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Christ and Culture: A Belated Assessment of H.R. Niebuhr for Preaching

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Abstract: *H. Richard Niebuhr's Christ and Culture (1951) has had enduring scholarly appeal, yet its impact on preaching is unclear. His types can be adapted to represent a range of listener perspectives on controversial issues, or to form categories with which to assess cultural engagement in sermons. Nonetheless, cultural attitudes have changed since Niebuhr's time, and scholarly critiques of his project are instructive in themselves, they can help preachers to be more sensitive in dealing with cultural issues. These shifts in attitude may limit the value of his types, at least without an additional type to better address listeners' needs.*

H. Richard Niebuhr's *Christ and Culture* (1951; expanded 50th anniversary edition, 2001), has received less attention in homiletics than might have been expected, given the central role culture has come to play in the discipline. In the 50 years of the Academy of Homiletics, no paper was delivered on him; two homileticians have each written most of a chapter on him. Perhaps now he is too dated to consider. A more recent volume to pair with biblical preaching might seem to be Stephen B. Bevans' influential *Models of Contextual Theology*,¹ yet of his six models he says that only one model and "perhaps" a second, "takes seriously the message of Christianity as recorded in scripture and handed down by tradition."² There are good reasons to re-examine Niebuhr. No other book has shaped cultural studies as *Christ and Culture* has. While we have no record of what impact Niebuhr's volume actually had on pulpits, he has continuing significance. Among other possibilities, his typologies can be methodologically conceived as tools to present differing stances on controversial subjects. Preachers can use his critics to inform their adaptations of him. Still, his five types are based on a confessional stance that may work better for preachers than for some people in their congregations today. An additional type is needed to address listener's needs today.

Cultural Relations as Choice

In 1949, people generally accepted that church and culture were separate, like church and state in the United States. Niebuhr taught their interconnection. Christians had choice and responsibility in dealing with culture. He defines culture as, "the total process of human activity and that total result of such activity [including] language, habits, ideas, beliefs, customs, social organization, inherited artifacts, technical process, and values."³ There is no exact Greek equivalent to the English word culture and he equates it with the New Testament idea of world⁴. He wrote to address what he called an "enduring problem", the "many-sided debate about the relations of Christianity and civilization" (1). He was particularly concerned about Christian social responsibility in the context of social upheaval following World War II.

¹ Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, revised and expanded edition (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2010 [1992]).

² *Ibid.*, 42.

³ H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper and Row, 2001), 32. Pagination of Niebuhr's actual text in this expanded edition is identical to 1951. Hereafter page numbers of this volume will be embedded in parentheses within the text or the volume will be abbreviated in footnotes as *C & C*.

⁴ Culture for Niebuhr is the "'social heritage' which the New Testament writers frequently had in mind when they spoke of 'the world'." *C & C*, 32.

He developed five ways in which Christ relates to the culture of his time and location. His types were rooted in history and the New Testament, and opened fresh avenues of thought for preachers. The general rule for the pulpit in his time, with the exception of major national events or celebrations, was to stick to the Bible and its key social teachings and doctrines, and to stay out of ‘political’ and economic matters—an attitude still prevalent for instance in some responses of opponents to Pope Francis’s 2015 encyclical on ecology.⁵ Niebuhr did not write to challenge pulpit attitudes, but that may have been part of his effect. His biblically centered confessional stance⁶ appealed to many preachers. He reminded all Christians that every part of creation is under Christ’s rule and the ways Christ related to the world can be determinative for them. Preachers heard Niebuhr argue that the church’s relationship to culture is not simply a fixed given. He gave reasons to engage culture and laid out the advantages and disadvantages of his five approaches.

Niebuhr’s Five Types as Models for Preaching On Controversy

Our purpose here is to further assess how Niebuhr might be homiletically or methodologically received. Rather than simply summarize his types as has been done by many authors, we frame our initial review of his types in terms of sermonic application. He intended his taxonomy to contribute to what one scholar calls a public theology,⁷ yet preachers could use his types as strategies to present controversial issues and to address different kinds of listeners.⁸ He speaks in balanced ways and models respect of positions not his own. Preachers using him might lead church members to increased understanding of one another and of others in society.

