dependent on race, nationality, and social and economic status";<sup>74</sup> "the Spirit of God...[has] empowered us to envision 'a different world' for the present and the future";<sup>75</sup> and the work of God from Babel to today sets a world held captive by homogeneity free to celebrate God's jubilee.<sup>76</sup> So now, despite fears in Korea and in the United States, Kim narrates that many churches are practicing a ministry of diversity.<sup>77</sup> Then she invites the congregation to share their own witness to God's work, recounting their "surprising stories within and beyond the church!"<sup>78</sup>

The above example of Kim's transcontextual spiral offers important insights for preaching the Old Testament. With her approach, Hebrew texts become another context, an *other*, who pushes us out of our racial, linguistic, and theological homogeneity. At the same time, the Old Testament is a text about "our God"—the Three-in-One who works through time and Testaments for the deliverance of the world. By joining in God's *perichoretic* dance, swinging from local to national to global, from New Testament to Old Testament to religious tradition, and from past to present to future, Kim empowers her hearers to live and act in step with the God who in all times and places is the creator, redeemer and sustainer.

## Theological Conclusions

As the above survey has attempted to show, each of the five sermons offers a distinct approach to preaching the Old Testament that is not beholden to a historical/Christological binary. This survey is meant to be suggestive. It is meant to spur further research into numerous—perhaps even better—approaches to preaching the Old Testament.

At the same time, these five sermons offer some guidelines for evaluating which OT homiletics to include in such research. Specifically, each of the five preachers challenge hermeneutics of power, re-envision Christology, and portray the "Old" Testament as a word that speaks today. Such interests, I contend, are not coincidental but central to effective Christian proclamation of the Old Testament today.

First, each homiletician challenges hermeneutics of power. Brueggemann critiques empire and questions the real "life" power of the ruling class. Campbell seeks to encourage those who speak against the slow violence of climate change, the mistreatment of immigrants, and the injustices of the global economy. Turman confronts patriarchal and religious systems that exploit people of other races, genders, and economic statuses. Deeg grapples with the church's anti-Semitic legacy and the world's post-factual nationalism. Kim confronts destructive homogeneity and fear of diversity. What all five homileticians demonstrate is that the Old Testament is most

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 136.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 137.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 139.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 139.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 137.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 139.

readily and perhaps best proclaimed today by attending to the dynamics of righteousness (*tzedakah*) and justice (*mishpat*) in the text, reading with and for the marginalized other. For this reason alone, I suggest that further insights into OT preaching might best be found in the homiletic work of people experiencing marginalization.

Second, each homiletician re-envisioned Christology. In his Ash Wednesday sermon Brueggemann never names, but only alludes to, Christ. Campbell inverts typology from Christ to Isaiah. Turman mashes up accounts of God, Jesus, and the Spirit. Deeg rewrites John 3:16 to interrupt messianic expectations and include an awareness of Jewish presence. Kim focuses on explicitly Trinitarian articulations of God's good work in the world. These examples suggest that preaching the Old Testament well today requires one to wrestle with how best to articulate the presence of God. This is not to suggest that Christo-centric Barthian or Christo-telic evangelical approaches be scrapped entirely. Rather, they should be queried for their implicit, intended, and unintended biases. At the very least, they should be contextualized by experimental and traditional Trinitarian articulations of God.

Finally, each of the five homileticians surveyed demonstrates that preaching the Old Testament well today requires one to portray the "Old" Testament as a word that actually speaks *today*. Brueggemann uses intentional anachronism to connect our world and Elijah's world. Campbell leads his congregation to pray Isaiah's prayer as their own. Turman breaks the linearity of time, demonstrating a God who continually speaks a liberating word. Deeg invites his hearers to look for God's light breaking into the darkness of political chaos "*Heute*." Kim shows that God's work in Babel *is* God's work in Romans *is* God's work in our globalized world today. For each of these preachers "Old" is merely a potential adjective for the Testament, like "First" or "Hebrew." In their preaching, the Testament is no relic of the past or figment for allegorical manipulation. Rather, the Old Testament is a living word that God speaks in and through *today*.

The shared interest of these sermons also offers the homiletician three helpful handles for evaluating Old Testament preaching. For instance, one might ask of students preaching the Old Testament in an introductory course:

- How does this sermon address dynamics of power?
- How does this sermon articulate the presence of God?
- How does this sermon present the text as a word that speaks today?

Such questions might not only spur constructive feedback, but they might help students discover creative alternatives to the 19th century binary of Christology or historical criticism (without necessarily nullifying either possibility).<sup>79</sup> Such questions might even lead to a more constructive, diverse, and theologically rich Old Testament homiletic.

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<sup>79</sup> I am grateful to Lance Pape for helping me see this point more clearly.