

Thomas H. Troeger. *The End of Preaching*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2018. 74 pages. \$15.99.

Demonstrating an ease of reflection birthed from the wisdom of an emeritus homiletician, preacher, poet, and psalmist Thomas Troeger invites the readers of this text on a journey of homiletical contemplation accompanied by the witness of the Beecher Lecturers that came before him. He asks the reader to wonder with him, “What is the end of preaching?” This is not a question as to whether or not preaching has reached its conclusion, or even if it is in danger of becoming less important in the culture. Instead, Troeger asks those who read this text to reflect on the purpose of preaching both for themselves and for sermons that they have heard. This book is full of questions asked directly to the reader that if answered honestly would require time and honest reflection. Troeger welcomes the reader into a virtual lecture, asking those who open these pages to use this text as a guide of self-discovery. Even though this book is an adapted version of Troeger’s 2016 Beecher lectures, it reads almost like an academically rigorous, contemplative homiletical devotional for preachers and scholars alike.

Ever a student of context, Troeger carefully researched those who had given the Beecher lectures before him and found that many of his predecessors wrestled with naming an end to preaching. He observed that “there are numberless ways to complete the statement ‘the end of preaching is...’ and they change continually as the historical context changes” (9). Troeger focuses the bulk of this book on answering this question for himself in our current cultural and historical context while also inviting readers to answer this question for themselves. Troeger adapts a line from George Hubert’s poem “The Church-Porch” as the beginning of his inquiry, “Praying’s the end of preaching” (10). From this moment in the text, Troeger lifts off into an imaginative deliberation on the different ways that prayer is the end of preaching. More expansive than it seems at first glance, Troeger works through six classic types of prayers as the end of preaching: adoration, confession, supplication, intercession, thanksgiving, and lament. Though this is not an exhaustive list of the possible kinds of prayer to be birthed from preaching, Troeger believes that these categories serve as a basis for exploration.

This poetic take on preaching is not devoid of action or prophetic witness. Troeger manages to describe a preaching practice that takes the preacher regularly to the altar but that also calls the preacher and the community into action. As I began reading, I was worried that the preaching that Troeger was calling for would be overwhelmingly internally focused and that it would lead to communal contemplation without activity in the world. But he makes it clear that prayer is the beginning of Godly action. Lament, for example, must be the prayerful end of preaching that recognizes evil for what it is and begins to address that evil.

Towards the end of the book, Troeger suggests that the phrase that sits at the heart of the work, “prayer’s the end of preaching,” is deceptively simple (67). I believe that this observation is true of the entire book. This short tome is, too, deceptively simple. Its brevity might suggest that it lacks a certain intellectual rigor, but in reality the opposite is the case. This carefully worded work is short out of necessity; Troeger wants the reader to experience what he’s writing as much as read it. He leaves room in his writing for the reader to pause, and though not explicitly named this way Troeger seems to want the reader to move slowly through this work, savoring the words and the ideas that it brings forward. One aspect of Troeger’s thought that becomes evident in this work is his lack of enthusiasm for the development of homiletic methodology. One might argue that this is not a “how to” work, but Troeger is clear that he is less concerned with teaching preachers “how to” preach but is much more interested in calling preachers into a reflective practice of preaching that develops the character of the preacher more

than their rhetorical acumen. Here I found myself desiring just a bit more of Troeger's wisdom, wondering what steps one might take to develop preaching that sees its end as prayer.

The End of Preaching serves very much as the beginning of journey of self-reflection for any pastor or scholar who sincerely submits to the experience of this work. Though brief, this work is the kind that can be regularly reread, with each interaction promising another nugget of wisdom to mull over.

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