Niebuhr did not consider his types to be rigid as some interpreters took him. The types represented a sequence, progression, or continuum of values. For our purposes, his types are to be honored less for their accuracy in describing historical movements than for their ability to describe a broad spectrum of contemporary approaches to culture that might exist in many churches. Some congregations might have individual members who represent all five of his types. Preachers could use the types directly in sermons, or behind the scenes to provide understanding of potential differences among the congregational members, or even to help identify their own sermonic tendencies in engaging culture.⁹ The first two types Niebuhr presents

⁵ “I think religion ought to be about making us better as people and less about things that end up getting in the political realm.” Jeb Bush in response to the papal encyclical and cited in, “The Republicans have a Pope Problem,” *The Economist*, June 19, 2015. Viewed online on June 22, 2015 at <<http://www.economist.com/blogs/democracyinamerica/2015/06/religion-and-politics>>.

⁶ His theological convictions are clear from his first sentence announcing his topic as “the double wrestle of the church with its Lord and with the cultural society with which it lives in symbiosis...” Niebuhr, *C & C*, xi. They are evident throughout and again in his concluding paragraph, “To make our decisions in faith is to make them in view of the fact...that there is a church of faith in which we do our partial, relative work and on which we count. It is to make them in view of the fact that Christ is risen from the dead, and is not only the head of the church but the redeemer of the world. It is to make them in view of the fact that the world of culture—man’s achievement—exists within the world of grace—God’s Kingdom.” *C & C*, 256.

⁷ Linell E. Cady, “H. Richard Niebuhr and the Task of a Public Theology,” in Ronald E. Thieman, ed., *The Legacy of H. Richard Niebuhr* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 107–130.

⁸ D. A. Carson uses Niebuhr as a springboard for his own biblically based paradigm to help Christians develop their own perspectives on difficult issues facing the church. See: D. A. Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008).

⁹ This exercise could complement an exegesis of the congregation as discussed by Lenora Tubbs Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 42. It could also complement an exegesis of the self in Stephen Farris, *Preaching that Matters: The Bible and Our Lives* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 30–33.

as extreme poles:

1. Christ Against Culture

Preachers could use this type to represent and understand the views of people in their congregations opposed to cultural change and who reject cultural cooperation. As argued by some medieval monastic orders and sectarian movements, the world is sinful and faithful Christians should withdraw from it. Individuals who follow this path ultimately “are tempted to divide the world into the material realm governed by a principle opposed to Christ and a spiritual realm guided by the spiritual God” (81). Niebuhr sees withdrawal and renunciation as “a necessary element in every Christian life” (68), but this type lacks responsible engagement of cultural tasks. He says of Tertullian, the greatest representative of this position in the early church, that he “replaces the positive and warm ethics of love which characterizes the First Letter of John with a largely negative morality; avoidance of sin and fearsome preparation for the coming day of judgment seem more important than thankful acceptance of God’s grace in the gift of his Son” (52).

2. Christ of Culture

This type could help preachers to appreciate the cultural stance of individuals who are largely accepting and uncritical of change. They favor accommodating culture. Harmony between Christ and culture is dominant, as exemplified by cultural Protestantism in the 19th century and beyond. Jesus is associated with the best things in society, people’s “finest ideals, their noblest institutions, and their best philosophies” (103). Friedrich Schleiermacher wrote to representatives of culture in *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers* and was “a clear-cut representative of those who accommodate Christ to culture while selecting from culture what conforms most readily to Christ” (94). This position helps people to understand Christ’s “gospel in their own language, his character by means of their own imagery, and his revelation of God with the aid of their own philosophy” (103). However, advocates of this perspective, “take some fragment of the complex New Testament story and interpretation, call this the essential characteristic of Jesus, elaborate upon it, and thus reconstruct their own mythical figure of the Lord.... Jesus stands for the idea of spiritual knowledge; or of logical reason; or of the sense for the infinite; or of the moral law within; or of brotherly love” (109).

The final three of Niebuhr’s categories attempt to hold Christ and culture together as a unity and are mediating positions between the first two:

3. Christ Above Culture

Preachers could use this type to speak for people who are open to change yet clear on their own positions and beliefs. They seek a synthesis between reason, found in the best ideals of culture, and gospel revelation. In line with Aquinas, whatever is good in culture is God-given. God sustains culture yet the culture of “moral life through training good habits...intelligent self-direction and...ascetic obedience to the radical counsels of Jesus” (133) can only take one so far in meeting Christ. Grace is needed. Synthesis between Christ and culture is provisional and symbolic, for culture “is subject to continuous and infinite conversion” (148). The danger here is “the institutionalization of Christ and the gospel” (146) and the restriction of God’s grace to the church. Also, people may fail to take sufficient account of the pervasive nature of radical evil (148). Still, for Niebuhr, “The synthesist alone seems to provide for willing and intelligent cooperation of Christians with non-believers in carrying on the work of the world, while yet maintaining the distinctiveness of Christian faith and life.” (143-44.)

4. Christ and Culture in Paradox

For some people in congregations, discerning the will of God can be an arduous task involving

dialogue and uncertainty. They may affirm value on various sides of an issue without needing to reconcile opposing views. Niebuhr calls this a dualist stance and identifies it with his brother, Reinhold Niebuhr, Martin Luther, Emil Brunner, “and perhaps Karl Barth”.¹⁰ The Christian believer faces many paradoxes: “He is under law, and yet not under law but grace; he is sinner, and yet righteous; he believes, as a doubter; he has assurance of salvation, yet walks along the knife-edge of insecurity. In Christ all things have become new, and yet everything remains as it was from the beginning...” (157). Being in the world but not of it is always in play, underlining both an ability and inability to follow Christ in cultural life. The danger is loss of the tension by opting for one position or the other (178) or, in finding paradox, Christians may be less motivated to act. It may seem to make no difference whether people “are sinfully obedient or sinfully disobedient to law” (187).

5. Christ the Transformer of Culture

This type represents the views of those who are essentially positive, seeking Christ’s transformative power at work in cultural change. Christ transforms culture and society must be changed or converted to follow God’s will. This is the only type that Niebuhr does not critique. He connects it with the early social gospel and calls it “the great central tradition of the church” (190). Those who exemplify this type are positive and hopeful towards culture, as is seen in three theological convictions: Christ “has entered into human culture” and orders it (193); culture is “perverted good, not evil; or it is evil as perversion, and not as badness of being” (194); and the end times are less in mind than “awareness of the power of the Lord to transform all things by lifting them up to himself” (195). This stance imagines a time of “universal regeneration through Christ” (206). With Calvin it “looks for the present permeation of all life by the gospel” (217) and with F. D. Maurice (1805-1872) it calls on people to “to take account of [Christ] only and not of their sin...as though it were the ruling principle of existence” (224).

Further Homiletical Relevance

In the 1950’s, social unity generally was prized, less suspect than it is in postmodern times, and diversity generally caused tension. Niebuhr did not understand diversity and pluralism as broadly as we do today yet his types model respect for diversity of opinion and the importance of dialogue. He focused on the importance of transformation (in his fifth type) well ahead of the New Homiletic that emphasized transformation over information as a goal of preaching.¹¹ His types not only draw attention to elements of historical continuity and significance, they also demonstrate his understanding that all ideas are historically rooted and context matters.

William J. Carl III was perhaps the first homiletician to apply Niebuhr, more or less directly, to preaching in 1984. He argued that “the way we preach doctrinal sermons in the context of apologetics and pastoral or moral problems will depend in part on how we view culture” and its relationship to Christ.¹²

In 1991, John S. McClure reworked Niebuhr in significant ways, reducing his five types

¹⁰ H. Richard Niebuhr, “Types of Christian Ethics,” in Glen H. Stassen, D.M. Yeager, and John Howard Yoder, eds., *Authentic Transformation: A New Vision of Christ and Culture* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 27.

¹¹ Many homileticians refer to the importance of transformation. See for instance, Lucy Rose’s discussion of transformational preaching (along with her other types, traditional, kerygmatic and conversational) in her *Sharing the Word: Preaching in the Roundtable Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997).

¹² William J. Carl III, *Preaching Christian Doctrine* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 134. See: 126–37.

to four¹³, and reconceiving them as rhetorical styles. McClure's overall project is too complex to reproduce here, but these four styles were part of his fourth code of preaching, the cultural code. He uses the term code to describe a system of signs, words, or cyphers that help to describe human interactions in sermonic areas, scriptural, semantic, theosymbolic, and cultural. Each code vouches for, promotes, and responds to an established intertext for support, thus the cultural code connects with the intertext of experience, while the scriptural code connects with anamnesis.¹⁴ He conceives of culture as "a kind of outward sedimentation of experience...capable of generating further experiences that follow from the same ordering."¹⁵ He uses the term homiletical culture to refer to the various cultures and subcultures referenced in a sermon, some unconsciously.¹⁶ His goal with Niebuhr's types, now converted into styles, is to help preachers diagnose differences between how they handle culture in their sermons and what congregations expect, thereby to learn better how to negotiate a hearing with them and meet their needs. McClure drops Niebuhr's "Christ" titles and opts for renaming his styles using categories largely drawn from Niebuhr that better serve rhetoric.¹⁷ This shift to communication strategy necessarily moves away from Niebuhr's emphasis on the activity of Christ.

Though Niebuhr in his time was a theological liberal,¹⁸ John G. Stackhouse, Jr., finds his continuing relevance in evangelical circles, "Evangelicals have inhabited all of Niebuhr's types."¹⁹ Christ against culture he finds in individuals and congregations of "Mennonites, Baptists, Christian Brethren, Pentecostals, and most types of fundamentalists"²⁰ Christ of culture is seen whenever "we have closely associated God and country and assumed that our nations are Christian, or 'almost'"²¹ Less common, Christ above culture can be found in "evangelical missionaries who emphasize anticipations of Christian revelation in the beliefs of non-Christian peoples [and those] who affirm the essential congeniality of the gospel with this or that non-Christian author—as the apologists of the early church allied themselves with Plato"²² Although "Evangelicalism generally eschews paradox," Stackhouse thinks it should favor Christ and culture in paradox because "God has called us to lives of difficult paradox, of painful negotiation between conflicting and competitive values, of seeking to cooperate with God..."²³ Finally, Christ transforming culture is found in those who believe that, "Society is to be entirely converted to Christianity. Business, the arts, the professions, family life, education, government—nothing is outside the purview of Christ's dominion, and all must be reclaimed in

¹³ John S. McClure, *The Four Codes of Preaching: Rhetorical Strategies* (Louisville: John Knox, 2003 [Fortress, 1991]), esp. 143–169. He combines Niebuhr's Christ above culture and Christ as transformer of culture as two parts under a new dialectical category, see: 149–157.

¹⁴ McClure, 10.

¹⁵ McClure, 140.

¹⁶ McClure, 139.

¹⁷ McClure's identification style is Niebuhr's Christ of culture; dialectical style, a) is synthetic or Christ above culture, and b) conversionist or Christ as transformer of culture; dualist style is Christ and culture in paradox, and sectarian style is Christ against culture.

¹⁸ Niebuhr continues to be seen in this way. See: Timothy A. Beach-Verley, *Robust Liberalism: H. Richard Niebuhr and the Ethics of American Public Life* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2011).

¹⁹ John G. Stackhouse, Jr., "In the World, but..." *Christianity Today* 46 (April 22, 2002): 5, 80. Niebuhr's relevance is currently affirmed for the Russian Orthodox Church: "all five types illuminate aspects of its complex life today." John P. Burgess, "Christ and Culture Revisited: Contributions from the Recent Russian Orthodox debate," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 31:2 (Fall–Winter 2011): 55–74, esp. 60.

²⁰ Stackhouse, 80.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 80.

²² *Ibid.*, 80.

²³ *Ibid.*, 81.

his name.”²⁴

Niebuhr’s types might be useful in other ways for preaching, as a way to discuss:

- 1) Individual Preaching Patterns over Time: Some preachers might consistently follow one or two of Niebuhr’s types when preaching on cultural matters. If they find value in other types, they might become intentional in employing them.
- 2) The General Character of the Preaching in Individual Churches or Denominations: Some churches or denominations have a particular style, character, or theological consistency to their preaching.
- 3) Individual Homiletical Approaches: Karl Barth argued that the preacher is to get out of the way of the Word, rhetoric has no place, and introductions draw attention to the wrong things.²⁵ Though his theory and practice arguably do not match each other, his theory matches Christ against culture. Christ of culture might represent preaching aligned with the views of a political party, or preaching understood as a form of civil religion. Christ above culture is found in preaching where the focus is largely moral instruction or social justice, the agency may be mostly human, and the motivation may be God’s command taken in itself as gospel, without the empowerment that makes for good news.
- 4) Different Aspects Of The New Homiletic: Expressions of the New Homiletic that focus on the human condition and God’s response to it (for example, much African American and Lutheran preaching, and the trouble and grace school²⁶) tend to present Christ and culture in paradox. On the other hand, when the emphasis is primarily on generating a transformative event often through an image or narrative experience, Christ as transformer of culture may be dominant.

Criticisms of Niebuhr

Niebuhr has ongoing relevance for preaching, yet much has changed since he wrote. Two key areas of change affect his utility. The first change concerns both of his key terms, Christ and culture. The second change concerns the composition of congregations in a postmodern age. Listener needs have shifted in ways that his typologies could not anticipate. We will explore each change in turn.

Changes in Conceiving of Christ and Culture

Scholarly criticisms of Niebuhr can be instructive to preachers today in helping them to avoid his assumptions and limitations as they deal with culture. Niebuhr criticized his own typology and the artificial nature of his historical constructs, “it is evident at once that no person or group ever conforms completely to a type” (43-44). Critics have attacked all aspects of his program. It is somewhat unsettling that most of the published conversation is amongst white middle-class males, the present author being no exception. Some scholars from other backgrounds may dismiss him on the grounds that he represents a social context and age in which Protestant white males presumed to define culture in a universal manner according to their own standards. Niebuhr’s types show his regard for historical conditioning and context, yet he makes almost no reference to cultural issues or events in *Christ and Culture*. From today’s perspective that is odd—how can one speak of culture without specifics?—yet that same absence

²⁴ Ibid., 81.

