

Kimberly Johnson. *The Womanist Preacher: Proclaiming Womanist Rhetoric from the Pulpit*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2017. 177 pages. \$90.

The Womanist Preacher: Proclaiming Womanist Rhetoric from the Pulpit invites the reader to consider what womanist preaching entails and encourages them to consider the rhetorical strategies used by womanist preachers. In the book Johnson offers four rhetorical models that she uses to analyze the sermons of four Black women who are preachers. Her models stem from the four-part definition of womanism as categorized by Stacey Floyd-Thomas. They are: radical subjectivity, traditional communalism, redemptive self-love, and critical engagement. The aim of the book is to excavate the voice of Black women from the margins and to name the rhetorical strategies used in womanist preaching.

The introduction of *The Womanist Preacher* serves as a thorough and helpful literature review of the scholarship that Johnson is building upon. The reader gets a clear idea of the scholarly lineage in which Johnson imagines herself as she articulates her movement from Alice Walker's definition to Stacey Floyd-Thomas' categories derived from that definition. She looks at the rise of womanism and takes the reader through some of the scholarship in this introductory chapter as a helpful set up for her own argument. Johnson then walks through some of the literature engaged specifically with homiletics, focusing on Katie Cannon, Elaine Flake and Donna Allen. This chapter is exemplary in setting up the argument because it allows readers to follow Johnson's train of thought while giving them an abundance of resources to continue reading should they want to delve more deeply into womanism or, more specifically, womanist preaching.

Chapter 2 through chapter 5 look at specific sermons by Black women to note the rhetorical strategies seen under the categories of radical subjectivity, traditional communalism, redemptive self-love and critical engagement. Each chapter introduces the category and then does a critical textual analysis of the sermon(s). In chapter 2, Johnson analyzes sermons by Gina Stewart and Elaine Flake to consider radical subjectivity. Chapter 3 focuses on traditional communalism through Cheryl Kirk Duggan's sermon. Chapter 4 looks at redemptive self-love through a sermon by Melva L. Sampson, and chapter 5 examines a sermon by Claudette Copeland to consider critical engagement. Each chapter gives the reader a chance to read a powerful sermon and to note the rhetorical strategies Johnson identifies. Johnson's main argument and conclusion is best stated in the final chapter. She writes, "A womanist rhetorician must work at re-imagining victims to victors, calling us back to our communal beliefs and values using a rhetorical Jeremiad, reimagining villains to heroines, and offering a culture critique of the oppressive power structures that continue to marginalize people. Both womanist preaching and womanist rhetoric have the moral responsibility to fight for the social justice and liberation of all people" (126). In short, she finds their preaching liberating from and subversive of normative structures by using the strategies of radical subjectivity, traditional communalism, redemptive self-love and critical engagement.

In this book Johnson contributes to the field of homiletics as well as the field of communications by centering a voice that is often marginalized: the voice of Black women. This book is a good starting point for someone trying to begin engaging with womanist preaching and wanting a base for what womanist rhetoric can be. The models found in the final chapter also offer examples that someone could use to analyze their own words to see if they are using the strategies offered. While I think the book is helpful, I also wonder if separating the tenets does a disservice to the definition of womanism that intentionally holds them together. I think the next

step would be engaging the tenets together. By separating them into different chapters, one could assume that you only focus on one aspect of womanism in your preaching. However, as evident in many of the sermons lifted, all four tenets are present and operating alongside one another. The way the categories are interwoven in womanism offers a different understanding of the strategies needed to engage in what someone might call “womanist preaching.” Overall, this book is a helpful read that can benefit both scholars and practitioners with any interest in preaching and/or rhetoric. It continues a necessary conversation about womanist preaching and posits a helpful series of strategies for the reader to consider.

Chelsea Brooke Yarborough, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN