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Microphones of Christ: Lessons from the Pulpit of Oscar Romero

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Abstract: *From the beginning of Latin American history, the pulpit has been the first line of defense of human dignity. This paper presents Oscar Romero as a distinguished witness to this tradition. His preaching life and death offer a short primer on the liberating message of the gospel. Romero's Augustinian Christology coupled with the radio broadcasting of his sermons in the face of state resistance led him to express the preaching task in terms of the metaphor of a microphone. Christ is the best microphone of God; the church is the best microphone of Christ. For Romero, preaching Christ requires reading the Scriptures, the life of the church, and the signs of the times. When this happens the voice coming from the microphone sounds like many voices, like the voice of the voiceless, like the voice crying in the wilderness, and like the voice of the shepherd.*

Introduction

On the fourth Sunday of Advent, December 21, 1511, Father Antón de Montesinos stepped to the pulpit of the church in Santo Domingo.¹ Montesinos was known as a powerful speaker and his fellow Dominicans had spread news around town that he was preaching so as to have as large a crowd as possible, especially from among the city elites. The lectionary text for the day was from the gospel according to John, the first chapter. The congregation heard of how the Jewish authorities sent priests and Levites on a fact finding mission regarding the identity of John the Baptist. Who are you? His reply to their questions was simple: *Ego vox clamantis in deserto*. The lesson was read and Fray Antón began to preach by making some general remarks about the significance of Advent before turning to the theme for his sermon: the humanity of the indigenous.

I have come here to tell you that I am the voice of Christ in the wilderness, and that therefore, it would behoove you to pay attention, not casually, but with your whole heart and senses. You are about to hear the strangest news that you have ever thought you would hear. This voice declares that you are all in mortal sin. You are living and dying in sin on account of the cruelty with which you use these innocent peoples. Explain yourselves. By what right and justice do you hold these Indians in such horrible and cruel bondage?...Are these not humans? Do they not have rational souls? Are you not required to love them as you love yourself? Do you not understand? Do you not feel? Are you asleep?²

The sermon did not go over well.

If, as Herman Melville says, the pulpit is the prow of the world,³ then in its passage through Latin American history that prow has plunged to the abyss of genocide time and again. And yet from the belly of the big fish of empire, a chorus of voices spoke a different word. There was Montesinos. There was Bartolomé de las Casas. The vision of seeing Christ being whipped and crucified a thousand times in the Indies, led him to become the defender of the indigenous

¹ A version of this paper was presented at the *Festival of Homiletics* in Atlanta in May, 2016. This fact accounts for the, at times, colloquial tone of the text.

² *Historia de las Indias*, editor André Saint-Lu (Caracas: Biblioteca Ayacucho, 1986), 3.4:13–14.

³ Herman Melville, *Moby Dick*, (New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 1994), 33.

and eventually of the African.⁴ There was Antonio de Valdivieso, one of Las Casas's pupils and the first bishop of Nicaragua. He was stabbed to death in his house by a group of mercenaries hired by the governor.⁵ Valdivieso was martyred out of hatred for the inconvenient truth of his preaching: God loves the Amerindian and hates their enslavement. Page limits would fail me to write of Guaman Poma, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, Francisco José de Jaca, Epifanio Moirans, Miguel Pro, and so many others.⁶ Instead I skip centuries to speak of Óscar Romero.

Oscar Romero became Archbishop of San Salvador during a turbulent time for people in Central America. Vast income inequality, failed attempts at land reform, and rumors of a Cuban style revolution sowed unrest. Some expected the Church to serve as a bastion of national stability while others dreamed of a Christian guerilla movement. In this context, Romero was seen by many a safe choice, a pastor who would not rock the already tipsy boat. His election to the country's premier ecclesial post was greeted with a mixture of dismay and relief. However, both reactions misread the man and the moment. On March 12, 1977, his friend, Father Rutilio Grande was murdered while driving to El Paisnal. There was now no doubt about it. He was the pastor of a persecuted church. Paramilitary forces were devouring his sheep. Romero himself would be cut down by the death squad's scythe on March 24, 1980 while preaching from John 12:24, "unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit."

There is much that Christians can learn from this modern-day Church Padre. In this article, I hope that we can harvest lessons from his pulpit. In Monseñor (as he was and still is affectionately called) we have one more inductee to the great company of American preachers which God inaugurated in Santo Domingo in 1511.⁷ Montesinos was the voice crying in the wilderness. Romero was the voice of the voiceless. In every aspect of his ministry, from what he drove (a small Toyota Corona), to where he lived (not in the episcopal residence but in a small bungalow next to a cancer hospice center), to how he lived (he firmly refused offers of sanctuary), Romero felt with the oppressed, but never more so than at the pulpit, for then he became a microphone of Christ.

The homily, actualization of the Word of God

On January 23, 1980 a bomb blew up the transmission equipment of YSAX, the diocesan radio station known as the *Voz Panamericana*, the Pan-American voice. The bomb was an attempt by henchmen of the oligarchy to muzzle the church. Technicians worked hard to make repairs and they were able to finish just in time for Monseñor's Sunday sermon on January 27. The gospel lesson prescribed by the lectionary came from Luke 4:14–21. This is the story of Jesus' homecoming sermon. Reflecting on the events of the day in light of Jesus' words, Romero says,

⁴ Isacio Pérez Fernández, O.P., *Fray Bartolomé de las Casas, O.P.: De defensor de los indios a defensor de los negros* (Salamanca: Editorial San Esteban, 1995).

⁵ Cf. Enrique Dussel, *A History of the Church in Latin America: Colonialism to Liberation* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1981), 52–53.

⁶ Cf. José Tomás López García, *Dos defensores de los esclavos en el siglo XVII* (Marcaibo: Biblioteca Corpozulia, 1981).

⁷ With all proper deference I disagree with Pedro Casaldáliga's division of the history of the Church in Latin America to before-Romero and after-Romero. Cf. Jon Sobrino, *Archbishop Romero: memories and reflections*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990), 49. Romero belongs to a long line of witnesses of Christ. Yes, his witness is unique and unrepeatable. In that sense, he marks a turning point in Church history, but this can be said of the life of every true witness of Christ.

The best microphone of God is Christ, and the best microphone of Christ is the Church, and you are the Church; each one of you in your location, from your vocation: the religious, the married, the bishop, the priest, the kindergartener, the college student, the day laborer, the construction worker, the woman selling in the market. Each one of you, wherever you are, needs to live the life of faith fiercely because you are a true microphone of God our Lord in your context. Thus, the Church will always have preaching. The Church will always be a sermon... But on the day that the forces of evil deprive us of this wondrous means of communication which they have in abundance, and the Church is reduced to nothing, know that they have done us no real harm. On the contrary, then even more will we be living microphones of the Lord declaring his word everywhere.⁸

As the voice of Romero rides the airwaves, he is not preaching from the cathedral. Members of labor unions have occupied the building to protest the closing down of their factories. While negotiations were going on, the Archbishop moved his Sunday masses to the Basilica of the Sacred Heart. The Basilica was no mighty fortress shielding Romero from trouble. On March 9, a bomb was set to detonate during mass right next to the altar of the Basilica where Romero was preaching. For unknown reasons, the bomb did not explode. It is from this perilous pulpit that Romero preaches a sermon titled “The homily, actualization of the Word of God.”

Romero was accused of being a partisan polemicist. However, Monseñor always insisted that he was first and foremost a preacher of the gospel. His main purpose in preaching was not to call the government to account for its failed and fatal policies (important a goal as this was), but to unfold the paschal mystery of Christ’s passion, death, and resurrection.⁹ On January 27 the unfolding of this paschal mystery took a decidedly homiletical turn as Romero read the lectionary readings of Ezra’s sermon in the eighth chapter of Nehemiah and Jesus’ sermon in the fourth chapter of Luke as a warrant for turning the Basilica into a preaching academy. I invite us to enroll for a little while in this school.

As was his custom, Romero divides his sermon into three points. First, Jesus is the Father’s living sermon. Second, the Church is the working and actualizing prolongation of Jesus’ sermon. Third, the effects of preaching are various; some accept Christ and some reject him.

First, *Jesus is the Father’s living sermon*. In Jesus, the revelation of God reaches its culmination, God’s plan of salvation literally puts on flesh. The incarnation is the Father’s most eloquent sermon. Jesus preaches the most sublime sermon ever heard when he sits to speak at the

⁸ Óscar Romero, *Homilias* VI, 231f. For citations from Romero’s sermons I am using the critical edition edited by Miguel Cavada Diez, *Homilias: Monseñor Óscar A. Romero*, Volumes I-VI (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 2005-2009). All translations from Spanish are my own.

⁹ Cf. Michael E. Connors, CSC, “Romero: A Homiletic Saint for our Times,” in *Archbishop Romero and Spiritual Leadership in the Modern World* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2015), 93–97. Connors states that “Romero mystagogically linked his preaching with the liturgy, and in so doing he mystagogically linked Catholic Social Teaching with the liturgy” (96). On Connors’ reading, Romero can help bridge the gap between ethics and spirituality, the *lex vivendi* and the *lex orandi*, by promoting a more mystagogical approach to preaching. This seems right to me, but his suggestion that Romero attained these homiletical insights by in some way moving beyond the tradition of the Church Fathers and the Council Fathers seems stuck in a static reading of tradition as “archival” (96) and “mechanically deductive” (94). Connors says that “While he loved and honored the texts of Scripture, and loved and honored the tradition from the early Fathers to the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council, he intuitively arrived at the understanding that a new day demands a new word” (96). The contrast is overdrawn. If anything, Romero’s own claims of undying fidelity to the magisterium and the Pope show that being deeply traditional and radically open to the movement of the Spirit are not to be seen as radically opposed commitments.

synagogue in Jerusalem. And Jesus preaches through his miracles, his deeds, his death. Jesus preaches when he casts out demons and when he heals the sick. The multiplication of the bread is a sermon. The resurrection is a homily. He preaches in life. He preaches in death. And he preaches in life beyond death by sending the Spirit, another sermon. “Christ,” says Romero, “is God’s best microphone.” His human flesh modulates the eternal will to the audible range. In Christ the God that seemed far off becomes intimately near in him, as if he were speaking right next to one’s ear. The chief purpose of the sermon is to make Jesus present here and now. “The main thing,” he says, “is not the preaching, this is only the path, the main thing is the moment when, illumined by this word, we adore Christ and our faith surrenders itself to him. And from there, we go to the world to make this word real.”

Romero supports his christological account of preaching by appealing to a document from Vatican II on divine revelation titled *Dei Verbum*. Anybody reading Romero’s sermons will be quickly struck by how often he cites from the official teachings of the Catholic Church. You can find more references to the writings of the councils and the popes than to all the Church Fathers, Scholastics, and Liberationists combined. Only Scripture is referenced with greater frequency. The appeals to the magisterium are an effective rebuttal of the charges that he was preaching communism. Romero is no Marxist; he is Catholic. But more than this, Romero actually believes that the most prophetic denunciation of the current situation in El Salvador is found in the tradition of the Church, in particular in the tradition of Catholic Social Teaching. It was Leo XII who, at the end of the nineteenth century, claimed that one of the tasks of the church is to “improve the conditions of the proletariat.”¹⁰ It was John Paul II who said that “a social mortgage weighs on all private property.”¹¹ It was the Latin American tradition which taught that the poverty of the continent demanded “justice, solidarity, witness, commitment, effort, and overcoming,” in effect a “preferential option for the poor.”¹² Tradition and prophecy are often set against each other. Tradition is presented as old, conservative, backwards, static, dead; while prophecy is seen as new, liberal, progressive, dynamic, alive. There may be some truth to this characterization, but when applied wholesale to the Christian tradition and Christian prophecy the characterization becomes a caricature. Romero is a case in point. The reason that he is called a martyr is because he was killed out of hatred for the faith that is taught by the Church. He was a “martyr for the magisterium.”¹³ In the words of Salvadoran theologian Jon Sobrino, the Archbishop’s homilies show that “the magisterium should not be exposed in *concepts*, but should

¹⁰ The quote comes from the Spanish language version of the 1891 encyclical *Rerum novarum*, paragraph 12. Curiously, the English translation of the Latin text prefers to translate *proletarius* as labor. In any case, Romero references this particular text from Leo XIII in his homily of November 11, 1977 (*Homilias* I, 453-454).

Incidentally, this first Catholic social encyclical on labor informed the work of César Chavez who lifted and paraphrased entire sections of its message for the farmworker union paper *El malcriado*. See Frederick John Dalton, *The Moral Vision of César Chávez* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2003): 49; Edgardo Colón-Emeric, “Dare We Be Human? César Chávez and the Challenge of Christian Humanism” *Apuntes*, 32 (2012): 84-103, 89-91.

¹¹ John Paul II, “Opening Address to the Third General Conference of Latin American Bishops” *Las Cinco Conferencias Generales del Episcopado Latinoamericano* (Bogotá, Colombia: San Pablo, 2014): III, 4.

¹² The first citation comes from the second general conference of Latin American bishops which took place at Medellín in 1968 (Medellín 14, 2). The phrase “preferential option for the poor” was utilized at the third general conference of Latin American bishops which took place at Puebla in 1979.

¹³ Ricardo Urioste, Romero’s vicar general, interpreted the Archbishop’s martyrdom in these terms in an interview with Douglas Marcouiller which took place on December 7, 2002. Marcouiller recalls that according to Urioste “Romero would never have been so bold had he not believed the teaching of the Church demanded it of him” [Douglas Marcouiller, “Archbishop with an Attitude: Oscar Romero’s *Sentir con la Iglesia*” *Studies in the Spirituality of the Jesuits* 35 (2003): 1-52, 51].

rather be used to illumine and change *reality*.¹⁴ From the pulpit, Romero modeled a prophetic appropriation of the tradition.¹⁵ Second, *the Church is the working and actualizing prolongation of Jesus' sermon*. From the Christology of preaching, Romero turns to the ecclesiology of preaching. The Church is Christ's best microphone. The Church can say with Isaiah, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me." It can say with Jesus, "today this Scripture is fulfilled" on Sunday, January 27, 1980, in the Basilica of the Sacred Heart at 8:00am. The time may be one of national crisis, even so now is the day of salvation. The microphone of Christ that is the Church is an open mic. Romero tells his congregation that "the word of God is present here, because you are the Church, I am the Church, we are the continuation of the living sermon that is Christ, our Lord." In other words, preaching is a communal act. Monseñor invites his listeners to consider the origin of the four gospels. Each was composed for and in community. No one should be surprised at the differences among them. The gospels are not personal biographies, they are communal sermons and as such deeply contextual.

Third, *the effects of preaching are various; some accept Christ and some reject him*. Preaching has messianic and saving implications. Every sermon has as its goal eliciting an Amen from the congregation. A preacher soaked in the Spirit announces the love of God, and the people of God, also soaked in the Spirit, respond with an Amen of repentance, an Amen of thanksgiving, an Amen of wonder, an Amen of compassion. Even so, the Amen to the sermon is still not the full congregational response. Romero reminds his listeners that in the lesson from Nehemiah, after hearing the Law being read, the priests instructed the people to "Go your way, eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions of them to those for whom nothing is prepared, for this day is holy to our LORD" (Neh 8:10). This is the kind of Amen that Romero longs to draw from the people of El Salvador, an Amen of justice and joyful sharing. Of course, a heartfelt Amen is only one of the possible responses to a sermon. The people of Nazareth rejoiced when they heard Jesus preaching until he started denouncing their incredulity and false piety. Then, the mood of the congregation turned bitter and hostile.

At this point, one might expect Romero to wrap up the sermon. He has fulfilled his promise of offering a short catechesis on preaching. Jesus is the sermon of God. The Church is the sermon of Christ. Both are greeted with either an Amen or a No way. A friend of mine, a member of the Dominican order, told me that in preaching, the first five minutes belong to God, the second five minutes belong to the preacher, the rest belong to the devil. By that reckoning, Romero's sermons must have been belonged almost wholly to the devil. He has been preaching for about forty five minutes, very deep into Satan's homiletical territory. And yet Romero is only about half way done. He says that "It is now time to see, if the Church of the Archdiocese, our communities, and our ecclesial work is truly a microphone of God," and then he preaches for another forty minutes. What follows is one part church announcements, one part newscast, one

¹⁴ Jon Sobrino, "Introducción general," *Homilías I*, 25. The emphasis is found in the original.

¹⁵ Romero's prophetic approach to tradition is exemplified in the manner in which he lived out his Ignatian episcopal motto of *Sentir con la Iglesia*. See Douglas Marcouiller, op. cit.; Margaret Eletta Guider, "Sentir con la Iglesia: Archbishop Romero, an Ecclesial Mystic," in *Archbishop Romero: Martyr and Prophet for the New Millennium*, ed. Robert Pelton, (Scranton, Pennsylvania: University of Scranton Press, 2006); Edgardo Colón-Emeric "Para un verdadero sentir en la Iglesia: lecciones sobre la educación teológica hoy en América Latina" *Cuadernos de Teología* 32 (2013): 156-174; Jon Sobrino, editor, *La espiritualidad de Monseñor Romero: Sentir con la Iglesia* (San Salvador: Fundación Monseñor Romero, 2015).

part identification with the church and one part prophetic reading of the signs of the times.¹⁶

Pick up at random almost any sermon by Óscar Romero and you will find three sections: the exposition of the Scriptures, the life of the church, and the events of the week. *Sola Scriptura* is not enough. The text of the Bible must always be read along with the text that is the congregation and the text that is the present moment.

The preacher needs to interpret the community. The narration of the “Life of the Church” is one way in which Romero expresses his episcopal motto: *sentir con la Iglesia*. That motto, which is Ignatian in origin, is difficult to translate into English. It is most commonly translated as “To think with the Church,” but it can be translated also as “To feel with the Church” or “To perceive with the Church” or even “To listen with the Church.” “*Sentir* with the church” denotes Romero’s irrevocable commitment of love for his congregation. At that preaching academy convened in the Basilica on January 27, 1980, Romero thinks about the ecclesial celebrations of the week: a one year anniversary mass for a priest and four kids, the election of a new leader for a religious community of women, ceremonies marking the week of prayer for Christian unity. Romero perceives the same Holy Spirit that soaked Jesus in Nazareth to be at work in a school for adult vocations to the priesthood. This might seem trivial until one remembers that one of the slogans of the right wing was “Be a patriot, kill a priest.” Listening with the Church means listening to the pope, and Romero reads from John Paul II’s catechesis on Christian unity. He hears in the pope’s words a sermon of Christ encouraging all believers in El Salvador, Catholic and Protestant, to pick up the microphone and speak on behalf of the common good for all rather than seeking the approval of a privileged few. Feeling with the Church means identifying with the poor. Romero reads a letter from a group of *campesinos* who are being threatened with death if they do not join a Christian farmworkers’ union. Since the *campesinos* did not know how to write their names, they signed the letter with their thumbprints.

Preachers need to *sentir* with the Church. They also need to interpret the historical moment. Romero referred to this as “The Events of the Week,” or, more precisely, as reading the “signs of the times.” The phrase “signs of the times” has its origins in Jesus’ denunciation of the Pharisees and the Sadducees for being skilled at reading meteorological signs and missing “the signs of the times.” (Matt 16:3) The phrase is cryptic and its history of interpretation has been mostly apocalyptic. Often the signs of the times are read in terms of God’s imminent judgment of sin in the world. The Second Vatican Council offered Romero an alternative reading. The signs of the times are not billboards along the road to Armageddon but pointers to the God who saves within history.

In El Salvador, the signs of the times are many: poor people demanding liberation, young people longing for equal recognition, overcrowded theological schools and seminaries; the proliferation of grassroots organizations; the unceasing clamor for agrarian reform. These signs are contradicted by the sinful situation in El Salvador. Injustice and violence affect the entire population: extortion, slander, intimidation, kidnappings, tortures, assassinations, massacres. These evil things are also signs of the times. Because of all the contradictions and ambiguities, the signs of the times are not self-interpreting. Their reading is fundamentally an act of communal spiritual discernment.

Turning to the Events of the Week, Romero focuses his attention on a massacre that occurred on the previous Tuesday, January 22. Various leftist organizations staged the largest

¹⁶ Mariano Imperato, “Romero Predicador,” in Rocca, Roberto Mororozzo della (2013-01-16). Óscar Romero. Un obispo entre guerra fría y revolución (Spanish Edition) (Kindle Locations 1300-1302). Editorial San Pablo España. Kindle Edition.

march that the country had ever seen. As they drew near the national palace, the marchers were met with machine gun fire. An untold number were killed. Many more were wounded. The crowd dispersed and sought shelter where they could. Around three hundred found refuge in the Cathedral. The Archbishop quickly appointed a special commission to investigate the events. Romero reads ten points from the report of this commission. In brief, the government version of events is false. Romero's recitation of the facts is frequently punctuated by massive bursts of applause from the congregation. Following the reading of the report, Romero offers his pastoral judgment, his interpretation of the signs of the times. First, he turns to the victims and their relatives. He offers to them the hope of the gospel, the prayers of the church, and his pastoral solidarity. Second, he addresses the government. He asks them to cease the repression and rein in their security forces. Finally, he speaks to the popular organizations. He praises them for their restraint in the face of the government's provocative actions and exhorts them to definitively renounce violence.

Monseñor concludes by affirming his conviction that the homily has done its work, it has illumined reality in light of the word of God. He invites his listeners to join themselves to Christ's Eucharistic sacrifice and to cry to God out of the depths of their souls for their country and its people, so that all might find the paths that God wants rather than those marked by blood and suffering. As the two-hour preaching mark draws near, Romero invites his congregation to stand and profess the Nicene Creed.

John the Baptist, paradigm of the person committed to the reign of God

Romero's sermons were broadcast all over the nation. It is estimated that 73% of the rural population and 47% of the urban one heard his sermons. During his years as Archbishop you could walk down the street on any Sunday and not miss a single word of his weekly homily. Every house had a radio tuned to YSAX. Even state officials listened to his sermons because their campaign of disinformation was so effective that they did not really know what was happening in the country either.¹⁷ Without a doubt, the *Panamerican Voice* was Romero's microphone. But "the Church is Christ's best microphone." All Christians are called to be little radio stations broadcasting the love of God to their communities. The more the government blows up radio stations the more each person must become "living microphones" declaring Christ everywhere. This is more than a metaphor. When the *Panamerican Voice* was destroyed by another bomb on February 17, many parishioners showed up to the Basilica the following Sunday carrying tape recorders so that they could rebroadcast the sermon when they returned to their communities.¹⁸ The community, not YSAX, was Romero's best microphone. To better understand how this microphone works, we need to turn to the prophetic preacher par excellence, John the Baptist, the voice crying in the wilderness.

As a lectionary preacher, Romero preached on John the Baptist several times during the year. His most extended reflection occurred in the context of the feast day of John the Baptist's birth, June 24 in 1979. The title of the sermon was "John the Baptist, paradigm of the person committed to the reign of God." There is a tradition of theological reflection on the concurrence of John the Baptist's birth and the summer solstice. John the Baptist is born on the longest day of the year. As the days begin to shorten following his birth, Christians remember that John the

¹⁷ Rocca, Roberto Morozzo della (2015-08-12). Oscar Romero: Prophet of Hope (Kindle Locations 1404-1407). Pauline Books and Media. Kindle Edition.

¹⁸ Óscar Romero, "Cuaresma, triunfo del proyecto Salvador de Dios en la historia" (24 Feb 1980), *Homilias: tomo VI ciclo C, 22 de noviembre de 1979, 24 de marzo de 1980* (San Salvador, El Salvador: UCA Editores, 2009), 305.

Baptist must decrease so that Christ may increase. Jesus is born on the shortest day, the winter solstice. After he is born, the days begin to lengthen. The signs of the times that Romero was reading were not in the sky but in a bloodstained street in Santa Tecla where the body of Father Rafael Palacios was found. The death of Father Palacios becomes an occasion to listen again to the Baptist's call to repentance and to invite the assassins to convert. It also presents an occasion to reflect further on the voice that is picked up by the microphone of Christ, the voice of the preacher. As usual, Romero preaches a sermon divided in three points: John the Baptist the person, the forerunner, and the martyr.

In speaking of John the person, Romero draws our attention to his naming story and the naming story of Jesus in Luke. These stories are brought into conversation with the passage from Isaiah: "The LORD called me before I was born, while I was in my mother's womb he named me" (49:1). God called these unique person for service, but it is not only these great saints and the king of saints that are called by God. The call of John the Baptist is a paradigm for the call of all human beings, because all are called to be saints.

As forerunner, John the Baptist was so singularly effective that many confused him with the Christ. This is both a great honor but also a temptation for the forerunner, a temptation that he resisted with his bold admission, "I am not." Jesus is "I am," John is "I am not." Jesus is the light. John is not. Jesus is the Messiah. John is not. Jesus is worthy of all honor and praise. John is not. Romero explores the relation between the bridegroom and his friend by drawing on the Augustinian distinction between the voice and the word.¹⁹

According to Augustine, "A word has full value, even without a voice; a voice is worthless without a word."²⁰ The Word comes first. The voice second. The one Word could be expressed in many different voices: Moses, Elijah, Deborah, Miriam. When all these voices speak into the same microphone, as it were, we have John the Baptist. He is "the sign and sacrament of all voices."²¹ To put it another way, John is the voice made flesh; Jesus is the Word made flesh.

In the Augustinian distinction between voice and word, Romero finds a theological rationale for the metaphor of the microphone. There is difference between sound and meaning. Microphones pick up sounds (throat clearings, coughs, voices) and amplify them. Microphones do not generate meaning; that comes from the word which is conceived in the mind and delivered by the voice. In preaching, the Word of Christ is conceived in the mind by the power of the Holy Spirit and then born of the voice of the preacher. This is a humbling realization. Every preacher can say with Romero, "I am the microphone, nothing more."²² This is also a liberating realization. Every preacher can also say with Romero, "All who preach Christ are voice, but the voice passes away, preachers die, John the Baptist is gone, only the Word remains. The Word remains and this is the great consolation of preachers. My voice will disappear, but my Word

¹⁹ Tim Denecker and Gert Partoens, "De uoce et uerbo: Augustine's exegesis of John 1:1-3 and 23 in sermons 288 and 293a auct (Dolbeau 3)," *Annali di storia dell'esegesi* 31 (2014): 108. According to the bishop of Hippo, a word while remaining in the mind can be voiced in many ways. "In an analogous way, Christ the Word abided with the Father (John 1:1-3) while many and diverse heralds were sent ahead, and inversely, Christ, the Word that took on the flesh (John 1:14), only came into the world after having been announced by many and diverse preceding heralds."

²⁰ Augustine, Sermon 288, "On the Birthday of John the Baptist," *The Works of St. Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, Vol. III/8 (Hyde Park, New York: New City Press, 1994), 112.

²¹ Augustine, Sermon 288, 115.

²² Romero, "Santa Catalina de Alejandría" (25 Nov. 1977), *Homilías: tomo I ciclo C, 14 de marzo de 1977, 25 de noviembre de 1977* (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 2005), 489.

who is Christ remains in the hearts of those who have wanted to receive him.”²³ As long as the Word abides, the Church will never want for microphones.

Romero’s reflection on the martyrdom of John the Baptist is brief. The death of the Baptist becomes a lens for interpreting the life of the church and the events of the day. Father Palacios’s corpse preaches a prophetic word. His murder and the murders of Father Grande, Father Navarro, Brother Blanco, and so many others unmask the institutionalization of violence in Central America and call sinners to conversion. It was a bloody week. On the national day of teachers, Romero presided at masses for assassinated teachers. At the same time, funerals are not the only signs of the times. Romero also speaks of various church celebrations, confirmations, and birthdays. As Romero says, “That is what church festivals are like: with blood of martyrdom, with hope of Christianity.”²⁴

Microphones of Christ

Romero’s final letter was written on the date that he died. It was addressed to Pedro Casaldaliga, bishop of Sao Paulo, Brazil. In the letter, Romero thanks Casaldaliga for his show of solidarity at the destruction of the radio station and commits himself to “keep on with our mission of expressing the hopes and anguish of the poor, in a spirit of joy at being accorded the privilege of running the same risks as they, as Jesus did.”²⁵ Romero concludes his brief letter stating his confidence in the triumph of resurrection. News of Romero’s death arrived before the letter. Casaldaliga wrote a poem in reply.

Saint Romero of the Americas,
our shepherd and our martyr,
no one shall ever silence
your last homily.²⁶

Romero’s life and death constituted a coherent and compelling homily.²⁷ His sermon can still be heard, though his voice disappeared, because the Word remains. What would it mean for others to pick up the microphone he dropped and preach as he did? Yes. The context would be different. The language may be different. But the Word is the same. What would this preaching voice sound like? I imagine a sound check would reveal the following.

First, a Romero preaching voice would sound like many voices. The voice crying in the wilderness is always part of a chorus. This was true in the time of Montesinos. The sermon he preached to the congregation of conquistadors was drafted *en conjunto* by all the Dominican friars living in La Española.²⁸ Montesinos was chosen to deliver the message because of his

²³ Romero, “El Verbo se hizo carne y habitó entre nosotros,” (17 Dec 1978), *Homilias: tomo IV ciclo B, 3 de diciembre de 1978, 17 de junio de 1979* (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 2007), 65.

²⁴ Romero, “Juan Bautista, paradigma del hombre comprometido con el reino de Dios” (24 June 1979), *Homilias: tomo V ciclo B* (San Salvador, UCA Editores, 2008), 47. At the heart of any festival is the affirmation of the goodness of life as God’s gift. In spite of everything, Romero exclaims that “with this people it is not hard to be a good pastor.” It is good to be pastor of this diocese even in as it is going through the valley of the shadow of death. It has been said that no Christian martyr died cursing creation. It is all very good. Cf. Josef Pieper, *In Tune with the World*, 27.

²⁵ Cited in Sobrino, *Archbishop Romero*, 40.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 45f.

²⁷ Martin Maier, *Oscar Romero: Mistica y Lucha por la Justicia* (Herder Editorial, 2005), 84.

²⁸ Cf. *Teología en Conjunto: A Collaborative Hispanic Protestant Approach*, edited by José David Rodríguez and Loida I. Martell Otero (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997). The concept of “en conjunto”

oratorical gifts, but all his brothers signed their names to the sermon manuscript. The “voice” crying out “Prepare the way of the Lord” is never alone. The “I” is not individualistic. It is always in surround sound. It was true in the time of Romero. The people were his prophets. He preached to them and they preached to him. All Christian prophecy is but a participation in the prophetic office of Christ, a kind of Pentecostal karaoke. Preaching is not a solo, not an aria; it is *en conjunto*, an ensemble piece. The *conjunto* is not ethnic but baptismal; it is a choral response to the call of Christ.

The call to speak into the microphone of Christ has a number of implications. The call to speak humanizes. According to Romero each baptized Salvadoran can say with Ezekiel, “The Spirit entered into me and set me on my feet” (2:2). Your voice is wanted. When God calls you to step up to the mic and he opens your lips, your mouth will proclaim his praise. The call to speak humbles. God offers the mic to stutterers like Moses, sidelined disciples like Mary, fumbling orators like Paul, and even to asses like Balaam’s *burro*. What made John Chrysostom’s preaching golden was not the agility of his mind or the beauty of his voice but the power of the Word. The call to speak for Christ empowers. The humbling humanization of this call transforms the speaker’s social relations. Romero puts it this way: “A holy matrimony is John the Baptist in the home. A holy lawyer, a holy professional, a holy engineer, a holy wage worker, a holy woman, they are John the Baptist. God uses them to announce that the kingdom of God is already near.”²⁹ The baptized have a prophetic mission that touches all aspects of daily life, a mission to and from *lo cotidiano* (the everyday). The call to speak is often frustrated. According to Romero the injustice and violence in El Salvador is due in large part “to the failure of the prophetic mission in many baptized.”³⁰ If I may paraphrase: What difference does being baptized make to being a Black Lives Matters supporter? What are baptized people doing in congress or the White House? Republicans, where is your baptism? Democrats, where is your baptism? Bishops and pastors, where is your baptism? Deans and seminary professors, where is your baptism? The call to speak for Christ is constantly being drowned out by noise; it needs to be reissued. Romero was not Methodist; if he had been, he might have said: O for a thousand tongues to preach my great redeemer’s praise!

Second, a Romero preaching voice would sound like the voice of the voiceless. The church as microphone of Christ serves as an instrument of the risen savior who still speaks through the Scriptures and who identifies himself with the least, the last, and the voiceless.

Speaking for the voiceless is urgent. In El Salvador, tens of thousands of tongues were silenced. Their bodies disappeared. It was as if they had never been. For Romero it is very important that the voiceless are not nameless. The care he takes in calling the victims of repression by name is a way of giving voice to the voiceless. The act of naming is an empowering act; it restores dignity to those often lost into the anonymity of the poor or the marginalized. Human rights are borne by people who have names. They have faces. They have voices. The Church has a responsibility to speak before these are silenced, defaced, and erased.

carries methodological weight. It is intended to express the theologizing of a group of people who are both diverse in culture and conjoined in purpose. Theology done *en conjunto* aspires to model a collaboration among scholars that is rarely found and even less frequently rewarded by the academy. Justo González also refers to this methodological solidarity as *Fuenteovejuna* theology in remembrance of a play by Lope de Vega, where the people of the town of *Fuenteovejuna* maintain their solidarity in the face of police attempts to divide the community. Cf. *Mañana: Christian Theology from a Hispanic Perspective* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 28–30.

²⁹ Romero, “Juan Bautista, paradigma del hombre comprometido con el reino de Dios” (24 June 1979), *Homilias: tomo V*, 41.

³⁰ Romero, “El profeta, presencia de Dios en la sociedad” (8 Jul 1979), *Homilias: tomo V*, 87.

Speaking for the voiceless is complicated. Is there not a risk that the voice of the voiceless ends up muting the marginalized? Are not the voiceless in danger of becoming passive amplifiers of the voice of the privileged philanthropist? Yes. Romero is aware of these risks. Romero does not claim to be the voice of the voiceless based on his own knowledge or experience. Romero's representative role is based on the prior initiative of God who calls, anoints, and sends prophets to speak to and for the people of God.³¹ It is because "the Spirit of the Lord is upon him" and upon the people of God in El Salvador that Romero listens and preaches good news to the poor.³²

Speaking for the voiceless will be opposed. "These sermons," preaches Romero, "want to be the voice of those who have no voice. This is the reason why they irritate those who have too much voice."³³ As microphones of Christ, the church amplifies voices which the government would like to silence, and it does so by keeping the mic close to the mouths of the suffering ones. The state has bombs and microphones. Even so, the power of the microphone that is the church and its instruments far exceeds that of the state media, because the voice of the church speaks from the power of truth rather than the truth of power.

Third, a Romero preaching voice would sound like the voice crying in the wilderness. John the Baptist is the paradigm of all prophetic calls. I have been struck by the contrast in homiletical approaches in many mainline churches in the United States compared to that most common in Latin America. In the United States, students learn to preach like Nathan the prophet. The story is well known. Nathan the prophet is sent by God to condemn David's sin with Bathsheba. By telling a parable, Nathan leads David to pass judgment on himself. The Nathan approach is inductive, subtle. It works by misdirection and guile. In Latin America, preachers learn to preach like John the Baptist. He is direct and hard. He speaks of vipers, axes against trees, and one coming who is more fearsome than he. Both approaches are biblical. Both are speaking truth to power, but in different ways and with different risks.

On the one hand, there is more John the Baptist in Romero than Nathan. Romero challenges his listeners to compare the manner of John the Baptist's preaching to contemporary preaching. Which preaching resembles that of John the Baptist the most? The preacher that denounces injustices and abuses in the world? Or the one who preaches a flabby gospel that makes no social demands?³⁴

On the other hand, there is more to prophetic preaching that denunciation. The voice crying in the wilderness does not only says "repent," but it also says "behold." The vision of the new creation comes first. And in light of this vision comes the rejection of the anti-kingdom. Preaching eternal life and the new creation are not opiates which dull the people's sensibilities. On the contrary, the vision of the new creation is the high caffeine drink that urges people on because it gives meaning and permanence to transitory deeds.

³¹ Cf. Mark Lewis Taylor, "Subalternity and Advocacy as Kairos for Theology," in *Opting for the Margins: Postmodernity and Liberation in Christian Theology*, Joerg Rieger, ed., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 23f. Accessed through Oxford Scholarship Online.

³² Cf. Puebla, 1145: "By drawing near to the poor in order to accompany them and serve them, we do what Christ taught us, to make ourselves into our brother, who is poor like we are. For this reason the service of the poor is the preferred, though not the exclusive, measure of our attempts to follow Christ. The best service to one's brother is the preaching of the gospel, which readies him to recognize himself as a child of God, which liberates him from injustice and promotes his welfare comprehensively."

³³ Romero, "El Divino Salvador, solución de todos nuestros problemas" (29 Jul 79), *Homilias: tomo V*, 155.

³⁴ Cf. Romero, "Juan Bautista, paradigma" (24 Jun 1979), *Homilias: tomo V*, 42.

Fourth, a Romero preaching voice would sound like the voice of the good shepherd. In his *Leaves from the Notebook of a Tamed Cynic*, Reinhold Niebuhr remarks on how it is difficult to be prophetic with a congregation once you get to love them.³⁵ Romero did not experience this tension between the prophetic and the pastoral. When Romero preached at the funeral for his friend Rutilio Grande, the first of many priests killed in El Salvador, he preached of love, a love that can conquer all evil and quell all desires of revenge. To the killers, whom Romero imagines may well be listening to the radio broadcast of the sermon, he says, “Brother criminals, we want to tell you that we love you and that we are praying to God for your heartfelt repentance.”³⁶ Brother criminals, this is the voice of the shepherd, prophetic and pastoral.

The voice of the shepherd is a human voice, but the presence of the Word makes it more than a human voice. The divine origin of the words riding on the human voice is also the reason why the voice should not sound like the voices of the world. Romero was and still is hard to locate on ideological maps. He preached against sin in all its forms, personal and structural. He listened to the pope and to the poor. He preached strong messages against consumerism and militarism and he also preached against abortion and adultery. He refused to let the voice of the Church be commandeered by any of the social agendas of the day. Not because all the agendas were the same. They were not. And some like that of the oligarchy, he preached against. But no agenda can capture the kingdom of God. The kingdom is not built from below; God’s plan does not come from the right or from the left. The New Jerusalem comes down from above. For these reasons, he was attacked from all sides. Preaching may be polarizing but it cannot be partisan.

Conclusion

We could learn many more lessons from the pulpit of Romero, but let us turn for a moment instead to the University of Central America in San Salvador; there is a chapel known as the Chapel of the Martyrs. In it are buried six Jesuit priests who were murdered by death squads on November 16, 1989. The Chapel was built in 1985. Its construction and design were guided by the rector of the University, Ignacio Ellacuría, one of Romero’s collaborators and one of the martyred priests. As with many church buildings in the tropics, it has open walls except at the front and back. The wall behind the altar bears brightly colored panels showing scenes of the civil war in El Salvador. Romero’s own martyrdom is featured along with mass graves. And yet the scene is a hopeful one. The light of the resurrection illumines the history with hope. This is the view of the worshipping congregation. The preacher has a different view. The priest can see the congregation and behind them on the back wall, by the entrance, a set of fourteen black and white sketches of tortured, naked, corpses. These were commissioned by Ellacuría, who wanted to have a set of stations of the cross that represented the passion of the people of El Salvador. Each station was associated with a text from one of Romero’s sermons, and marked another step of the crucified people journeying through history. The entire building can be interpreted as a posthumous celebration of Romero’s preaching. As microphones of Christ, we, the Church, preach resurrection in the face of crucifixion. Tortured truths in a culture of pleasant lies. Hallelujahs and woes. Repent and Behold. “That is what church festivals are like: with blood of martyrdom, with hope of Christianity.”³⁷

³⁵ Reinhold Niebuhr, *Leaves from the Notebook of a Tamed Cynic* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/Knox Press, 1990), 47.

³⁶ Romero, “Una motivación de amor (Funeral del P. Rutilio Grande)” (14 Mar 1977), *Homilias: tomo I*, 35.

³⁷ Romero, “Juan Bautista, paradigma” (24 June 1979), *Homilias: tomo V*, 47.

Preaching as Internal Interreligious Dialogue: A Harvard Case Study

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***Abstract:** This paper explores the overlapping space between an internal conception of interreligious dialogue and models of conversational preaching and homiletical theology which embrace mutual critical-correlational theological method. At the heart of the paper is a close reading of a sermon focusing on John 5:31–47—preaching much influenced by interreligious hermeneutics. The analysis shows how preaching effectively may address some fundamental principles of interreligious dialogue, for example by offering space for open-minded, respectful, and attentive listening and learning from the religious other, or by encouraging curiosity as well as deep reflection on Christian gospel in the light of gospel resonant of voices from other religious traditions. In the concluding discussion, the implications of this research for the rhetoric of conversational preaching practice are highlighted, and further homiletical-theological reflection on the relationship between preaching and interreligious dialogue is encouraged, not only because it is possible but because it is desirable for Christian preaching and homiletics in particular.*

Christian preaching is probably not the most likely candidate venue for encouraging interreligious dialogue. Sadly, preaching has too often been a place where the identities of non-Christian others have been used as a foil either for defining or redefining a Christian group. Advocates of interreligious dialogue might point to other shortcomings that make preaching an unlikely partner for such work: the historically monological form of the sermon, especially in culturally dominant groups; the culturally privileged place that the pulpit has occupied in Euro American traditions; and the location of preaching practice within religious traditions for which preaching is often precisely a key identity marker. There are many good reasons for assuming that preaching is not the ideal place to engage in interreligious dialogue.

At the same time, we sense that this may just be the right moment to explore strengthening such a relationship. Two key insights about interreligious dialogue and the task of preaching themselves lead us to bringing the two together in practice.

First, the field of homiletics itself has begun to develop theologically more open, dialogical models to describe the preaching task. We think in particular of the rise of conversational models of preaching and more dialogical approaches to homiletical theology. At the level of preaching practice and theology, homileticians are embracing mutual critical-correlational ways of thinking about the relationship of preaching both to differences within communities of faith and the diverse sources and norms with which theological method is carried out in the preaching task. While conversational preaching as a practice remains monological, it attends internally to differences among congregants and develops and promotes rhetorical practices that expose dominant views to dialogue and revision.¹ Similarly, in homiletical theology, the theological task of preaching is viewed as unfinished. This is to say that within the

¹ See e.g. Lucy Atkinson Rose, *Sharing the Word: Preaching in the Roundtable Church* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997); John S. McClure, *Other-Wise Preaching* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2001); O. Wesley Allen Jr., *The Homiletic of All Believers: A Conversational Approach to Proclamation and Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005); Ronald J. Allen, John S McClure, and O. Wesley Allen Jr., eds., *Under the Oak Tree: The Church as Community of Conversation in a Conflicted and Pluralistic World* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2013).

diverse sources and norms for doing theology in the pulpit, there is no clear, unified resolution of the tradition (say, Christian antijudaism in its ancient texts), but actually an ongoing dialogue of critique and revision: especially at the level of scripture, reason, tradition, and experience.

Second, the study of interreligious dialogue has helped to clarify the range of activity that dialogue actually entails. While we may usually think of interreligious dialogue as a meeting of religious leaders or groups in such a space that allows each to bear witness to each one's truth in an environment of mutual respect, the actual practice of interreligious dialogue happens across a much broader spectrum. Comparative theologian Catherine Cornille notes the many forms assumed these days by interreligious dialogue, e.g. "meetings between religious leaders in a common display of solidarity and friendship [...] collaboration between members of different religions in grassroots projects [...] intense discussion and debate between religious scholars [...] interreligious prayer [and] spiritual exchange."² Even then, a fundamental ontological distinction can be made between these various external manifestations of interreligious dialogue and *internal* or *interior dialogue*: "an internal conversation going on between two religions to which [an individual] has been exposed [...]."³ This is a dialogue, says Faisal Bin Abdulrahman Bin Muaammar, "about the meaning of life, through a search for meaning that investigates the foundations of religious, cultural, and ideological worldviews, as well as their constant interactions." It is appropriately labelled "internal" because it "takes place within one's own self-consciousness, stimulated by interactions with both written and oral sources of knowledge. It is a dialogue that is often invisible and inaudible because it takes place inside one's head and heart."⁴

We are convinced that this overlapping space, particularly between an internal conception of interreligious dialogue and models of conversational preaching and homiletical theology that embrace mutual critical-correlational theological method as a way of accounting for difference present a unique opportunity for rethinking preaching itself as interreligious dialogue. We particularly think it is valuable given the opportunity of developing and furthering an explicitly interreligious consciousness not just among leadership, but the faithful as well.

As a way of initiating a wider discussion of this topic in the field, we focus in this paper on an analysis of a sermon that embodies internally a profound dialogue with religious others and inhabits a kind of mutual critical-correlational view of theological method in actual preaching practice. We think a close reading of this sermon in light of some clear criteria of the "conditions" for interreligious dialogue will yield a helpful platform for the field of homiletics to consider a more wide-ranging, pluralistic vision for its conversational and theological practice in preaching. As we propose this, we aim to instigate a self-conscious dialogue in the field of homiletics itself about the relationship of preaching and interreligious dialogue. While we believe that specific models of conversational preaching and homiletical theology are open to such a possibility, the reality is that relationship has yet to be realized in the direction we hope to surface here. We want this study to offer a first step toward such dialogue. Following the sermon analysis, we also hope to draw out conclusions that may further buttress why such a move is not only possible but desirable for Christian preaching and homiletics in particular.

² Catherine Cornille, *The Im-Possibility of Interreligious Dialogue* (New York: Crossroad Pub. Co., 2008), 1.

³ Sallie B. King, "Interreligious Dialogue" in *The Oxford Handbook of Religious Diversity* by Chad Meister, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 102.

⁴ Faisal Bin Abdulrahman Bin Muaammar, "Agree to Differ in Matters of Ultimate Concern: Religious Diversity and Interreligious Dialogue" in *UNESCO: Agree to Differ* (Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization/Tudor Rose, 2015), 48. Accessed December 4, 2016. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0023/002315/231544E.pdf>.

Sermon, context and analytical procedure

The sermon used as our example (Appendix 1) was preached on 9 March 2016 during the “Thursday Morning Eucharist,” a recurrent event in the religious services calendar at Harvard Divinity School. The preacher, Francis X. Clooney, is a Jesuit priest, a leading authority on Hinduism, and the Parkman Professor of Divinity, Professor of Comparative Theology, and Director of the Center for the Study of World Religions at HDS. The sermon was prepared but Clooney used no notes. The Gospel reading of the day from John 5:31–47 “*If I testify about myself, my testimony is not true ...*” was focal to the sermon. Two main themes run through Clooney’s sermon. The first is our latent inability as Christians to acknowledge God’s acts of love that happen right before us and, consequently, our failure to follow Jesus and act as people for whom love has been revealed. The second is more metatextual in nature and addresses the hermeneutic challenges facing preachers taking on John’s gospel. In many ways, Clooney’s sermon could be seen as a response to Marilyn Salmon’s urgent call for Christian preaching not to “resort to false and harmful stereotypes” of Jews in the gospels and, in several places in the sermon, Clooney proposes hermeneutic and other approaches intended to counter the perpetuation of Christian anti-Judaism.⁵ The two themes come together to form a central message in Clooney’s sermon: do not point a finger at other people, do not engage in polemics about what may be right or wrong; instead, pray for your own transformation so that you can truly respond to Jesus’ call to love.

An audio recording was made of the service up to and including the sermon. Following the service, one of the authors transcribed the sermon in full. The author attending the service took observation notes (about the venue, people attending, things said or done, gestures etc.). While the notes were crucial as a supplement to our close reading of the sermon, they also formed the basis for a follow-up conversation with the preacher. Approximately three weeks after the sermon, one author met Clooney for a (semi-structured) interview where we talked about his preaching in general terms as well as the sermon in question in particular. Before the interview, Clooney had been asked to read a copy of the transcript, and encouraged to take self-reflective margin notes about anything that came to mind as he revisited his own sermon. In the informal atmosphere of the interview we compared our observation notes with Clooney’s reflections, adding to a comprehensive, and partly collective, initial analysis.

We would have done an “interreligious reading” of the sermon injustice if we had analyzed it line by line. Therefore, a holistic approach where we were guided by a set of established “principles” for interreligious dialogue was chosen, and we evaluated Clooney’s sermon on the basis of how it addresses these principles.

⁵ Marilyn J. Salmon, *Preaching Without Contempt* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2006), 107. This second principle may prove to be especially significant for the practice of preaching as internal, interreligious dialogue. The unfinished work of the tradition around the relationship of the Christian sect that begins to emerge from Judaism after the destruction of the Temple in and after the latter part of the first century becomes an ever reinscribed space within the tradition where interreligious issues still haunt the tradition and offer within its own effective history, an opportunity to do homiletical theology other-wise.

Table 1. Principles of interreligious dialogue, adapted from King⁶

Interreligious dialogue is conditioned by:

- Principle 1:* Willingness and ability to listen to and learn from the religious other.
- Principle 2:* Willingness and ability to speak with confidence and bear witness.
- Principle 3:* Open-mindedness, curiosity, and sense of discovery.
- Principle 4:* Utmost respect for the other (and their beliefs, traditions, etc.).
- Principle 5:* Self-criticism rather than defensiveness.

Needless to say, this list of five principles for interreligious dialogue should not be considered conclusive. However, the principles serve a purpose in this paper by providing a framework of comparative standards for the empirical analysis (further elaboration on the principles is deferred to the analysis where they may be properly contextualized). These principles seem especially plausible to us in light of the very mutual critical-correlationist models that often guide conversational preaching and homiletical theology as a whole.⁷

An interreligious reading of Francis X. Clooney's sermon

As in most instances of analytical work of this nature, our analysis moves between, on the one hand, empirical verification evidenced by data and, on the other hand, informed yet tentative supposition. The analysis is concerned with both content and form as in preaching, a separation of form from content is unsustainable: "form and content are of a piece."⁸ Quotations from the sermon appear together with a line reference to make it easier for readers to go to the appendix and confirm the analysis.

Preaching and Dialogue Principle 1 (willingness and ability to listen and learn from the other)

Contemporary interreligious dialogue endeavors to place emphasis on the listening and learning mode (notwithstanding Principle 2),⁹ on "listen[ing] to the other with a certain attention, the hermeneutical openness to understanding the other."¹⁰

Clooney acknowledged the central place of sermon listening in our interview by way of a rhetorical question:

How can you carry on a conversation if you are not willing to listen? One's starting points need to be open to correction, what one thinks one knows must be open to be challenged; reducing the other to something static is a mistake. Really listening [to what the other has to offer] is indispensable.

⁶ King, "Interreligious," 107.

⁷ Ronald J. Allen, "Preaching as Mutual Critical Correlation through Conversation" in *Purposes of Preaching* by Jana Childers, ed. (St. Louis, Mo.: Chalice Press, 2004), 1–22. David Tracy takes up the relation to interreligious dialogue in particular in his chapter, "Western Hermeneutics and Interreligious Dialogue," in *Interreligious Hermeneutics*, C. Cornille and C. Conway, eds. (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2010), 1–43.

⁸ Fred. B. Craddock, *As One Without Authority* (Atlanta: Chalice, 2001), 18.

⁹ King, "Interreligious," 107.

¹⁰ Marianne Moyaert, "Interreligious Dialogue" in *Understanding Interreligious Relations* by David Cheetham, Douglas Pratt, and David Thomas, eds. (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 2013), 217.

Early on in Clooney's sermon, listening is explicitly foregrounded:

(Lines 34–36): A powerful message I think all of us can hear in Lent: we already know what we need to know.

However, listening is thematic throughout the sermon, though perhaps less conspicuously than in this first instance. There are no less than 31 instances of “say”-speech events, all of which are suggestive of this listening theme, as the act of someone “saying” something also implies a listening agent. If we disregard for a moment the privileged speaking position granted Clooney by virtue of being the preacher, multiple other speaking subjects are foregrounded in the sermon: Jesus, John, and the Hindu teacher Shankara, all of whom invite us to listen attentively to what *they* have to say:

(lines 103–105): We, of all people, should know better. Shankara said this to his fellow Brahmins; Jesus (and John) SAID this to those who watched Jesus; and Jesus says the same to us today.

The recurrent construal of these individuals as subjects of speech events is conversationally significant as it places them in a position to engage us as listeners, as individuals partial to conversation. While they are also occasionally construed as objects of speech events, i.e. when Clooney talks *about* them, the more frequent construal of Jesus, John, and Shankara as grammatical subjects suggests a discursive empowerment and acknowledgment of these individuals as real conversational equals, worthy of our listening. Their status as conversational partners in the sermon is further accentuated by *how* their speech is presented. Close to 23 % of the words in the entire sermon (i.e. including everything) is represented as “hypothetical” direct speech from one of these individuals, as in this important section where Clooney envisages the evangelist addressing us directly, creating an immediacy and certain urgency by virtue of the (hypothetical) direct rendition of his words:

(lines 64–69): ...John is saying this today too: “You are the educated people; you are the people of God; you are the people who have the sacred text; you are the people who have the temple. Why don't you get it and see who this is?” And he is most concerned about the people just like himself saying: “I am a Jew” – unfortunately he does not say this – “I am a Jew, you are Jewish, why don't you get it?”

Additionally, the religious belonging of these speaking subjects is significant. Obviously, Shankara is Hindu, but Clooney urges us also to remember

(line 54): ...that Jesus is Jewish, John is Jewish...

In other words, the speaking subjects privileged in significant parts by the sermon represent the religious other, the Hindu and the Jew; it is the words of these religious others that we hear echoing through the sermon and are called to attend to.

The voice of the religious other is also structurally prominent. Although this is a sermon which is deeply committed to an understanding of Christian gospel and its contemporary relevance, for the opening and framing of the sermon, Clooney turns to another religious

tradition, and we are invited to share in the central tenets of the Brhadaranyaka Upanishad and Shankara's teaching based on it:

(lines 3–4, 7–9): ...every self is ultimately one with the universe in a very powerful way... don't water down the scripture; don't take the scripture for less; don't make it something common sense, but change yourself to fit the scripture – because it is true.

Effectively, Clooney is utilizing central teachings from Hinduism to break open the underlying meaning of John's gospel; he seems to have complete faith in his listeners' opening themselves up to this exercise in interreligious hermeneutics, and thus in their willingness to learn from the religious other. Quite evidently, Clooney has a strong belief in the transformative potential of listening and learning from this message and what it can bring to our understanding of the Christian gospel:

(lines 108–112): ...we have two weeks of Lent left, and two weeks in which to pray that the transformation Jesus is calling for takes place. The changing of our hearts, the changing of our lives so that instead of throwing stones at other people realize that we are the ones being chastised...Now is the time to convert your life

Preaching and Dialogue Principle 2 (bearing witness and speaking with confidence)

Preachers, by virtue of their right to preach from within a faith tradition, are able to speak compellingly with confidence and integrity from within their own tradition and, importantly, have the ability to formulate a theology based on witness bearing which resonates with their Christian listeners. Interreligious dialogue, King says, also “requires witness, understood as expressing one's *own perspective*, experience, and commitment to one's religion.”¹¹ Many Christians may want to resort to the comfort of a denominational identity and/or definition, at least during the initial stages of dialogue, but careful preaching can help people develop a stronger sense of confessional self that is open to a different kind of interreligious exploration. From the point of view of her “homiletic of comparative theology,” Yarbrough confirms this position, saying that:¹²

the role of witness is crucial for the preacher.... In a religiously plural world, all people of faith must accept that their understanding of the divine reality we Christians call God is mediated through the lens of their particular tradition. What you see depends heavily on where you stand, and so no one can do more than bear witness to their *own experience* and observation.

Thus, the individual witness-bearing in the sermon is conditioned by the preacher's experience and individual sense-making of the text, and typically expressed affirmatively. Clooney's sermon highlights this witness-bearing dimension of preaching in several ways. Clooney represents in this sermon what Thomas G. Long calls a biblical witness: [...] a preacher [who] prayerfully [and dutifully] goes to the Bible on behalf of the people and then speaks on Christ's behalf what she or he hears there.”¹³ Clooney's engagement with the gospel text boils down to his finding

¹¹ King, “Interreligious,” 106, emphasis added.

¹² Yarbrough, “Practicing,” 202.

¹³ Thomas G. Long, T, *The Witness of Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 52.

(lines 20–21): a beautiful teaching in today’s reading from the fifth chapter of the Gospel of John, and ... a big problem.

The “problem” he witnesses to, the contemptuous gospel tone towards Jews, is brought into a different perspective as a result of Clooney’s interreligious engagement with Shankara. Effectively, this is an acknowledgement of “the witness we have heard from our interreligious neighbors about their experiences [...]”¹⁴

Clooney is also bearing witness to how one can remain firmly established within one’s own (scriptural) tradition, and still engage in multiple ways and at various levels with other religious traditions. During the interview, he expressed it thus:

The complexity, the openness, the taking seriously, both the gospel, the Jewish interlocutors, and the Hindu parallel...this makes for a complicated kind of witness, but an important witness: See, you can take ALL [emphatic] of this seriously and still be here as a Christian.

Clooney’s confidence in the way the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, Shankara’s commentary, and John’s gospel jointly carry an important message for the contemporary listener is reminiscent of one of his recent publications where he expresses a similar point: “we see the other in light of our own, and our own in light of the other.”¹⁵ There is definitely, he says, a “possibility of being intelligently faithful to tradition, even while seeking fresh understanding outside the tradition”¹⁶ Clooney’s position, as evidenced by such claims, represents an interesting case of inclusive Christian testimony.

Through his interreligious testimony, when it is appropriate, Clooney speaks unwaveringly and with strong epistemic confidence. Rhetorically, this testimonial confidence is reflected through the repeated use of determinate modality, conveying a sense of certainty characteristic of the poised witness:

(lines 34–35): ...we already know what we need to know. The word of Jesus is absolutely clear...

Such forceful rhetoric becomes even more acute when it is presented as Jesus speaking directly to us, naming us by name:

(lines 26, 30, 90): You already know who I am...you know who I am...you know all of this...

The preaching-conversational implications of expressing such conviction seem clear: Clooney wants to instill confidence in us too; he wants us to embrace a Biblical message, one which has become clearer to us by virtue of our dialoguing with Hinduism; he also wants us to become self-assured witnesses, testifying to the potency of religions in conversation, to the very positive impact such conversations may have on us and our religious convictions. Listeners could be

¹⁴ Yarbrough, “Practicing,” 202.

¹⁵ Francis X. Clooney, *Comparative Theology* (Malden, Mass.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 13.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

challenged to pursue, Clooney reminded us during the interview, “a new hermeneutic of their own, open to relevant interreligious influences”:

[Preaching] is a step toward getting Christians to have a more mature and nuanced relationship to their own scripture, which therefore would be a development of their maturity as Christians, their Christian identity. There must be stages of growth, so you go from “everything in the scripture is simply as it is”... to a very critical relationship... to some kind of sense that we are not authorized to dismiss or censure scripture... but we may up to now have had an incredibly naïve sense of how it works and therefore have to listen to it anew...and provoke a sense that “the way I have been reading these texts no longer works and therefore if I am serious about taking them seriously, I have to find a new hermeneutic”...

The notion of identifying a new hermeneutic is a significant theme in much of Clooney’s preaching and obviously relates to his conviction that preaching, and faith more generally, benefits from productive interreligious exchange. A consequence of finding this new hermeneutic is that it will greatly help sermon listeners to develop an authentic testimony to their own faith, and in Clooney’s sermon, listeners are encouraged to turn to another religious tradition for hermeneutical inspiration.¹⁷ Clooney is adamant that anyone can apply hermeneutical tools for the benefit of hearing an authentic gospel – he wants his preaching to be an incentive for listeners to explore what is outside an “ordinary” Christian frame of reference. The result, if done properly, is not only a more nuanced form of Christian hermeneutics, but a conversation opener with religious traditions other than our own.

The same kind of hermeneutics can be applied to a Christian text as to a Hindu text, if a person is willing and able. The hermeneutical process, the interpretative process, there is no good reason, even if there are doctrinal differences, why we cannot learn how to read better, how to think better about a text [regardless of its religious origin].

To summarize, what we are seeing in Clooney’s sermon with respect to Dialogue Principle 2 is evidence that preaching in conversation with the religious other, nourished by a nuanced hermeneutic, can effectively sustain a Christian philosophy (through witness bearing from *within* the tradition) while simultaneously acting as (and encouraging the listener to be a) witness of *another* tradition, and how these two testimonies can be mutually supportive.

Preaching and Dialogue Principle 3 (open-mindedness and a sense of discovery)

Preconceived ideas about dialogue (e.g. what it will accomplish) is a poor starting point for any dialogue, King argues, primarily because it is impossible to know how the other will affect us individually.¹⁸ The objective of interreligious preaching could be to encourage and cultivate in the listener a sense of curiosity about where a continued conversation with the other may lead, a sense of discovering gospel *involving* the other. Yarbrough recommends that listeners be gospel explorers, that they go “into the world with an open mind and heart, ready to see God at work in the midst of all our worldly encounters, including those with people of

¹⁷ Catherine Cornille, “Conditions for Inter-Religious Dialogue,” in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogue* by Catherine Cornille ed. (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 8.

¹⁸ King, “Interreligious,” 108.

different religious traditions.”¹⁹ Through open minds, we open ourselves to a conversation with others about *their* “gospel,” and what we might take away from it.

Clooney incentivizes such discovery and curiosity by foregrounding the Upanishad, rather than John’s gospel, so that it becomes the frame of reference; a Hindu “gospel” shedding light on the Christian gospel. Clooney makes no attempt at hiding his own enthusiasm for the impact that this conversation with the religious other might have, and he obviously wants his listeners to share that enthusiasm. To facilitate a start of the conversation, the other is described in appreciative, almost passionate, terms:

(lines 1–9, 61): one of the most important ancient Hindu texts... is a text that teaches pure non-dualism, that every self is ultimately one with the universe in a very powerful way... the great Vedanta teacher, Shankara... it [the Scripture] is true... Shankara, the great teacher

Such positive appraisal of the other may be conducive to the listeners’ overall positive evaluation of what dialogue with the other may entail.

Clooney conveys how his own discovery of Shankara’s commentary on the Upanishad has allowed him to arrive at an alternative understanding of the relevant section in John’s gospel. He hopes, no doubt, that having provoked the listeners’ enthusiasm for discovery beyond the “ordinary,” the internal dialogue between the listeners and the other may continue in some shape or form.

What I see myself as doing in any preaching context is helping people to see that the word of God is far more interesting, unfamiliar, and challenging than they thought it was. I often urge people to go home and “get out your Bible and re-read this chapter and think about this for yourself... Once the things you think you know well, once that opens up and you realize that you really do not know how to read these texts or what they are about”. I think that would set up a model of openness, a willingness to learn also from other traditions that one ostensibly knows a lot less about and that that needing to know more, not knowing enough, is quite compatible with being a person of faith.

Clooney triggers our curiosity by pointing to an inherent duality of the gospel reading, represented at the surface level as lexical contrast along the positive-negative continuum: the reading is variously described with reference to a beautiful teaching (e.g. line 20) or a powerful message (e.g. line 34), whereas in fact the text also raises a big problem (e.g. line 21). Addressing this problem is the real challenge of this gospel, according to Clooney; the challenging nature of the word of God means that listeners would be wrong in accepting just the beautiful teaching; rather the word of God challenges them to thoughtful engagement, indexed by the many verb phrases involving cognitive activity that goes well beyond a mere reading:

(lines 76–77, 82, 85, 87, 93): the reading today... challenges... in this Gospel... requires deeper thinking... what we can struggle with... to sort out for ourselves... if we can imagine... we could realize...

¹⁹ Yarbrough, “Practicing,” 196.

The lesson of the sermon is clear: the listeners' (and indeed the preacher's) conversation with the religious other becomes a real and viable resource for profound reflective engagement; openness to the other paves the way for genuine gospel discovery. This gospel discovery recalls what Allen refers to as "theological discovery" and the preacher's task of "help(ing) the congregation as a community engage in theological reflection."²⁰ Theological discovery as conceived by Allen is ultimately about revising one's point of view as a result of "thinking afresh about her or his own theology."²¹ As we have seen, the internal interreligious dialogue prompted by preaching conversations offers an excellent platform for pursuing such discovery.

Preaching and Dialogue Principle 4 (respect for the other)

According to King "each party to the dialogue *must* be recognized as occupying a place of respect equal to the others."²² The lack of compromise is noticeable here – there is nothing suggesting that respect merely *enriches* dialogue – without respect for the other, there can simply be no dialogue. Respect for the other (not just the religious other but all "others") is also a cornerstone of postmodern (post-apologetic) homiletics: "each participant [in the preaching conversation] must respect the otherness or integrity of all other participants."²³ Preaching is, therefore, a discourse well prepared to handle the pronouncement and sustenance of respect as a necessary condition for the relationship with the other and, arguably, preaching can contribute significantly and profoundly by way of ideationally and interpersonally constructing respect in the sermon. During our interview, respect was addressed conceptually on several occasions with Clooney noting, e.g. that

...respect is central, and respect is a very demanding virtue... Respect should not be superficial, and the most respectful thing to do is to really get to know the other tradition.

In Clooney's sermon, respect may be understood as having different dimensions. In one sense the sermon addresses respect ideationally, i.e. as an experiential phenomenon, problematized as respect for a text about otherness prone to misunderstanding, and how this impacts directly on the participants in the dialogue. Listeners' relationship to the text, and the deployment of an interreligious hermeneutic to counter a misreading (essentially a "disrespectful" reading) of the text becomes a central theme. Closer inspection of the sermon confirms that Clooney is concerned both with the text as other, and with the religious other who is *in* the text and consequently subject to our (mis)interpretation of the text. Clooney is adamant, however, that this gospel about religious otherness deserves our respect:

...I want people to learn to respect this chapter of John's gospel. This is about self-respect. It's easy to dismiss it and say let's skip that because it's problematic. That would not be respectful... We are at the service of the Biblical text; this is what we have. The Bible is not simply one more book on this shelf to pick from.

²⁰ Ronald J. Allen, "Preaching as Spark for Discovery in Theology" in *Homiletical Theology: Preaching as Doing Theology*, by David Schnasa Jacobsen, ed. (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015), 151.

²¹ Ibid.

²² King, "Interreligious," 107, emphasis added.

²³ Allen, "Preaching as Mutual Critical Correlation," 3.

In addition, however, respect becomes a central interpersonal concern in the discursive relationship between Clooney and the listeners where, clearly, Clooney is anxious to open up a conversational space to further the internal interreligious dialogue. According to Wesley Allen Jr., sermon listeners must be granted the “freedom to assent or disagree” with a sermon.²⁴ This freedom presupposes that there is an interpretative or dialogic space in the sermon that is open to the extent that listeners may inhabit it and exploit it, informed by their experiences, opinions, and desires. When preaching invites listeners to share in a dialogue involving the religious other, preaching must respect that listeners want to participate in the conversation on their own individual terms; for this reason, certain conversational allowances must be made. In the Andover sermon, Clooney is sensitive to listeners’ desire to extend the conversation.

A prominent feature of the sermon is thus the prolific use of so-called hedging language, typically used to express alternative viewpoints, possibility and open-mindedness about a proposition.

(lines 48–61): One view is just to, you know, not say those words... Another thing is to not do... A third thing to do...Fourth, I think we can also

A powerful message I think all of us can hear in Lent; ... I think we cannot just wave our hand... I think, probably, if we put ourselves in that spot... And I think if we took it in that tone... probably...maybe...I suppose...I think it reminds us... I think the point is...I think we can also, probably, as I was suggesting...I think there’s a way in which John is saying this today too.

This language, rejecting assertiveness in favor of non-assertiveness, is not intended to convey uncertainty or doubt in the epistemic sense, rather the purpose is to acknowledge sermon listeners as active participants in the sermonic conversation, and to further their internal dialogue without imposing on them. By resorting to this kind of rhetoric, Clooney is encouraging listeners to explore further on their own, to offer their own alternative individual interpretations of states of affairs with which they are presented, and to open up their own (tacit) internal dialogues. Clooney needs, however, to strike a reasonable balance between showing respect for the listener in this regard, and expressing the confidence of the credible and passionate witness. Cornille draws attention to this challenging dimension of interreligious dialogue, saying that “whereas the receptive side of dialogue requires complete openness, the active side on the other hand presupposes total commitment.”²⁵

Preaching and Dialogue Principle 5 (self-criticism rather than defensiveness)

Addressing this last of the dialogue principles, King observes that “all religious traditions are embodied in human institutions, which are limited and fallible” and an interreligious dialogue participant must engage in “appropriate self-criticism of one’s tradition,”²⁶ necessitating a re-evaluation/re-perspectivization of definitive confessional truths, or as Cornille notes, a recognition of “the limited or finite way in which the ultimate truth is grasped or expressed

²⁴ O. Wesley Allen Jr. “Introduction: The Pillars of the New Homiletic” in *The Renewed Homiletic*, by O. Wesley Allen Jr., ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010), 8.

²⁵ Cornille, “Conditions,” 8.

²⁶ King, “Interreligious,” 107, emphasis added.

within one's religion."²⁷ Effective dialoguing is, to some extent, about exposing one's vulnerability and failure to understand something completely, even when it applies to one's own tradition. Preachers can be instrumental in making self-criticism dialogically constructive rather than destructive, and they can help listeners find their way out of the apparent conversational conundrum of witness-bearing offset by a critique of self.

Clooney addresses the self-criticism head on in the Andover sermon, indeed, it can be argued that the sermon as a whole constitutes a critique of the complacent Christian self, or even a general critique of spiritual complacency across religious boundaries, since neither Hinduism, Judaism or any other religious tradition is immune to Clooney's words in this sermon. By framing his argument with the example of Shankara's critique of the Brahmans (lines 62, 12–13) – those who are “people like himself” yet, depicted as “pointless fools... totally blind to the meaning of the scripture...” – Clooney intertwines Hindu and Christian self-criticism for a powerful message.

The argument with the Jewish leaders that happens there turns into a kind of indictment of us, our failure to listen...I think it's a principle of not thinking that you are in a position to scold people as if you are exempt from scolding, ... Don't be complacent and don't assume that it applies to someone else but not to you.

The critique, exemplified below, is explicit, relentless, and shows how the sermon can be an effective platform for constructive self-criticism:

(lines 31–32, 69, 88–97, 110) ... you are turning away...you've not seen or understood anything...you don't get it. You fools. You call yourself Christian, you call yourself Catholic, you claim to know the Bible, you claim to go to church on Sundays...you damn Catholics, you damn Christians, you don't get it...wasting your life when you should be following me ... throwing stones at other people...

Negative appraisal of Christians is prominently foregrounded in the sermon: as much as one third of the sermon amounts to Christian critique, either inscribed or evoked. Three things are noticeable about this negative appraisal.

First, it is addressed directly to the listeners, who are specifically named in the sermon, using the second person pronoun “you.” Second, the critique is typically attributed to Jesus or John (rather than averred by Clooney himself or the Church), using direct speech to address the listeners. This is consistent with the conversational circumstances as conveyed by the gospel text where Jesus is speaking in the first person to his interlocutors. The sermon listeners are thus construed as directly responding to Jesus' critique rather than merely observing the criticizing of someone else (arguably, an effective move by Clooney if the intention is to “replace” the Jews with the listeners in the reading of the gospel text). Third, the criticism is targeting listeners' tenacity, veracity and propriety *as Christians*; in other words, it is questioning their behavior with reference to what being a follower of Jesus amounts to. This is the same form of critique that Jesus uses for his interlocutors in the gospel reading.

In sum, therefore, it is interesting to note that Clooney chooses to communicate self-criticism very much in keeping with the sentiment and form of the gospel text, providing

²⁷ Cornille, “Conditions,” 21.

additional evidence that respect for the text (even at the rhetorical level) is important and serves a theological as well as dialogic purpose.

From Sermon as Internal Interreligious Dialogue to a Revised Conversational Preaching Theory

An analysis of Clooney's sermon is likewise both an occasion for "beautiful teaching" and a "big problem" for conversational preaching and homiletical theology today. In one sense, the kind of conversational moves made here build on the many insights of emergent theory in the field. We have already seen frequent elaborations of key features of conversational preaching in Clooney's homiletical praxis in the preceding analysis. On the other hand, a move toward preaching as internal, interreligious dialogue ends up challenging seriously the limited frames by which both conversational preaching and homiletical theology have conceived their tasks, especially on the level of underlying theological method. In this way, Clooney's sermon becomes an occasion to assess both the promise and the limits of the ways in which preaching has been conceived and its theological practice undertaken. We will consider this in six respects, three of which impact the rhetoric of conversational preaching practice and three of which challenge deeply the form of mutual critical correlational homiletics that has brought us to this crucial moment:

Conversational Preaching and the Rhetoric of Internal Interreligious Dialogue

1. Framing to thematize listening to the other

One of the most telling features of Clooney's sermon is his use of Shankara's reading of the Upanishad in connection with the assumptions of the people in his own Brahmin class at the very beginning of his sermon. Clooney wishes to place interreligious dialogue at the center of the unfolding conversation in this sermon. In order to do this, however, he must also offer a hermeneutical angle of vision that gives his hearers purchase on such a move. In the course of this first part of his sermon, he not only introduces the subject matter (presumably to students, some of whom may know Shankara and the traditions involved), but also "frames" it by virtue of an analogy with the Biblical text: Shankara is to fellow Brahmins as Jesus is to other Jews. David Buttrick argues that sermon introductions are especially important for setting a hermeneutic frame for the sermon as a whole, which he calls "hermeneutical orientation."²⁸ While this functions here as a key rhetorical feature of setting up conversational preaching in the form of internal interreligious dialogue, it poses underlying material issues theologically which we will cover below. For now, it is sufficient to notice that thematizing listening to the other becomes important not just as a matter of content and context, but hermeneutically through the use of rhetorical framing.

2. Preaching and the vocative

As a way of engaging hearers conversationally, Clooney adopts the use of the vocative "you" in his sermonic language. The sermon analysis has indicated how the use of "you" and hedging language work together to leave room for hearers to participate in the emerging insight provided by the preacher's shared internal interreligious dialogue. With the use of vocative language, the preacher also gains added immediacy in speech: the conversation is not merely about "something," but direct address, and specifically in the form of "hypothetical direct speech," a mode of the vocative that builds on Jesus' address in the text and elaborated through

²⁸ David Buttrick, *Homiletic: Moves and Structures* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 90–91.

the interreligious analogy from the Hindu tradition. Where this *stretches* the conversational frame in contemporary homiletical theory is the way it grounds the vocative on Jesus' authority relative to the disciples. While conversational preaching typically aims to accommodate difference with a relativization of power relations between preacher and hearers,²⁹ this particular rhetorical use of the vocative wishes to grant a more significant presence to the "other" that is the analogical relation of Jesus and Shankara. Here, we begin to press beyond the more horizontal terms of much conversational homiletics and move toward something different. In his article, "Western Hermeneutics and Interreligious Dialogue," David Tracy argues that the very nature of conversation interreligiously does more than simply level the relation between participants in the conversation, but also opens up the possibility of conversation/dialogue (in a Gadamerian sense) being sometimes subject to a "Hermeneutics at the Limit," where conversation invites participants into a play around dialogue that eventuates in something beyond conversation itself.³⁰ If preaching is to lay itself open to internal interreligious dialogue, it may need to proceed with Tracy toward a wider sense of conversation that includes "hermeneutics at the limit."

3. *A rhetoric of mutual respect*

This rhetorical commitment is, of course, never *merely* rhetorical in interreligious dialogue and reflects an *a priori* commitment to the other and the possibility of openness to transformation. Preaching has been plagued by the use of the other as a rhetorical foil and a caricature of positions and identities unlike one's own. Conversational preaching is focused on respecting difference, even as such difference is typically instantiated within a tradition, about a practice, or in relation to a community of interpretation internal to the homiletical "round table" itself. Interreligious others, though implicit in the conversational impulse, have yet to be treated widely and explicitly in the literature.³¹ The challenge of a rhetoric of mutual respect in interreligious dialogue, even in our own admittedly more internal mode through the use of a conversational homiletic, likely also calls forth a special focus on respect on the part of the preacher, who, internally, renders the religious other present (see #1 above) by thematizing a discursive listening to an otherwise "absent" other. Given the potential range of interreligious knowledge in contexts of Christian preaching, the cultivation of such respect may require an ever more complex theological formation on the part of the preacher not only to render the "other" accurately as represented in the sermon, but to embody a respectful and engaged interest in the other as Clooney clearly does. In this way, a rhetoric of mutual respect has both direct and indirect consequences with conversation partners: direct to the interreligious dialogue partner represented in the sermon and indirect to hearers who, like the preacher, share in a process of internalizing the respect necessary for such an internal interreligious dialogue to occur.

²⁹ The literature in conversational preaching ranges from the conversational "asymmetry" of McClure's collaborationist proposal in *Roundtable Pulpit*, 52–54, to the more thoroughgoing egalitarian impulses of Lucy Rose's non-hierarchical vision in *Sharing the Word*, 122–23.

³⁰ Tracy, "Western Hermeneutics," 18ff.

³¹ To be clear, representatives of conversational preaching have anticipated interreligious realities as a possibility, see McClure, "Collaborative Preaching from the Margins," *Journal for Preachers*, 19:4 (Pentecost 1996), 37–42. At the same time, the issue of such interreligious difference has only begun to be theorized with respect to conversational methodologies.

Homiletical Theology and the Work of Internal Interreligious Dialogue in Preaching

4. *Homiletical Theology and the Principle of Recognizability*

Homiletical theology, says Ronald Allen, attends both to the prospect of theological discovery in preaching, and to the principle of recognizability as well.³² In order for a true dialogue to take place, preachers as homiletical theologians need to root theological discovery in relation to traditions participating in a hermeneutical, dialogical process. Clooney's foregrounding of this issue begins at the point of introduction and with the use of the analogy itself. Attending to this theological reality becomes a ground by which transformative theological discovery becomes possible. This move does not merely "discuss" scripture, but uses, in tandem with the vocative rhetoric, a kind of direct "dialogue" between two traditions and contemporary interpreters all of which is predicated on the "recognizable." It is that which embodies the very possibility of "bearing witness" and "speaking with confidence" in the unique form of internal, interreligious dialogue represented by the homiletical-theological task of the conversational sermon in this case.

5. *Triangulating Dialogue as Internal to the Christian Tradition Itself*

Building upon this recognizable relation in the dialogue between two religious traditions and diverse, contemporary hearers, it is important theologically to drill down into the nature of the interreligious impulse that impacts the sermon's development in light of its own tradition. Clooney's sermon brings to the surface a key element of why internal, interreligious dialogue is an especially apt way of thinking about the theological task of preaching within the Christian tradition. Lurking underneath the contemporary issue of interreligious dialogue today (say, between Christians and Hindus), is the struggle of the Christian tradition as it begins to define itself as an emerging sect within Judaism in its most "recognizable" source: its founding texts. While this ancient reality differs in that it represents an intra-Jewish dynamic in the first century, its history of effects includes an emerging interreligious dialogue between Christians and Jews. This is to say that there is *in nuce* a recognizably Christian interreligious struggle embedded in one of the most recognizable sources of the tradition: The scriptures themselves. The conversational preaching issue of accommodating difference does not become manifest solely at the level of contemporary religious pluralism, but is a latent issue in the founding documents with which conversational preaching does its homiletical-theological work. Internal interreligious dialogue is no postmodern homiletical novelty, but is in a sense internal to the tradition itself.

6. *Discovering Gospel through the Unfinished Work of Internal Interreligious Dialogue*

The tentativeness of the conversational preacher who wishes to try his/her hand at internal interreligious dialogue is therefore inviting hearers to an unfinished, constructive theological task in preaching. At the heart of this homiletical-theological tradition, which internal interreligious dialogue exposes, is the unfinished business of a tradition. A presupposition of conversational preaching and the mutual critical correlational theological method that underlies it, is an openness to "discovering" gospel in a pluralistic, interreligious context. In one sense, this embodies the interreligious dialogical principle of the possibility of self-criticism. This particular sense is not unique to preaching, even though it has not always been practiced. What it does from

³² Allen talks about this in terms of relating theological discovery to what he calls "recognizable continuity" with Bible and tradition, "Preaching as Spark," 147.

the standpoint of homiletical theology, however, is to place the interreligious task not at the periphery of preaching practice, but at its heart. Conversational preaching and homiletical theology both place the gospel at the center of their work. The internal, interreligious model of preaching is more than a “man bites dog” one-off event, but stands at the heart of its unfinished theological task.

Appendix

Sermon (John 5:31-47) offered by Francis X. Clooney S. J. on 9 March, 2016

1 I am teaching a course this semester on Hinduism and one of the most important ancient
2 Hindu texts, the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, and the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad is a text that
3 teaches pure non-dualism, that every self is ultimately one with the universe in a very
4 powerful way. And we are reading with the Upanishad the great Vedanta teacher, Shankara,
5 who lived maybe a thousand years after the Upanishad but wrote a commentary trying to
6 bring out the full meaning of this teaching of your self as the self of the universe. And he
7 constantly drives home the point: don't water down the scripture; don't take the scripture for
8 less; don't make it something common sense, but change yourself to fit the scripture –
9 because it is true. In class the other day, there's one passage where he talks about his worst
10 enemies, they are the Brahmans, what he impolitely calls "the scum of the Brahmans" (as one
11 translator puts it,) the logic choppers, the mere ritualists who just do rituals in a closed-
12 minded way. He yells at them like they are pointless fools, they are nothing else, they are
13 stupid, they are his enemies, totally blind to the meaning of the scripture. But what's ironic
14 about it, is that these targets are precisely of his own class, because he is a Brahman, he is a
15 ritualist, he is a teacher, he uses logic. While he talks to many people in the course of his
16 commentary on his teaching of the self and universe, the people he gets furious at are his own
17 kind.

18
19 The reason I mention this today – you may have figured this out already – is because on the
20 one hand we have a beautiful teaching in today's reading from the fifth chapter of the Gospel
21 of John, and on the other hand we have a big problem. The beautiful teaching that continues
22 in the common lectionary Tuesday, Wednesday and today Thursday, is that Jesus has helped a
23 man who is crippled to get up and walk, and when this man gets up and walk Jesus says
24 basically: "This is the power of God in your midst; the Father has sent me. This is the power
25 of the true God." And the reading today, despite its many complications (because we have to
26 be brief on Thursday mornings!) is basically saying: "You already know who I am, but you
27 will not accept me. You see what I do. You've had messengers like John the Baptist, you have
28 the scripture, the word of Moses himself, and you saw me take this man, who was well-known
29 for being unable to walk, and helping him to walk. You can read your own hearts. If any of
30 this is clear to you, you know who I am. And it's really annoying that you are not going to
31 follow me. It's really annoying that you are turning away, as if you've not seen or understood
32 anything."

33
34 A powerful message I think all of us can hear in Lent: we already know what we need to
35 know. The word of Jesus is absolutely clear, John thinks. And this word really calls us to
36 change our lives. And we often don't.

37
38 The problem is that this message is addressed to "you Jews". Earlier in the chapter "the Jews"
39 are very annoyed with Jesus because he told the man to get up and walk, "you were crippled,
40 now take your mat and go home." And "the Jews" are annoyed because this is on the Sabbath
41 and he is not supposed to carry his mat. And then Jesus says: "This is the word of my Father".
42 And then since "the Jews" hate him because he says God is his Father, "the Jews" want to kill
43 him. Now this is highly problematic, I think we know this. This language of "the Jews": "The

44 Jews hate Jesus”, “the Jews want to kill Jesus.” And I think the problem is we have a
45 powerful message: God is here; God is before you; change your life. And then John again and
46 again saying: “And ‘the Jews did not get it’.”

47
48 And so what do we do with this? One view is just to, you know, not say those words. Any
49 time in John’s gospel “the Jews” are mentioned, change it to “the leaders” “the people” or
50 something like that, but of course we did not do that this morning. Another thing is to not do
51 what the Catholic Church (in this Common Lectionary) does, adding today (as yesterday)
52 “Jesus said to the Jews” which is actually not in the text; we are reminded that Jesus is
53 speaking to “the Jews”, without further explanation given. A third thing to do, I suppose, is to
54 realize that Jesus is Jewish, John is Jewish, the people he is arguing with are Jewish. This is
55 not some kind of gentile attack on the Jews. But it’s an in-house argument in some way, and
56 you can go back and anyone who wants to go to the library later on I can show you all the
57 books about the controversies in the earliest church when John and his community felt
58 persecuted and they are pushing back against the establishment and fell into this language of
59 “Jesus and the Jews” and “Jesus against the Jews”. So we can see this kind of battle going on
60 in a text like this. Fourth, I think we can also, probably, as I was suggesting before, we can
61 generalize it. The reason I mentioned Shankara, the great teacher, he was most annoyed at
62 people like himself, who he thought should know better, and said: “You have the text, you are
63 smart, you are educated, you’ve done all these things, you see it all – why don’t you realize
64 that the self is one with the universe.” And I think there’s a way in which John is saying this
65 today too: “You are the educated people; you are the people of God; you are the people who
66 have the sacred text; you are the people who have the temple. Why don’t you get it and see
67 who this is?” And he is most concerned about the people just like himself saying: “I am a
68 Jew” – unfortunately he does not say this – “I am a Jew, you are Jewish, why don’t you get
69 it?”

70
71 Still, none of this takes away the problem — the problem of the 2000 years since then, in
72 which texts like this start to have an odious life of their own: the “Jews hate Jesus”, “the Jews
73 are narrow-minded”, “the Jews don’t like curing on the Sabbath”, “the Jews want to kill Jesus
74 because he is a good man.” This afterlife has lived a disastrous history for 2000 years and I
75 think we cannot just wave our hand and explain it away. Nor can we ignore other, subtler
76 challenges and problems in this Gospel, such as Jesus’ claim that Moses was already writing
77 about Jesus himself. That too requires deeper thinking, facing up to differences between how
78 thoughtful and pious Jews and Christians read the Torah. But today we stay close to the
79 surface, words such “the Jews” – and the irresponsible paths they travel if we don’t say
80 anything about them.

81
82 But what we can struggle with is probably the fact that the historical situation, the point of
83 what John is trying to say, the struggle and his frustration with the people who should know
84 best, unfortunately that got all tangled up in this polemic. And in some way then we will be
85 able to sort out for ourselves what is the message and the point he is trying to make, even
86 when he uses this unfortunate language. And I think, probably, if we put ourselves in that
87 spot, if we can imagine that John came today, or if Jesus came today, he would probably start
88 yelling at us, and say: “You fools. You call yourself Christian, you call yourself Catholic, you
89 claim to know the Bible, you claim to go to church on Sundays, and sometimes you are even

90 so good you go to church during the week, you know all of this, you are the people who
91 should be best at following me and living like Jesus. And you damn Catholics, you damn
92 Christians, you don't get it; you of all people should see and understand and follow Me —
93 and you don't." And I think if we took it in that tone, we could realize that Jesus today,
94 maybe John today would be angry at people like me, saying: "What are you doing, why are
95 you wasting your life when you should be following me, you should be setting the people
96 free, you should be preaching the good news, you should not be caught up in your rituals, you
97 should not be entangled in your laws. What's wrong with you Catholics?" And while this
98 does not again take away the problem, the 2000 years of misuse of texts like this, unfortunate
99 language that we have in our Bible, I think it reminds us that the real pit to fall into is not
100 whether we should change a word here or there but that because we are clever, because we are
101 educated, because we know how to talk about things, we do everything to avoid the presence
102 of Christ right before us; as it were, we walk around Jesus and keep going without changing
103 our lives. We, of all people, should know better. Shankara said this to his fellow Brahmins;
104 Jesus (and John) said this to those who watched Jesus; and Jesus says the same to us today.

105
106 I'd be happy to talk to anyone who wants to talk about this after Mass. But I have to stop my
107 sermon at this moment. But I think the point is, we have two weeks of Lent left, and two
108 weeks in which to pray that the transformation Jesus is calling for takes place. The changing
109 of our hearts, the changing of our lives so that instead of throwing stones at other people
110 realize that we are the ones being chastised saying: "What don't you get. Now is the time to
111 convert your life." It is as if Jesus says: don't label and caricature others and blame them: it is
112 you I am talking to, you I expect now to change your lives.

O. Wesley Allen, Jr. *Preaching in the Era of Trump*. St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2017. 117 pages. \$11.

The election of Donald Trump on November 9, 2016, was met with a salvo of questions from Christian ministers and laity alike dumbfounded by the prospect of finding something to say in the aftermath. “How could this have happened?” “What do we do now?” “How can I preach when I am so overwhelmed and devastated by the results of this election?” Fortunately, Wes Allen immediately set to the task of tackling these questions and produced a much-needed handbook for preaching in this new era.

The first half of the book is a series of essays exploring how our nation arrived at this point. Like a physician diagnosing a very sick patient, Allen explains the confluence of conditions that have led to the morally septic state of the body politic. From postmodernism taken to its chaotic extremes, to the hypocritical endorsement of Trump by most Republican Christians, to the virulent divisiveness between straight, white Christians and all those deemed “other” (and thus inferior, or, worse, dangerous), the preexisting conditions of American society now seem to have made Trump’s rise inevitable.

Chapters 5 and 6 remind us of the need to avoid being pulled into the funnel of hatred that has been characteristic of the Trump regime. The title of Chapter 5 may cause some wincing, but is an important reminder: “Love Trumps Hate, But Only if We Love Trump.” Allen is not speaking of some kind of sentimental love, however. Rather, he works with Martin Luther King, Jr.’s and Gustavo Gutiérrez’s understanding of love – that which resists participation in oppression, and thus works to free both the oppressor and the oppressed. Chapter 6 outlines what will be necessary for “making the church great again” in this ethically bereft time, and the role preaching must have in such a monumental task.

In the effort not to demonize and drive away Trump supporters within our congregations, Allen encourages “approaching difficult subjects in a hospitable manner – inviting hearers into the sermons as honored guests to converse about the topic instead of using the topic as a weapon against them . . .” (20). However, in the wake of incidents like the KKK and neo-Nazi march in Charlottesville that resulted in one death and many injuries, as well as countless other acts of violence and hate crimes since the election, Allen’s position raises an uncomfortable question. Are we to be hospitable to those in our congregations who are affiliated with the KKK or fascists? Are advocates of hatred and violence really to be treated as honored guests? As a lesbian colleague of mine reminded me, “You can’t expect me to be hospitable to someone who wants me silenced, stripped of my rights, sent away, or dead.” So where do we as preachers draw the line of hospitality? At what point does a congregation say to an unapologetically aggressive hate-spewing parishioner, “This behavior is not welcome in this church”?

The second half of the book deals with these questions by providing strategies for addressing four specific issues that have come to the fore during the era of Trump – race, gender, LGBT issues, and Islam. Each of these four chapters begins with lists of examples of the ways in which Trump, his staff, and supporters have engaged in speech and actions that threaten vulnerable populations. The remainder of each chapter consists of a brief analysis of the issue, and helpful suggestions of ways to approach these topics in sermons.

Reading the book less than a year out from the election with the Trump administration embroiled in scandal and potential accusations of treason, one may wonder (hope?) if *Preaching in the Era of Trump* will become obsolete sooner rather than later. But regardless of the length of Trump’s term, the consequences of the 2016 campaign and Trump’s presidency will have long-

lasting effects. Allen's book will, unfortunately, remain required reading for the foreseeable future.

If nothing else, the book captures an historical moment in the homiletic world where the existential threats to historically marginalized and oppressed peoples were so urgent, Allen's speedily-written book was both necessary and useful. Regardless of the historical markers, the charge to clergy to avoid quietism in the face of injustice is timeless: "We cannot claim to serve a God of justice and be silent about such things in the pulpit" (25). Indeed, prophetic preaching will be all the more necessary as our nation attempts to recover from this era. Ideally, the church will rise to the task of facilitating healing. And clergy who function as public servants of moral and ethical re-centering will find Allen's book to be a valuable tool to encourage and equip preachers for their prophetic task.

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Richard W. Voelz. *Youthful Preaching: Strengthening the Relationship between Youth, Adults, and Preaching*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2016. 226 pages. \$27.

Richard Voelz notes in his acknowledgments that, “preaching and youth have not proven to be the coziest partners in contemporary times, nor has there been much, if any, mutual academic interest between the subjects.” Writing with this premise in mind, Voelz seeks to remedy this situation. He is bold enough to say, “To my knowledge, this is the only book on preaching and adolescents in North America undertaken from the perspective of critical homiletics.” If his claim is true, then *Youthful Preaching* is a much needed addition to the library of homiletical literature.

Eschewing the ideas of writing some kind of “how-to manual” or producing a work based upon “developmental psychology,” Voelz seeks instead to create a “theologically and ethically grounded agenda for faith communities that take preaching and youth seriously.” His methodology consists of using historical research (by far his best section) as well as looking at both culture and rhetorical analysis to attempt to find a theological corrective to what he believes is the typical approach to understanding preaching and adolescence.

As noted above, Voelz use of historical retrospective is a fascinating and riveting section of the book. Over the course of the first two chapters he brings the reader into the world of preaching to and by youth over the course of North American history. Beginning with Puritan preaching and its corollaries, he traces the influences, themes, and changes that have occurred over the last 400 years. He also intersperses his analysis of preaching with an insightful understanding of how adolescents are viewed within each of those periods. This combination of homiletical approaches, social science constructs, and cultural/religious changes provides a helpful understanding of the approaches that have formed our current understanding of preaching to young people. As he notes in his summary, “Preaching helped shape perceptions of young people.” In addition, Voelz makes the critical observation that, “Young people have spoken back to preaching in important ways as much as preaching has spoken to them.” This symbiotic relationship is both helpful and, possibly, surprising to the modern mind. As a way of reinforcing this premise, the book concludes with a series of thirteen sermons by young people in full transcripts in an Appendix that gives credence to his idea that young people have helped to shape some aspects of the preaching approach.

Less successful is his chapter on “Renewing the Relationship” where he chooses to create his theological and ethical corrective to the typical approaches to youthful preaching (what he describes as silence, ontological adolescence, and deficiency). It’s not his analysis that is lacking but his terminology that muddles his case. His determination to reframe the issue of liberation theology to form the foundation of his theological corrective appears to get lost in the weeds of theological analysis. While he freely admits the difference between adolescent experience of “oppression and marginalization” and those of people groups most clearly aligned with the issues of liberation theology (African Americans, Latin Americans, feminists, womanists, disabled persons, etc.) is significant, his analysis remains dependent on making that connection. On a positive note, his attribution of the damaging results of mass media and mass marketing as primary tools for defining adolescence is well done. Depending on Henry Giroux and Nancy Lesko for insights into how adolescents are understood and defined, Voelz makes a strong case for how some preaching reinforces what he calls a “combative rhetoric toward adolescents.”

Finally, chapter four of *Youthful Preaching* is a most interesting and helpful analysis based upon rhetorical analysis. Voelz is most helpful here when he gives a methodological

approach to help hearers determine how preaching helps create both Christian identity and homiletical identity in young people. I think that teachers of preaching, students of preaching, seminarians, and those who preach to youth or who are training youth to preach will benefit greatly from Voelz approach and analysis. To further aid in this, Voelz also includes his Sermon Analysis Worksheets related to these two ideas just before he includes the thirteen sermons from youth. As a result, the reader can easily see how his ideas of Christian identity and homiletical identity can be evaluated through listening to *Youthful Preaching*.

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Joseph E. Bush, Jr. *Practical Theology in Church and Society*. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2016. 184 pages. \$25.

Over the past decade, we have been fortunate to see an uptick in the number of texts introducing and/or further theorizing the field of practical theology. Joseph Bush Jr.'s text seeks to do both, and as such is an orientation and guide for those who face the "challenge of beginning ministry in a new place with new people," (ix) whether that may be seminarians in a field placement, those beginning their first call or other ministry situation, or those who are entering a new position of ministry after extended time in another. The text emerges from Bush's own ministry experiences and as director of field education at Wesley Seminary in Washington, D.C. This note about place extends beyond a perfunctory recognition: the book features an approachable, conversational style that one might imagine grows out of, and is intended for, Bush's classroom.

The book unfolds in two major divisions: "Part One: Reflection on Practice" and "Part Two: Methodological Movements." Novice readers are invited to enter into Part One, which guides thinking about ministry as a practice of action and reflection (Ch. 1), understanding congregational cultures (Ch. 2), pastoral authority and leadership in liminality (Ch. 3), reframing as an act of the reflective practitioner (Ch. 4), and similarly, introducing frames for understanding congregations as organizational cultures (Ch. 5). Each chapter contains case examples from Bush's ministry experience and exercises that place the discussion into the reader's context.

In Part Two, Bush traces out his theological, methodological, and theoretical commitments as a practical theologian. While Part One focused on the relationship reflection and practice in ministry contexts, Part Two focuses on "the relationship between the community of faith, on the one hand, and the wider surrounding community of the larger social world, on the other" (93). In this, Bush makes a fundamental assertion that reflection-practice rhythms never stand apart from the wider social location of communities of faith. Practical theology happens in a larger social orbit, which Bush seeks to outline as a descriptive practice (Ch. 6) and a constructive one that leads to social engagement (Ch. 7). Outlining his own theological commitments to liberation theology, Bush explores four different ways of negotiating action-reflection in context (Ch. 8). Bush then maps different practical theological methods from mostly male, European American practical theologians, charting commonalities and differences among Don Browning, Ed Farley, Robert Schreiter, Thomas Groome, Richard Osmer, and Bishop Laurie Green (Ch. 9). Following this, Bush explores the role of hermeneutics within practical theology, particularly naming both a hermeneutic of suspicion and Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic of restoration as necessary perspectives for practical theological reflection (Ch. 10). The book concludes by thinking about how formation for ministry might best occur through the practices of reflexivity described throughout the book, along with the goal of solidarity with others (Ch. 11).

In these two major divisions of Parts One and Two, the book speaks to two different audiences. Part One provides a helpful orientation to those just entering the work of practical theological reflection. This may be most helpful in field education settings in theological schools at the M.Div. and other master's degree levels. Bush employs the ideas of two now-classic texts: Ammerman's edited *Studying Congregations* (1998) and Carroll's *As One with Authority* (1991), in addition to integrating new voices and perspective. The case studies from Bush's experience and reflection questions provide useful components for the aforementioned level of study. Part

Two, however, shifts to a different audience. This might best be read in a D. Min course in practical theology, deepening theoretical frameworks for practical theological reflection. Or perhaps Part Two is somewhat directed toward an intradisciplinary discussion among field educators (Ch. 11 especially rings true in this regard). These shifts in audience are both a strength and a weakness of the book as a whole. One substantive difficulty with the book falls in the organization of Part One. In Chapter One, Bush indicates the direction the following chapters will take: “the profession of ministry itself as a community of practice...the church as community...[and] the wider community of which the church is a part...The chapters that follow address each of these arenas in turn” (15). This is not, in fact, how Bush moves subsequently in Part One, thus providing a confusing orientation to the otherwise helpful material that comes next.

Bush’s text provides not only an updated primer in practical theology for individuals leading in congregational settings, but broadens the perspective for readers to see congregations as integrated, liberation-seeking components of society, worthy of similar practical theological reflection.

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Jeanne Stevenson-Moessner. *Overture for Practical Theology: The Music of Religious Inquiry*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2016. 126 pages. \$37.

Overture for Practical Theology: The Music of Religious Inquiry is an introduction to practical theology and its interrelatedness with other disciplines. Jeanne Stevenson-Moessner argues for the image of the “living human document” used in pastoral theology to expand to “the living human instrument,” positing that “theology is the music of religious inquiry” (27). The metaphor of an orchestra using its living human instruments underscores the entire book, and is interwoven throughout the text from the headings of the chapters (stanzas) to the content within the chapters. The author uses extensive anecdotal evidence to support her argument for the lived humanness of practical theology and to offer many an entry point, through the living human instrument, for different disciplines to engage.

Stanza 1 unpacks Schleiermacher’s theological model of the tree that illustrated his understanding of how philosophical theology (roots), historical theology (trunk), and practical theology (leaves/fruit) are related to each other. Stevenson-Moessner uses this image as a foundational image in understanding practical theology in relationship to other disciplines. The author then supplements this image with her use of the orchestra as metaphor.

Stanza 2 builds upon the metaphor introduced in stanza 1 and discusses the purpose of the church and the ministry of the church. The author posits “the purpose of the church and its ministry, as well as the goal of theological education, is to increase among humankind the love of God, the love of neighbor, and the love of self” (23). This goal is not limited to practical theology but can be easily found in conversation with practical theology because of its focus on lived experience and practices as the documents being studied. In this chapter, she names the difficulties that are posed by diverse perspectives and offers a challenge to practical theology to consider a methodology that can be foundational to many perspectives, yet still invite the diversity of thought that comes from them.

Stanza 3 highlights practical theology’s emphasis on movement and direction. The chapter focuses on movement seen in the dynamics of power; however, the reader could translate this to other dynamics as well. Stevenson-Moessner specifically looks at how the practical theologian looks at the dynamics and is able to use the movements between to name aspects of the lived experience of humanity.

Stanza 4 and Stanza 5 both focus on the unavoidable presence of cacophony and failure in both the study of practical theology and the execution of pastoral leadership. In the orchestra, harmony is created with different instruments but there are also moments when the harmony is off and failure requires one go back and try again. Drawing on Victor Hunte’s seven principles of orchestration for practical theological leadership, the author offers tools to help navigate the moments of cacophony to find beautiful harmony once again.

The final stanza explicitly states the two themes of the book. The first theme is that theology is the music of religious inquiry and the second is that all of God’s creations are living instruments. Although the author names it as secondary, the latter theme dominates the book.

Overture for Practical Theology is focused on persuading the reader that practical theology can be a place for all disciplines to engage and consider the human experience within their theoretical frameworks. Overall, the text can be helpful to scholars from a myriad of disciplines in framing how they might begin to work with practical theology. She disrupts the seemingly stagnant image of Schleiermacher’s tree and argues for a more fluid framework where disciplines equally add to the harmony of the orchestra. The metaphor of the orchestra that was

used throughout might cause confusion because some of the terms were not explained. However, if the reader looks up the terms they can see how the author is using the metaphor of the orchestra to argue that different human experiences create harmony in our work that creates a more robust sound than a sole instrument. Stevenson-Moessner accomplishes her goal of providing space for different disciplines to consider how they might use the methodologies of practical theology in their work, however the exact places that she sees interdisciplinary engagement are not explicitly stated and have to be determined by the reader.

This book is beneficial to all persons looking to engage with practical theology and those that hesitate to believe that their discipline would benefit from this type of interdisciplinary engagement. I recommend this text, not simply as a look into practical theology, but as a tool to begin engaging in interdisciplinary work and a useful metaphor to consider how different disciplines create harmony together in scholarship.

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Charles L. Campbell, Clayton J. Schmit, Mary Hinkle Shore, Jennifer E. Copeland, eds.
Preaching Gospel: Essays in Honor of Richard Lischer. Eugene: Cascade, 2016. 262 pages.
\$29.21

This volume is written in honor of Richard Lischer's thirty-seven years of teaching at Duke Divinity School and his career as a preacher and author. The four editors all served at one time or another as Lischer's teaching assistants. Eighteen individuals contributed essays that explore various components of what it means to preach gospel.

Several of the essays build on Lischer's three theological movements or tones for preaching. The opening chapter by Charles Campbell ("Preaching Gospel: Four Theological Tones") identifies Lischer's three tones as judgment, grace, and the new imperative (2). Campbell relabels these tones and adds a fourth calling them the "Yes tone," the "No tone," the "Go tone" and the "Ha tone." All four tones must be present in a sermon and interact with one another for it to be faithful to the gospel of Scripture. Contrary to the more standard form of a sermon that moves from judgment to grace, Campbell argues that the gospel presents these tones in a variety of orders; there is no set pattern.

Rein Bos ("Preaching Gospel from the Old Testament") overlays Lischer's three theological movements or tones (analysis, transition, and integration) onto the Rule of Faith in the Heidelberg Confession with its threefold movement of "'misery, redemption, and thankfulness' or 'guilt, grace, and gratitude'" (35). These three components act as "emulsifiers" bringing elements that appear conflicting or in tension with one another (e.g., Old Testament and New Testament, text and gospel, exposition and application) together in a more integrated and engaging way (33).

Clayton Schmit ("The Gospel and the Missional Church") calls Lischer's tones the "*law tone*," the "*gospel tone*," and the "*new obedience tone*" (125). Schmit applies the three tones to the missional church movement calling for such a movement to keep judgment, grace, and new obedience in conversation with one another and not truncate them into just two, the law tone and the new obedience tone. The truncated version results in people hurrying too quickly to engage in social justice acts resulting in altruism becoming the idol. Rather the gospel calls us to move thoughtfully and theologically from law to grace to love.

All the essays in this volume highlight preaching the multidimensional aspects of the gospel. William Willimon probes how Lischer uses texts in the task of preaching gospel ("Reading the Text with Richard Lischer"). Stanley Hauerwas emphasizes Lischer's careful and skillful use of words and takes the opportunity to offer two of his own sermons that are his efforts to "recover in the ruins of Christendom the true end of words" (60). Tom Long contributes a chapter entitled "Preaching the Gospel of Resurrection" and examines two frames of reference for understanding the resurrection: the historical and eschatological (71–87).

Michael Pasquarello assesses the dangers of creating a consumer Christianity that plays to the felt needs of listeners ("The Promise of Law and Gospel"). He reveals the dangers of a preoccupation with cultural relevance. He takes a brief look at Dietrich Bonhoeffer's lecture "Contemporizing the New Testament" and shows how the Nazis contemporized Christianity to use it for their political advancement. He concludes by showing how preachers can faithfully contemporize Christianity that liberates it to witness to Christ.

In "Gospel Wisdom for Ministry: Sermons for Theology Students," (138–151), Ellen Davis speaks of the Bible's "reach" and not its relevance. Relevance implies using Scripture only as a springboard to launch into a sermon topic. Davis includes two of her sermons, one from

Psalms 119 and the other from Psalm 91, as examples of what she means by proclaiming a sermon's reach.

This volume is packed with other quality essays which include "The Holy Spirit and Preaching: The Word that Moves" by William C. Turner; "Preaching the Gospel of Hope: How The Prophets Navigate Between Optimism and Despair" by Charles L. Aaron; "Singing the Story: The Gospel According to the Spirituals" by Luke A. Powery; "Speaking Gospel in the Public Arena" by Willie James Jennings; "Preaching Gospel in a Gendered World" by Jennifer E. Copeland; "Memoir and Gospel: The Theater of God's Grace" by Heidi Neumark; "Breakfast on the Shore" by Gail Godwin; "Gospel Performance and the Mind of Christ" by Charles L. Bartow; and "A Final Word on Richard Lischer as Preacher of the Gospel" by Richard B. Hays.

This volume not only honors the substantive contribution of Lischer, it also builds on and advances his work in a way that makes important contributions to the field of homiletics, preaching, and theology.

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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 Syrochrean 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.

Dave Bland, Harding School of Theology, Memphis, TN

William Willimon. *Who Lynched Willie Earle: Preaching to Confront Racism*. Abingdon, 2017. 138 pages. \$17.99.

Will Willimon's latest volume provides a fresh homiletic primer on preaching and racism. The first forty percent of the book is devoted to a gripping reconstruction of a 1947 act of racial terrorism followed by an assessment of "one of the most courageous sermons ever preached in South Carolina Methodism" (23-33).

The second portion of the book settles into a writing style familiar to the Willimon oeuvre as he examines ways that preaching can confront racism in today's church. Working with realities like "race is a myth" while "racism is a fact" (55) and that white possession of power makes racism all the more pernicious, Willimon meshes a biblical theology with recent sermon samples that address systemic racism in the wake of the killings of Walter Scott, Michael Brown and especially the massacre at Mother Emmanuel AME in Charleston. Christian preaching, Willimon claims, begins "not with astute sociological analysis of the human condition, but rather with scripture" (99). Thus, racism is our specific Christian problem "because of the God we are attempting to worship and obey" (61).

As a self-described "older white Southern male" (xiii), Willimon finds that little progress has been made against racism during his four decades in ministry, "The battle lines have shifted, white supremacist sentiment has morphed, and my church is more segregated than ever" (xiii). Armed with the lifelong conviction that white Christians have work to do and in subservience to a relentlessly redemptive God "who wrenches good out of our bad through a weapon called preaching" (xiv), Willimon retains a surprisingly optimistic view of the efficacy of preaching, especially given the dismal record he claims for the church during his era.

This is a fine work. An excellent opening foray for first year preaching students and an engaging introductory volume for ministers who desire to address the vexing concerns that continue to embed our churches and nation. Frankly, any volume that finds hope in the future of preaching while honestly addressing racism is a welcome addition.

The greatest strength of the book is not Willimon's personal connections to the 1947 events nor his exhortations and examples from his former Duke Divinity students. Rather, it is the horrific and honest description of Willie Earle's violent death and the "steam winder" sermon that Hawley Lynn preached just days after the event, which reveals the atrocity of the sin, often in the words of the culpable, and a sermonic response that embodies still the epitome of courage.

The most heuristic quality of the book, thus, is not the sermon samples and sage advice (helpful and welcome as they are) but the pathetic reality which Willimon confesses: that from 1947 to 2017, "White supremacist sentiment has morphed, and my church is more segregated than ever" (xiii).

How can this be? What can be said of preaching to give a reckoning for this reality? While evangelical pulpits have their hands full accounting for their silence in the current state of affairs, mainline Protestants must give account for the morphing, shifting, segregating systemic racism that continues to persist, seemingly immune to overtures from the mainline pulpit. Thus, Willimon's most recent book is an unfortunate missed opportunity; it begs for better work.

The better volume could lead from Willimon's career of sermons, not a vague confession of unnamed sins ("Hello, my name is Will, and I am a recovering racist," 79) which does little to advance the project before us. More helpful would be evaluations of Willimon's career of prophetic preaching, at the same critical level that he addresses the courageous Hawley Lynn

(rooted as he was in the American vision and without an articulated biblical theology) or John Piper, Sam Wells and the other white preachers he scrutinizes in this volume.

This sequel could advance his initial foray with depth, insight and perhaps a concrete model of reasons for repentance and a helpful way forward. For instance, Willimon recalls a lay leader at his first congregation, who after a sermon which called for expanded civil rights in Georgia, urged Will to “avoid politics” and “stick to saving souls” (66). That conversation revealed evidence of the “unconscious acquiesce of Southern Christians to white supremacy as a substitute for the Gospel” (66). True enough, but that same line of resistance continues to be thought and heard in countless white churches in America whenever racism is addressed. A close analysis from a career’s worth of prophetic sermons would uncover more than witty retorts, but an honesty grown from a local pastor’s life of preaching. We could learn much from Willimon’s critical reading of his own significant efforts.

In the meantime, *Who Lynched Willie Earle* is a primer worth our attention and should be employed while we await a volume that can assess this reality: that in lynching’s legacy of racial inequality, exemplified in the contamination of the integrity of America’s justice system, many of us preachers have kept a silence born from ignorance, an ignorance allowed and nurtured in white privilege. There is time to do more than repent, time perhaps to turn and forge a productive and biblical way forward. A preacher with Willimon’s heft and longevity can help us see, as Hawley Lynn did in the wake of Willie Earle’s violent death, that systemic racism in our society is like the air we breathe, it surrounds us and benefits us, and yet we see it not. How then do we preach?

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Bruce Barber. *Lanterns at Dusk: Preaching after Modernity*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2016. 228 pages. \$28.

Australian theologian and preacher Bruce Barber begins his work on preaching after modernity with a vigorous nod toward Friederich Nietzsche. He acknowledges, with Nietzsche's parabolic help in *The Gay Science*, the absurd difficulty of a madman lighting a lantern at noon day to find God. This disorienting parable helps name the very death of God impulses that surface in modernity's wake. Barber as a theologian is clearly not enamored with modernity. Like many a postliberal theologian, he is concerned that modernity and today's culture have vitiated Christian faith in the name of relevance, a flattening of truth, and a valorizing of privatized religion in the name of secularism. Barber pushes back against these modern tendencies by noting the gathering darkness of what is now the end of the day of modernity. The question in the title is the one that really governs the homiletical-theological reflections and several sermons that make up the book: How can preaching be a site for carrying "lanterns at dusk," preaching *after* modernity?

The first quarter of the book is devoted to careful theological work. Barber spends some time here considering how theology and culture relate specifically in different formations: pre-modern, modern, and post-modern. The most compelling insights come later in this first section, in chapter 6: "Three Questions for Preachers After Modernity." In this section the questions focus on the hearers (Who might they become?), the gospel (Where is reality found?) and the Bible (Who is Doing What to Whom?). In reviewing these questions Barber turns modernist conceptions of preaching on their heads and thus invites preachers to think more deeply about our work. The first two questions yield for the most part postliberal responses; the third advocates a way thinking about the Bible that the new hermeneutic of a Fuchs or Ebeling would likely endorse—with a special emphasis on the text's priority of explaining us, rather than our explaining the text.

The sermons, which make up 75% of the book, exemplify Barber's approach fairly well. Barber is quite willing in his preaching to goad hearers out of unreflective modern presuppositions. With some frequency, atheistic critics take the stage—though in most cases (Hawkins and Hitchens) they do so as a kind of foil to Barber's theology. The sermons themselves tend to work from the lectionary and often move thematically across lectionary texts to make Barber's theological case. I found the sermons "It All Happens in the Sermon," "Dry Bones Living," and "Jesus Means Freedom" were the most splendid examples of his overall vision. I also appreciated his careful thought about the apocalyptic nature of early Christianity as a way of thinking about the new thing God is doing—especially well done in the final two sermons of the collection "God's City and Ours" and "The Cosmic Drama." On occasion, some of the sermons are lacking in oral quality—they end up placing demands on hearers that go beyond the challenge of intellectual depth alone.

I am not convinced that a lot of new ground is broken here homiletically. There have been more than just a few books inviting preachers to think and preach beyond modernism. At the same time, I appreciate the depth with which Barber wrestles with the issues in Part 2: "The Word and Its World: A Theological Inventory." I think particularly here homiletical theology is enriched by his work. In this way, in particular Barber can help us to become better preacher theologians. In that respect, *Lanterns at Dusk* is quite illuminating.

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Paul S. Chung. *Postcolonial Public Theology: Faith, Scientific Rationality, and Prophetic Dialogue*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2016. 234 pages. \$21.23.

In this book, Paul Chung, a Professor of Mission and World Christianity at Luther Seminary, seeks to articulate a public theology in a postcolonial context through the rereading of Christian confession, a critical theological dialogue with scientific rationality, and interreligious dialogue. Although Chung's basic understanding of closely relates to David Tracy's proposal for public theology as a mutually critical correlation of Christian faith and the contemporary situation, he critically revises it by employing postcolonial hermeneutics and analectical methods that focus on dissimilarity and difference rather than similarity-in-difference. Through a thoroughgoing interdisciplinary analysis and dialogue, the author has developed a postcolonial public theology that calls for *metanoia* toward God's eschatological future and responsible and liberative action for others including non-human others in the postcolonial world.

This book is composed of nine chapters in three parts. In Part 1, the author undertakes the rereading of the theology of Martin Luther, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Karl Barth through a postcolonial lens, interreligious perspectives, and public ethics. In chapter 1, the author engages with and radicalizes Luther's theology in light of the suffering of *minjung*-subaltern in East Asian context. He particularly attends to Luther's understanding of the gospel as the living voice of God in order to find a hermeneutical principle for a dialogue in Christian faith and biblical narrative with the life of world. For Luther, the gospel cannot be merely reduced to written texts in Scripture. Rather, the gospel is the living word of God that addresses and encounters us in the midst of our lives. Since the gospel is the living voice of God, here and now, ongoing critical contextual interpretation of God's word in different times and places is an integral part of understanding and proclaiming the gospel (28). Thus, his notion of *viva vox evangelii*, the living voice of the gospel, posits a dynamic interaction, communication and translation of the biblical narrative and Christian faith through dialogue with the world in open-ended manner (37). In the study of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's theology from a postcolonial, contextual, and intercultural perspective, the author seeks to develop a theological-ethical rationale for public theology to transcend postcolonial reality. Bonhoeffer challenges any binary construction of reality in light of God's reconciliation in Christ with the world while he invites the church to participate in God's reconciliation by being in solidarity with the Other (45). Solidarity with others is necessary for a church to be church because Jesus Christ had given for others and God speaks to the church through the otherness of the Other (47). A dialogue with the other, including religious others, becomes a theological mandate for a public theology. Through intercultural and interreligious exchanges, the church can encounter a living voice of gospel in the otherness of the Other and discover a new horizon of theological meanings for postcolonial and interreligious contexts. In chapter 3, the author explores Karl Barth's theology and its relevance for postcolonial theology. Barth's excessive emphasis on revelation from above does not preclude his theology from being a rich soil for a public theology that seeks dialogue with social and natural sciences and other religions in the public sphere. Barth's analogical theology in relation to the universal effectiveness of the word of God provides a space for a hermeneutical conversation between theology and natural science (66). It opens a possibility that even profane words and wisdoms, whether in natural science or other religions, "analogically may bear witness to God's reconciliation in Christ" (65). Hence, God may speak to the church through the

otherness of the world. Barth's notion of God as the Wholly Other supports the freedom of God's act of speech through the "face" of others (80).

In Part 2, the author seeks to develop a postcolonial rationality for advancing public theology through a theological dialogue with scientific rationality. In chapter 4, the author examines how the Western Enlightenment and rationalization ended up with an instrumental rationality that results in human domination over the natural world, ideological domination of the West over the non-Western countries, and a domination of socio-political and economic structures and systems over human bodies. As a way of developing a postcolonial rationality transcending beyond the domination of instrumental reason, the author attends to "God's act of speech through the Other" (95) and attempts to incorporate the social discourse of *irregularity* in the life of *minjung*-subaltern into his postcolonial public theology. In chapter 5, based on the position of critical realism, the author advances a theological dialogue with scientific rationality. The author points out a linguistic and hermeneutical dimension of scientific discourse. This hermeneutical horizon in scientific discourses becomes an intersection for dialogue between the theology of nature and natural sciences, particularly evolution theory. In addition, the author enriches this dialogue between theology and science by adding a Buddhist understanding of compassion and its contribution to ecology. In chapter 6, the author examines implications of Ted Peters' proleptic theology for public theology and public ethic. Peters contends that God's eschatological future is both the *telos* and the ground of all beings (140). This eschatological kingdom of God breaks in the present as "an advent in which creation undergoes genuine and transforming renewal" (140). Our lives need to be reoriented toward God's eschatological future. In other words, the proleptic advent of God's eschatological future in Jesus Christ becomes a ground for public ethics.

In Part 3, the author seeks to articulate a postcolonial public religious theology and social ethics through interreligious dialogue in a postcolonial and global context. For this task, the author develops a conceptual framework for comparative religious study and interreligious dialogue in chapter 7. He critically revises Ernst Troeltsch's relativistic sociological approach to public ethics and comparative religious study through a dialogue with Gadamer's hermeneutical theory, Habermas's critical social theory, and Levinas' notion of God as infinite Saying through the otherness of the Other. This hermeneutical and postmodern reorientation of a sociological frame of reference for comparative religious study enables public theology to move "from Eurocentric modernity to a transmodernity, which seeks to articulate a global project of solidarity and recognition of religious others for ethical humanism" (165). In chapter 8, the author provides an example of public religious theology rooted in a transmodern rationality that emerges from interreligious dialogue between Christianity and Buddhism. In a comparative study of a Buddhist notion of compassion and its contribution to economic and ecological justice with a theology of the cross, the author shows how a trans-scriptural reading of other religious texts opens up a new horizon of theological meanings for the present. In chapter 9, the author is concerned with refining public theology in terms of world economy and economic justice in a postcolonial world, in which the anonymous Empire still takes control and dominates the lives of people. He employs a biblical-prophetic notion of *diakonia* as the basis for God's economy to criticize and counter global capitalism as possessive individualism. Since God speaks through the face of others, it is necessary to carefully listen to "God's irregular voice marginalized in the world" (195) and to seek to economic justice in the public realm.

The colonial period ended long ago, but ongoing impacts of colonialism and imperialism continue to shape a post-colonial world and the daily lives of people. This interdisciplinary,

intercultural, and interreligious approach to a public theology provides a comprehensive frame of reference to engage with moral, ethical issues facing postcolonial reality in the public realm. This book persuasively invites readers to take ethical responsibility for others, including non-human others, on the basis of God's Saying through the face of others. Its postcolonial understanding of the gospel as the living voice of God is particularly beneficial for preachers as resident public theologians who struggle to take both Christian confession and context seriously. One minor critique is the absence of a tentative definition of a postcolonial public theology. Throughout the whole book, the author claims to develop a postcolonial public theology but he does not provide any one definition for it. It would be helpful for readers to have a tentative but clear definition of what postcolonial public theology means as they read through Chung's complex and insightful arguments.

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Christian Grethlein. *An Introduction to Practical Theology: History, Theory, and the Communication of the Gospel in the Present*. Translated by Uwe Rasch. Waco: Baylor University Press, 2016. 264 pages. \$34.95.

Condensed from the larger German version, Christian Grethlein's introduction on practical theology argues for the importance of the discipline with regard to ecclesial practices, the communication of the gospel, and as a foundational theological field. While many of the sources utilized and provided by Grethlein are German or speak to the German context, he engages more broadly with practical theology in the United States and in Catholicism. The multiform approach is consistent with the work's emphasis on a plurality of ways to communicate the gospel. Grethlein focuses the task of practical theology as "critical reflection on praxis...expressed in the theoretical concept of communication" (4).

The work consists of three parts. Part 1, Historical Introduction to Practical Theology, explores the independence of practical theology as a field in the contexts of Germany, the United States, and Catholicism. These historical and contemporary contexts are crucial to the communication of the gospel, especially as globalization and ecumenism are increasingly influential (7). A great strength of Grethlein's is his ability to summarize and synthesize diverse contexts and disciplines in order to show how they shed light on practical theology in general and communicating the gospel in particular. Grethlein introduces the reader not only to the important voices and to schools in the field of practical theology but to the tension and continuity between them as well. Ultimately, he argues that practical theology needs to be "a theory of balance" between studying particular practices and contexts in regard to the totality of spiritual practices, constraint of theological research methodology and non-theological means, and "the practical-theological discipline to theological praxis...in conflict with the multiperspectival approaches that lifeworldly complexity requires" (59).

Part 2, Practical Theology as the Theory of the Communication of the Gospel, reviews the shifts in various forms of communication theory based on "psychology, semiotics, sociolinguistics, ritual system, and action theories as well as poststructural approaches" (67). He reveals how communication theories have shifted from unidirectional approaches to dialogical ones focusing on "mutual understanding" (74). The survey leads to the conclusion that communicating the gospel "requires symmetrical constellations" yet this must contend with "functionally...unavoidable asymmetries" (75). To communicate the gospel and God's reign, Jesus used "teaching and learning, communal celebrations, and helping for living" (90). These three modes were continued throughout ecclesial history and still exist in the modern context as means by which to communicate the gospel. The concrete nature of each reveals that empirical sciences, as well as theology, can inform praxis. A task of practical theology is to consider how revolutions in media, especially the internet, lead to a new contextualization of these modes. This is especially crucial with regard to shifts away from "religion" to "spiritual" or non-religious (104, 183).

After surveying the vast complexity of practical theology throughout history and in its recent forms, in addition to methods of communication, Grethlein's work culminates in Part 3, Methods for Communication of the Gospel. He explores how the development and contextualization of the liturgical year and church buildings reveal the importance of time and space to contextual communication of the gospel (191). Leading to God being "neither 'concept' nor 'experience,' but concretely subject, goal, and origin of communication" (189). Throughout the entire book, but especially in part 3, Grethlein offers commentary on how the discipline of

practical theology needs to adapt in different settings around the world. Beyond contextualization being a historical necessity for concretization, he views the decrease of church membership and the rise of electronic media, wiki churches, as revealing essential questions to practical theologians' task of communicating the gospel in the 21st century.

While the explicit section devoted to homiletics (217-221) is only a few pages, the book's attention to communicating the gospel in the present setting is directly connected with the task of preaching. Thus, the work offers insight into how preachers and homileticians can engage with the broader field of practical theology to inform their tasks. The insights throughout the book point toward a dialogical form of preaching that communicates the gospel in concrete ways to real people. The emphasis on open-ended communication and multi-perspectival approaches, grounded in social sciences and theology, provides profound rationales for dialogical forms of preaching.

Students, teachers, and practical theologians will find this work immeasurably helpful. Grethlein offers key insights into developing areas of practical theology that need to be considered. The survey of history, theology, and social sciences provides a foundational introduction to practical theology. Readers in the United States will find this text valuable; however, its reliance on a German bibliography restricts English speakers from further exploring many of the sources and theories he describes. This is limiting to the overall task, as much of the work is introducing theoretical concepts to the reader who can further the task by contextualizing concrete modes of communicating the gospel. Nevertheless, Grethlein provides more than enough in this clear translation to be introduced to the task of communicating the gospel from the perspective of practical theology. While there is no single way to do practical theology or to communicate the gospel, Grethlein offers a necessary framework that is open and concrete. The work is a valuable and timely reflection on practical theology that I would recommend to those in the field.

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Eunjoo Mary Kim. *Christian Preaching and Worship in Multicultural Contexts: A Practical Theological Approach*. Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2017. 227 pages. \$29.95.

Eunjoo Mary Kim, a leading Asian-American homiletician, presents this unique book as a liturgically and practical-theologically expanded discussion of her previous work, *Preaching in an Age of Globalization*. In the earlier book she thoroughly engaged with globalized contexts and provided her trans-contextual homiletic as a solution. In this volume, Kim argues that while we are all living in locally and/or globally *multicultural* contexts, most churches still stick to a conventional, monocultural preaching and worship style, along racial, ethnic and cultural lines. Therefore, it is crucial to bring about a paradigm shift to the ministry of preaching and worship in order to make them more relevant to culturally diverse contexts by seeking “theological, and biblical wisdom and homiletical and liturgical insight” (xv).

This book is comprised of four parts, with seven chapters, followed by appendices with sample sermons and liturgies. The first chapter provides her definition of multiculturalism as “a socio-cultural movement to transform our multicultural society into a better world” (5) and presents her theology of diversity as the foundation for preaching and worship in multicultural contexts. Its three core understandings are: 1) humans are created as communal being according to the image of God, 2) the *perichoretic* relationship of the Trinity is the prototype of the human community, and 3) God still continues the work of creation (*creatio continua*) and humans are invited to work together with their imagination of, and passion for, a new world in which racially and culturally different people live together in justice and peace (7-18).

In chapter 2, Kim argues that it is required to find a common focus of engagement for preaching and worship in multicultural contexts. This focus is elaborated in a threefold way: “the divine invitation to the community of friends, the human response to the invitation through praying and doing justice, and the eschatological celebration here and now” (29).

For the interpretation of Christian scripture in our multicultural world, the third chapter presents multicultural hermeneutics as an alternative to the Christocentric approach to *sola scriptura*, seeking in the scripture the wisdom of God as a way of life, through dialogue with other religions’ sacred texts (intertextuality). While providing four hermeneutical principles for the actual practice of multicultural hermeneutics in this chapter, the author, in chapter 4, as a test case for multicultural hermeneutics, deals with the miracle story in Luke 7:11-17 through the intertextual dialogue with the Buddhist story, “The Parable of the Mustard Seed.”