²⁵ As Barth said of introductions, “No doubt introductions offer many opportunities for much wit and cleverness, but in any case too much precious times is wasted by intellectual gymnastics of this kind.” Karl Barth, *Homiletics* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1991), 122.

²⁶ See Paul Scott Wilson, *Preaching and Homiletical Theory* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2004), 101, 115.

of social issues is found in most pulpits of his day. One socially active preacher that Niebuhr knew well, Harry Emerson Fosdick at Riverside Church in New York City,²⁷ often mentioned events in the world by way of brief anecdote, illustration, or passing reference, yet he rarely devoted a sermon to a social issue.²⁸ Ironically, this lack of cultural specificity on Niebuhr's part may have contributed to his enduring influence—he was not easily dated. Among the primary critiques scholars made of him, we focus on several that stress current emphases in cultural studies. These criticisms tell preachers as much about changing attitudes towards culture as they do about Niebuhr.

1) Every understanding of Christ is affected by the culture/s in which it is offered. As Peter R. Gathje poignantly asks of Niebuhr, “How does one give a ‘neutral’ definition or understanding of Christ? How does one give an understanding of culture that does not reflect one’s own view of what qualifies as ‘culture’ and what does not?... [C]ritics of Niebuhr’s project may rightly ask. ‘Whose Christ? and what culture?’”²⁹ Niebuhr seems to equate believers in Christ with people who “wrestle” with the connection between Christ and culture, but Martin E. Marty notes that in each of the types there may be stances other than wrestling at work.³⁰ Moreover, there are people devoted to Christ who are not part of a church community, just as there are individuals in the church who are not devoted to Christ.³¹

2) Christ cannot be considered separate from his embodiment in the church. Paul Metzger finds biblical basis for each of Niebuhr’s types and reframes them for they are “neither Christ-centered, nor cruciform, nor ecclesially framed.”³² Niebuhr’s two poles lack theological grounding: “The Christ of culture orientation, on its own, does not account for the judgment of the cross. The Christ against culture orientation, on its own, does not account for the transformative work of the resurrection.”³³ Noting the destruction that has often accompanied the cross in Native American communities, Metzger says, “The American church today must not simply bear the cross, but be willing to be hung upon it on behalf of the surrounding world.... the church has often failed to see that God so profoundly and pervasively demonstrates... omnipotence through the weakness of the cross.”³⁴

3) Culture is composed of many overlapping cultures that differ in many ways. John G. Stackhouse, Jr., drawing on Kathryn Tanner³⁵ and others, summarizes changes in cultural understanding since Niebuhr. Culture now may variously mean: high art, ethnic diversity, the common life of a given society, what is made or cultivated, society at large, a dominant way of

²⁷ Fosdick actually taught H. Richard Niebuhr pastoral theology at Union Seminary in New York City in 1919. See: Jon Diefenthaler, *H. Richard Niebuhr: A Lifetime of Reflection on the Church and the World* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1986), 8, n.17.

²⁸ One notable exception to this is Fosdick’s 1934 sermon, “My Account With An Unknown Soldier,” in which he renounces war. See: Robert Moats Miller, *Harry Emerson Fosdick: Preacher, Pastor, Prophet* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 491. Miller gives a detailed account of Fosdick’s social involvement. See: 389–548.

²⁹ Peter R. Gathje, “A Contested Classic: Critics Ask: Whose Christ? Which Culture?” in *The Christian Century* (June 19–26, 2002), 28.

³⁰ Martin E. Marty, “Foreword,” in *C & C*, xv.

³¹ *Ibid.*, xvi–xviii.

³² Paul Louis Metzger, “Christ, Culture, and the Sermon on the Mount Community,” *Ex Auditu* 23 (January 1, 2007), 45 n. 63.

³³ *Ibid.*, 30.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 41.

³⁵ See: Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997). See 61–62, where she devotes some attention to *Christ and Culture*.

living in a pluralistic society, and the various subcultures in which an individual participates.³⁶ Scholars have critiqued Niebuhr's understanding of culture as singular, monolithic, uniform and universal. Jack Schwandt calls Niebuhr's notion of culture "innocuous"³⁷ because politics is strangely absent, "but it was and is politics that gives force to [his] problem."³⁸ As John Howard Yoder puts it, Niebuhr showed "no interest in the Christian community as a sociological entity in its own right"³⁹. Niebuhr defined culture essentially in the way that the New Testament defined what was demonic and was in need of being saved.⁴⁰ The church, Yoder said, has different ways of responding to different aspects of contemporary culture.

4) Christ and Culture are not mutually exclusive alternatives. George Marsden underlines that even attempts to follow Christ are culturally conditioned.⁴¹ Postmodern thought is wary of binaries that serve powerful interests at the expense of other options. Graham Ward says of Niebuhr that, "The models are not discrete, as he is himself aware, but they tend to operate on a governing binary, there is Christ and there is culture, and how the two relate." Ward avoids the "binary problematic" by beginning "to think through the grammar of Christian believing on the basis that there can be no distillation of Christ from culture."⁴²

5) Typologies are limited. Yoder is scathing of Niebuhr, "One must somehow or other make the claim that the principles of classification one is laying out are 'really there in the nature of things,' and are not merely impressionistic...."⁴³ Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon are equally dismissive, "We believe that few books have been a greater hindrance to an accurate assessment of our situation than *Christ and Culture*."⁴⁴ James M. Gustafson finds these criticisms misplaced, to discuss Aquinas under Christ above culture does not preclude him from also displaying aspects of the transformationist type.⁴⁵ Some scholars want other types: Marsden would make new types with combinations of the original five;⁴⁶ Yoder wants, *The Church Functioning Within Society*⁴⁷. He loses the parallel structure of Niebuhr's titles, but John P. Burgess makes a similar suggestion when he considers the survival of the Christian faith in communist Russia under his new type, *Christ in Culture*.⁴⁸ On the basis of pacifism, Craig A. Carter rejects all of Niebuhr's types in that they seem compatible with actions like "using violent coercion to maintain the position of Christianity within society".⁴⁹

6) Christ implies an ethical life. Niebuhr's Christ seems lacking in ethical teaching or

³⁶ John G. Stackhouse, Jr., *Making the Best of It: Following Christ in the Real World* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 14–17.

³⁷ Jack Schwandt, "Niebuhr's Christ and Culture: A Re-Examination," *Word and World* (September 1, 1990), 368.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 372.

³⁹ John Howard Yoder, "How Richard Niebuhr Reasoned: A Critique of Christ and Culture," in G. H. Stassen, et al., eds., *Authentic Transformation*, 75.

⁴⁰ See: *Ibid.*, 69.

⁴¹ George Marsden, "Christianity and Cultures: Transforming Niebuhr's Categories," *Insights: The Faculty Journal of Austin Seminary* 115:1 (Fall 1999), 6.

⁴² Graham Ward, *Christ and Culture* (Malden, ME and Oxford, U.K.: Blackwell, 2005), 21.

⁴³ Yoder, 46.

⁴⁴ Stanley Hauerwas & William Willimon, *Resident Aliens* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1989), 40.

⁴⁵ James M. Gustafsen, "Preface," in *C & C*, xxix. For a reinforcement of Gustafsen's defense of Niebuhr's use of types see also: Diane M. Yeager, "The View from Somewhere: The Meaning of Method in *Christ and Culture*," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 23:1 (Spring–Summer 2003), 101–120.

⁴⁶ Marsden, 13.

⁴⁷ Yoder, 75.

⁴⁸ John P. Burgess, 55–74.

⁴⁹ Craig A. Carter, *Rethinking Christ and Culture: A Post-Christendom Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2006), 17.

practices. Glen H. Stassen observes: "The farther the book goes, the less specific it gets about the ethics of the New Testament Jesus. . . . Nowhere does the chapter on transformationism indicate Christ's ethics or practices. The result is that readers may be convinced to call themselves transformationists without committing themselves to any specific ethics."⁵⁰ The unity of Christ's body and the church implies that the church embodies Christ's values. It stands as an alternative and transforming community in service to the world. As Metzger says, the church is to be "the now of the not yet".⁵¹

7) Transformation is not necessarily preferable. Hauerwas and Willimon claim that Niebuhr's biases for the transformationist option led him to justify "what was already there—a church that had ceased to ask the right questions as it went about congratulating itself for transforming the world, not noticing, that in fact the world had tamed the church."⁵² Yoder considers Niebuhr's notion of transformation to be "so inadequately defined that it is virtually indistinguishable from the Western understanding of progress"⁵³ and he concludes that Niebuhr had a "low estimate of the power of evil".⁵⁴ Glen H. Stassen disagrees with Yoder,⁵⁵ countering that the point of transformation is that Christians take social responsibility for a church that is "transformationist rather than conformist".⁵⁶ John G. Stackhouse, Jr., makes a strong case to "recover, restate and renew" a priority for Christ in paradox with culture.⁵⁷