In chapter 5, Kim further expands her discussion by exploring how to bring about liturgical renewal from a multicultural perspective through interdisciplinary studies with ritual theories and church history. While renewal is always provisional, contingent, and contextual, she presents some practical suggestions which can be summarized as follows: by making preaching and worship more relational and participatory, renewal should move the worshippers’ heart so that they can make meaning of complex realities in a multicultural world (108-109).

The sixth chapter introduces five cultural images (the melting pot, the salad bowl, the mosaic, the kaleidoscope, and the metamorphosis) in order to develop liturgical models of multicultural worship. The author advises preachers and worship leaders to examine which image fits their worship and try to move to their next level of worship by considering the strengths and weaknesses of each model.

The final chapter proposes the reflective practical-theological method, in which theory and practice relate to each other dialectically through the spiral movement of four stages: empathetic imagination, prayerful and contemplative imagination, creative imagination, and

visionary imagination. In this way preachers and worship leaders can discern and communicate practical wisdom (*phronesis*) for the renewal of preaching and worship, facing racial and cultural diversity (136-138).

Kim's has made unique contributions in this book. First, I highly value the remarkable thematic continuity between her previous book and this book, in terms of globalization and multiculturalism. For Kim they are not mutually exclusive but closely intertwined. Whereas the former book is solely focused on the field of homiletics, the latter broadens its scope beyond homiletics toward liturgy and practical theology, critically engaging with the issue of multiculturalism. Therefore, I hope readers can read both books side by side in order to gain a fuller understanding of Kim's suggestions. Second, seeking the wisdom of God as a way of life (through multicultural hermeneutics) opens a new vista for possible fruitful dialogues with other racial and cultural groups within and beyond the Christian church, in order to fully understand and embody the wisdom of God as God's *creatio continua* in our racially and culturally diverse world. Third, I find the sermons and worship orders in the appendix extremely helpful for anyone who wants to learn how to apply her multicultural suggestions to the actual practices of preaching and worship in a multicultural congregation.

There are also a couple of minor issues to be named. First, the current structure of this book is a little uneven for those who do not have knowledge about homiletics, liturgy and/or practical theology, perhaps making them difficult to fully grasp Kim's fascinating vision for the renewal of preaching and worship in multicultural contexts. Second, while some practical theologians may not agree with her definition of *phronesis* as infused/acquired prudence taken from Thomas Aquinas, I personally wondered if "the wisdom of God as a way of life" and "practical wisdom" in multicultural preaching and worship can be used interchangeably. As they can denote two distinct scopes of wisdom, further clarification of the terms at the earlier stage would be necessary to avoid any confusion.

Despite these minor issues, I would highly recommend this book for any preachers or worship leaders, knowingly or unknowingly ministering at multicultural congregations, as it proposes a paradigm shift for preaching and worship, seriously taking into account multicultural contexts. I hope this book will have a ripple effect on future homiletical and liturgical discourses.

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Deanna A. Thompson. *The Virtual Body of Christ in a Suffering World*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2016. 144 pages. \$19.99.

This volume by Deanna Thompson dares to compel its readership, against probable reluctance, to consider the virtuality of the body of Christ. Adopting language of conversion and testimony, Thompson relies upon her own experience with stage IV metastatic breast cancer to share how she came to embrace, and be embraced by, the virtual body of Christ. Throughout her book, Thompson rightfully anticipates pushback from those who are familiar with research concerning the negative impacts of technology and internet dependence. Without dismissing these concerns, Thompson asserts that technology is a growing aspect of human life, and that Christians are faced with the task of how to better utilize technology in order to manifest Christ to those who suffer.

In the first section of her book, she shares her “conversion story,” with moving descriptions of how she was embraced and carried by a virtual community of both strong and weak ties as she suffered through illness and treatment. She then explores the technological revolution, and engages ethical and philosophical angles of increasing human interdependence with technology. She argues that virtual relationships of support can lead to the strengthening of relationships beyond virtuality.

In part two, she really begins to develop a theological claim concerning the virtual body of Christ. By first appealing to the letters of the New Testament, with a special emphasis on Pauline material, she explores Paul’s “virtual” relationship with many of the New Testament churches, as his relationships are largely sustained through letters. She pays special attention to the implications of the language of the body in 1 Corinthians 12, highlighting the corporeality of the fellowship of believers as the body of Christ, while simultaneously sustaining Christ’s physical absence. In this sense, Christ’s body is necessarily virtual, living on through the fellowship of believers, unified throughout past, present, and future. The universality of the virtual body of Christ, by way of technology, exponentially expands the possibilities of care, support, and service for those who are suffering. At the end of chapter two, she raises the question, “But are virtual spaces real enough to bear the incarnation?”—a worthwhile question which launches her into a thoughtful reimagining of incarnational living to include virtual spaces. In chapter three she strives to break down frameworks which understand embodied interactions and virtual interactions to be oppositional, arguing, rather, for the idea of continuity between the two. Perhaps virtual engagements can foster and enhance face-to-face relationships. It is in this third chapter that the reader will find what may very well be the most poignant and insightful section of Thompson’s argument. She explains, as only one who has truly suffered can, the very complicated dynamics of social interaction for a person who is enduring bodily suffering. She carefully navigates matters of selfhood, emotional and psychological trauma, and communication barriers that emerge in face-to-face interactions. Here she explains that in many ways, virtual engagement of a person who is suffering can provide alleviation of pressure from the person who is struggling to communicate through the battlefield of suffering. It may be important to note that never in this volume does she argue that virtual engagement is superior to, or a proper substitution for physical engagement.

Thompson then reiterates her proposal for the virtual body of Christ meeting the needs of those who suffer. Here she addresses the many challenges that technology raises in human attentiveness. How will people be aware of suffering, and give rightful attendance to human needs, if research indicates that technology is depleting human ability to sustain attention and

careful attendance? She argues that inattentiveness is as much a learned behavior as attentiveness. Attentiveness and sensitivity to suffering are skills which one must hone, sometimes over and against the challenges of technology.

She also addresses practical matters of online presence for churches who strive to negotiate virtual space with their face-to-face worship experiences. Ministers will likely feel inspired by this section to imagine new ways of utilizing online resources to help their congregations flourish in personal relationships.

In the final section of her book, Thompson explores some of the potential limitations and challenges of her proposal. Persons who are suffering from various cognitive diseases, mental illness, persons who are visually impaired, or those who do not have access to technology due to socio-economic circumstances, may not be able to fully participate in the virtual life of the body of Christ. Thompson's overview of these limitations and challenges is perhaps too brief, as the reader is left with an abundance of questions concerning the experiences of those who suffer in ways unaddressed by the majority of the book.

While Thompson carefully anticipates rebuttals that may emerge from her readers, and aptly addresses concerns along the way, she does not thoroughly address matters of *communal* trauma or suffering, as one might have expected to find in a book that is supposed to address a suffering *world*. However, granted the concision of this volume, Thompson's exploration of suffering through her own testimony is quite profound. Readers should anticipate a change of mind, and an expanded perception on the role of the internet and technology in the church's mission to embody Christ to the suffering.

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David Grumett. *Material Eucharist*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016. 322 Pages. \$112.

What happens when Christians break bread, pour wine, and celebrate the Eucharist? David Grumett, a Senior Lecturer at the University of Edinburgh, seeks to revive robust theological discourse about how God transforms ordinary materials into signs and presence of Christ's Body in the world. His new book, *Material Eucharist*, invites contemporary readers into an ancient conversation about wheat and grapes, fermentation and decay, silence and song, death and resurrection. This consideration of God's activity within the physical world and the rhythms of liturgical time enriches the exploration of themes in later chapters, where the author explores current conversations about Christ's presence among Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed, and Orthodox theologians. Grumett discloses and explains his own perspective as "an Anglican with Roman Catholic leanings" (4), but he engages different positions with generosity and respect, such that the book itself is a thoughtful and fascinating contribution to ecumenical dialogue.

Material Eucharist's first chapter gathers ancient accounts about the theological significance of ingredients that comprise eucharistic bread and wine. Grumett cites documents in which monks, priests, and theologians offer practical counsel, allegorical teachings, and biblical exegesis regarding grain, salt, olive oil, leaven, water, and grapes. For example, East Syrian monks enact the drama of Christ's passion in the bread oven: they burn incense and arrange loaves in a manner that symbolizes Christ's crucifixion between two thieves (57).

The following chapter situates the sacramental elements within the rhythms, sounds, and prayers of different Christian worship traditions. For instance, silence during a fifth century Syrian liturgy precedes the eucharistic prayer as an intense, communal expectation of the Holy Spirit's descent (73). In the Church of England, however, silence functions as an opportunity for private reflection during confession, a moment alone with God before joining one's voice with the congregation in prayer (74).

Later chapters explore how these material and liturgical commitments inform, and are shaped by, doctrinal arguments that engage with classical and secular philosophical constructs. Chapter four offers a peculiar juxtaposition of the Fourth Lateran Council's sophisticated debates on eucharistic reservation (i.e., keeping consecrated elements locked away) and Western medieval folk beliefs about the host's efficacy in making crops grow or livestock get well (108-109). The themes in the book progress from examination of documents about tangible materials and actions (wine-treading methods, congregational singing during liturgies, administration of the sacrament to the sick) to a chapter that treats more abstract philosophical discourse (the relationship of Aristotle's *Categories* to Aquinas's eucharistic theology), and, as a conclusion, second order discourse about eucharistic theology and ecumenism.

Material Eucharist's last chapter and epilogue consider the present-day conversation about eucharistic theology and ecumenism. Here, Grumett explains Calvin's position as the representative of the Reformed perspective, so that he can include it in the dialogue. Grumett concludes with a comparison on the role of the Holy Spirit in these traditions. Here the book takes on a beautifully ecumenical tone: there are unexpected resonances between Orthodox and Reformed theology about communal ascent to God; Lutheranism upholds a creative tension of Christ's corporal and spiritual presence with consubstantiation; Catholic transubstantiation retains a fidelity to the incarnation, even if its current articulation may be due for magisterial revision or adaptation. Perhaps Grumett's erudition and charitable attitude have rekindled this reviewer's glimmer of hope that the Body of Christ may someday reconcile around eucharistic theology.

This may seem like a lot of material for a three-hundred-page book, and, at times, *Material Eucharist* is overwhelming. Remembering the differences and similarities among examples that span second-century Greek martyrs to modern proponents of the Latin Mass can be disorienting. But the material is also an engrossing look at what matters most about the Eucharist to fellow Christians. Disagreement concerning the Eucharist has been the cause of division, excommunication, and even bloodshed among Christians, and Grumett does not ignore the ugliness of this history. Nevertheless, the book makes a compelling case that Christians can learn how to think about the Eucharist from one another, even if we do not share the same commitments. For this reason, *Material Eucharist* is a fantastic read for theologians, pastors, and seminarians who wish to further understand the tremendous diversity of practices and beliefs that surround this holy meal.

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Prema Kurien. *Ethnic Church Meets MegaChurch: Indian American Christianity in Motion*. New York University Press: New York, 2017. 279 pages. \$32.84.

Migration is changing and revitalizing the religious and cultural landscape of the United States. The mushrooming of places of worship by and for immigrants of every religious persuasion in New Jersey, where I live, stands as an example of such a seismic change. In my experience as the pastor of an immigrant congregation, many mainline denominational churches facing the challenge of declining membership envy the immigrant church for its vitality, religious fervor, and steady growth in its membership.

Using the Mar Thoma church as a model/paradigm, Prema Kurien, a professor of sociology with her expertise in sophisticated analysis and a keen interest in church life demonstrates how immigrant congregations are making a deep impact on the religious life both in the United States and India. Even though the book addresses specifically Indian American Christianity any keen reader whose is interested in the study of global religions, diaspora, ethnicity, and cultures will greatly benefit from reading this book.

The book focuses on the Mar Thoma church, which traces its roots to Apostle Thomas, the disciple of Christ and its influence in the lives of the first and second generation Asian Indians living in the United States. The first generation tries to recreate the worship experience of home in this context in order for them to find stability in the midst of their disruptive and unsettling immigration experience. Furthermore, for the immigrant generation, an ethnic church model provides a buffer or way for them to get integrated into the larger society. While the second generation, who are born and raised in diasporic context (not affected by immigration experience like their parents) find the liturgy, worship, and preaching in the immigrant generation hindering their spiritual experience and growth. This has resulted in a “silent exodus” of second-generation youth in large numbers from the Indian immigrant churches.

American Evangelicalism, writes Kurien, with its emphasis on “born again,” individualistic faith has permeated into the life of the immigrant congregations both here and in India. This transformative experience informs the second generation’s decision to do evangelism among neighbors of other religions and in their own community. Kurien notes that the immigrant generation is willing to make concessions and forego their worship experience in order to meet the demands of the second generation. This is also a way of keeping the second generation within the denomination. There is a move, writes Kurien, within the Mar Thoma denomination to create churches that are led by second-generation with a vision to be a church for *all* people (137). In this model, worship is conducted in English, led by lay people theologically trained in North American seminaries with “longer than traditional messages” (138). This also provides the “sense of community” that they were raised in and which, the megachurch model could not provide (138). This model of church is more *contextual* (emphasis mine) than the church formed by their parent generation and more effectively addresses the generational commonality, needs, and aspirations.

I believe Kurien accomplishes the purpose of this book, which is to undertake a sociological/anthropological study of the immigrant church with her “thick description” of the context. I resonated with her description of the Asian Indian immigrant context as I researched the preaching practices in the Tamil speaking immigrant churches. Preachers did not have an adequate understanding of their context and hence encouraged preachers to become “amateur ethnographers” in order to preach sermons that are contextually appropriate. This book will greatly benefit preachers in so far it provides tools and techniques to understand any

congregation where they are called to serve. In preaching, context is everything and the narrative of the Asian Indian immigrant community described in this book can greatly benefit any preacher in understanding Asian Indian immigrants worshipping in their setting.

With the ongoing migration of Asian Indians to the United States there will be a need for the first generation ethnic churches to help with societal integration. In other immigrant communities like the East Asian Americans, unlike the Mar Thoma church, the reversal is happening. The second generation is leaving the white evangelical churches because “they felt racialized and marginalized in these churches” (241). Finally, with the emphasis on multiculturalism within the nondenominational, evangelical churches and a society that is postdenominational, the ethnic model might be a hindrance for immigrant integration into the larger society than aiding it.

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Swee Hong Lim and Lester Ruth. *Lovin' On Jesus: A Concise History of Contemporary Worship*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2017. 162 pages. \$29.99.

No two words are more inflammatory in the study and practice of worship than “contemporary worship.” “Worship wars” have divided congregations into camps, forcing pastors, parishioners, and musicians to “pick a side” between traditional and contemporary worship. Liturgical Studies has largely been dismissive of contemporary worship, especially in terms of musical and lyrical style, which has left a void in recounting the stories of this movement. Now, the long-awaited moment has come: a concise, but robust study of the history and practice of contemporary Christian worship has hit the bookshelves.

Swee Hong Lim and Lester Ruth’s *Lovin’ on Jesus: A Concise History of Contemporary Worship* tells the story of contemporary worship in a way that goes beyond musical stylings. Structured in accordance with James F. White’s *Introduction to Christian Worship* chapter headings, Lim and Ruth discuss contemporary worship through the categories of definitions, time, space, music, prayer, the Bible, preaching, and sacramentality. Consequently, *Lovin’ on Jesus* may be read in tandem with White’s book or it may stand independently. This book is well-organized for classroom use, accessibly written, and is suited for liturgical scholars, historians, [ethno]musicologists, students, pastors, and contemporary worship leaders alike.

Prior to discussing the history of contemporary worship, one must define the term. Lim and Ruth offer nine defining qualities within four larger groupings:

- Fundamental presuppositions: using contemporary, nonarchaic English; a dedication to relevance regarding contemporary concerns and issues in the lives of worshipers; and a commitment to adapt worship to match contemporary people, sometimes to the level of strategic targeting.
- Musical: using musical styles from current types of popular music; extending times of uninterrupted congregational singing; a centrality of the musicians in the liturgical space and in the leadership of the service.
- Behavioral: greater levels of physical expressiveness; a predilection for informality.
- Key dependency: a reliance upon electronic technology (2-3).

In the 1960s, the “fundamental presuppositions” listed above are what constituted contemporary worship, irrespective of musical style. It was not until the late 1970s and 1980s that contemporary worship became synonymous with contemporary worship music, which was codified more widely in the 1990s through Mainline Protestant implementations of contemporary worship (22-23).

Although Lim and Ruth write as liturgists, they allow the historical and theological commitments of contemporary worship to make their own vernacular contributions to “traditional” liturgical categories. For example, liturgical time in contemporary worship is conceived of in terms of “achieving flow” (32). Liturgical space is spoken of as “fluid,” especially through technological mediation (56-57). In the music chapters, which constitute the heart of the book, contemporary worship songs are situated within their historical context, then evaluated generously in theological and musicological terms (79-81). On liturgical prayer, the authors uplift extemporaneous prayer and its standard, but learned formulae (101). For biblical foundations, Lim and Ruth cite the ubiquitous use of Psalm 22:3 (“you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel”) in Pentecostal literature as a justification for worship (111-115). In their discussion of “sacramentality,” they argue for worship music’s near-instrumental sacramental effectiveness by drawing parallels to Roman Catholic theologies of Eucharistic consecration

(121-123, 134). The strength of this book lies within Lim and Ruth's ability to allow contemporary worship to generate its own idiomatic scholarly grammar as an established, non-derivative movement of Christian worship.

Their research methodology is both a textual study of primary sources, as well as an oral history project. Given the "con-temporary" nature of the study (i.e. "with the times"), Lim and Ruth incorporate seamlessly the voices of many authors and songwriters who are still living. Additionally, they demonstrate the diversity of contemporary worship as they incorporate voices of color global and domestic throughout the historical narrative.

Lim and Ruth complement one another well. Swee Hong Lim's musicological expertise balances Lester Ruth's historical acumen. The book itself is replete with helpful textboxes, photographs, and diagrams. At 162 pages, the project is indeed "concise," leaving readers wanting more. As such, the six-page bibliographical "For Further Study" section is a helpful and necessary inclusion. On a more critical note, organizing the book à la James White is helpful, but sometimes comes across as forced, especially when chapters occasionally overlap in content. Also, as expected with co-authored works, there are moments when smoother written transitions are needed.

Overall, *Lovin' on Jesus* is a brilliant, generous, accessible, and first-of-its-kind contribution that will benefit many classrooms in the burgeoning study of contemporary worship.

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