Changes in Congregational Attitudes

Changes have also taken place in congregational attitudes in recent decades that work against Niebuhr's types. Mass media, computers and smart phones have transformed how listeners think and perceive things. The New Homiletic was attentive to this in making the needs of listeners a deliberate focus. Effective oral communication increasingly needed to create images and pictures with words, not stay focused in one place too long, employ narrative, and avoid excessive reliance upon propositions. Today's generations are schooled in postmodern thought that challenges the Enlightenment's excessive dependence on reason. Unexamined assumptions are considered dangerous as is blind trust in authority figures. Good reasons need to be offered to support claims. Pulpits may be gradually shifting along with the culture to recognize that in many cases, modernity is the problem, not postmodernity.

A problem with Niebuhr's types is that they all start from the faithful belief that Christ died for all, is raised from the dead and rules over all. For most Christian preachers and church members, this may be a safe starting place. However, many congregations in recent decades have become less biblically informed, or more critical, or more questioning of authority, or more relativist in their perspectives—whatever the cause, people who come to church want good reasons for believing something, reasons not exclusively provided by rational argument. They do

⁵⁰ Glen H. Stassen, "Concrete Christological Norms for Transformation" in Stassen, et al., *Authentic Transformation*, 143.

⁵¹ Metzger, 40.

⁵² Hauerwas and Willimon, 41.

⁵³ Yoder, 53. Another Mennonite, Charles Scriven, claims the Anabaptist tradition is "the best way to embody Niebuhr's vision. . . . The church serves surrounding culture by being an alternative society and a transformative example. In this way it is, under God, an agent of social conversion, midwifing a world whose form is Christ." Charles Scriven, *The Transformation of Culture: Christian Social Ethics after H. Richard Niebuhr* (Scottsdale, PA and Kitchener, ON: Herald, 1988), 192–193.

⁵⁴ Yoder, 89.

⁵⁵ Stassen, 179.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 160.

⁵⁷ John G. Stackhouse, Jr., *Making the Best of It*, esp. 28.

not want faith and assent to be simply assumed. They may be more conscious of the suffering in the world. They are not necessarily unfaithful, they reflect a thoughtful generation critically engaged in various cultures. They need sermons to reflect their own experiences and cultural perspectives, to name reality as it often seems to be. For the preacher merely to assert that Christ reigns, never to speak of doubt or cultural issues that challenge faith, may seem blind or unrealistic. It may also deny aspects of their own experience.

The authentic identity of Christ was not in question in Niebuhr's time to the same degree it is today. Christ tends to be identified with the church in contemporary western cultures and often is known in negative ways. History calls attention to terrible deeds still being done in Christ's name. Global news events speak so loudly of evil and suffering that many people are left doubting that God even exists, much less that Christ is risen. Movies and media programs—including some religious ones—tend to depict Christ and Christians in less than flattering ways. From a preaching perspective, these cultural perceptions of Christ and the church are real and exist in the minds of listeners. They may be accurate in portraying aspects of the church at its worst. Still, from a faith perspective, they do not depict the real Christ. People may reject the true Christ, but the Christ known through culture is frequently not this.

How do Christians speak to cultures that have largely made up their minds against Christ? If one does not speak of these other perceptions of Christ, how can one communicate the true identity of Christ? Perhaps we need a new type, Christ Through Culture, to name these perceptions. They are authentic to the degree that they represent real experiences in the culture at large and they are perceived as accurate and true by those who hold them. They are also representations that do not correspond to what is true as witnessed in the Bible and tradition. True and false in this age can be problematic (according to whose standards?), but we name these Christs as false not as a way of denying the reality of people's experience, but as a way of naming the *fidei regula*, a normative range of perspectives discerned by the church and reflected in its teaching about the Triune God. These false Christs⁵⁸ are not to be proclaimed by preachers in the manner of the risen Christ. Still, from time to time, like an elephant in the sanctuary, they may need to be named or acknowledged. In faith one may affirm that through proclamation and the power of the Holy Spirit, the authentic Christ who is truth is made known. Here are five ways to conceive of the false Christ that listeners may bring to church. Like Niebuhr's types, these five are suggestive not exclusive. They represent of a spectrum of negative possibilities:

Christ Through Culture

This category adds to Niebuhr's original five a sixth that gathers perspectives on Christ that come through the culture, largely as a response to impressions of the church in the world. Here we name a few possibilities, recognizing that false views of Christ are not limited to those outside of the church.

1. Christ as dangerous to culture (The Enemy Christ): This view is enlivened by modern and postmodern critiques of the church. Modernist critiques are still prevalent today, as in Rudolph Bultmann's notion that biblical accounts represent a mythology disproven by scientific worldviews. In some modernist critiques, religion and science are opposed to each other, and science by contrast is understood as fact and certainty. Postmodern critiques challenge the church on several fronts: its historical use of power to dominate and coerce minorities and those who

⁵⁸ What term to use is unclear, since a false Christ is an illusion or an imposter. This is not the "antichrist" who denies Jesus Christ in 1 John 2:22, 4:23 and 2 John 1:17, yet even as Niebuhr links each of his types to New Testament passages, this might be a rough parallel.

disagree with it; its collusion with colonial powers and oppressive regimes in order to further its own gain;⁵⁹ its protection of clergy involved in sexual abuse; and in some cases its contribution to cultural genocide of aboriginal peoples.⁶⁰ For many critics, the church is seen as a real danger to society. In faith, Christ can be dangerous to culture, not because Christ is an enemy to it, but because Christ is an enemy to whatever separates us from God, and the gospel often overturns common human expectations and assumptions.

2. Christ as Commerce (The Harmless Christ): This position regards Christ as harmless, possibly even mildly entertaining. This is the Christ whose cross is a mere ornament or piece of jewelry, whose birth supports Christmas shops, whose Easter supports the chocolate industry, whose hymns convert to professional sports songs (e.g., “Glory, Glory, Man United,” sung by fans of Manchester United soccer club), whose worship space is sought for weddings for reasons of aesthetics or sentiment, and whose clergy are sought to conduct weddings and funerals with the request not to mention God. In this view, the church is a business that exists to serve the customer’s desire, while the minister, pastor or priest is a hired temp to cater to the client’s needs. Christ does not rule over culture, commerce rules over Christ.

3. Christ as a Good Cultural Story (The Imaginary Christ): In this view, Jesus is an historical person, a good teacher of morals. He offers a way of thinking about life that is hopeful and he models what it means to love others. His story is good to live by and enriches culture in the confidence that good wins over bad. Many people who hold this perspective regard his life as just a story. They may believe in God yet be uncertain that much can be said about God’s nature. Christmas and Easter present a God in whom many people would like to believe, but the story is akin to other childhood stories about Santa, the Tooth Fairy, and the Easter Bunny. Story has its own kind of truth like good literature and movies, though not the same kind of truth as science.

4. Christ as Aloof from Culture (The Impassive Christ): From this perspective, Christ is indifferent to the needs of the world or powerless in relation to evil. Prayer in Christ’s name does not seem to work. Disasters strike, tragedies occur, the innocent suffer, wars break out. Christ does not hear, or if he does, he is impassive, unable or unwilling to help. The situation of the broken, the vulnerable and oppressed remains unchanged. For some this may even be a Christ who suffers with those who suffer, who represents an incarnational God, perhaps even be a resurrected God, and who is nonetheless of small comfort now to most people. As a consequence, this Christ seems largely irrelevant and powerless to alter most human situations. If Christ is able to affect change in the here and now, it is only for those whose faith is much larger than a mustard seed.

5. Christ beyond Culture (The Unknowable Christ): This view of Christ regards him essentially as foreign, unknowable or unknown. People are indifferent to this Christ who may exist or not, alongside other gods or other perspectives on God. This Christ offers and demands nothing. No relationship with this Christ is possible or desired. All gods may be the same, and God may be ultimately a mystery. In effect, Christ has no identity apart from what impression people have of him and may be the Christ loosely understood by someone of another faith. Because this Christ is separate from one’s experience, he is beyond culture and makes no difference to it except as a cultural artifact.

⁵⁹ See for instance, Sarah Travis, *Decolonizing Preaching* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2014).

⁶⁰ See, for instance, *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada* (Winnipeg, MB: Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015).

Viewed on line on June 25, 2015 at

<http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/2015/Findings/Exec_Summary_2015_05_31_web_o.pdf>.

The list could go on. Raymond Williams suggested many years ago that whoever describes a culture or context in a sense constructs a world and every world contains new perspectives not least on Christ.⁶¹ All five of these types of false Christ we have named belong under our general category of Christ Through Culture. Of course not just members of the congregation are influenced by false Christs. Preachers participate in many of the same cultures as their people. Even preachers who share Niebuhr's confessional stance might find, in examining past sermons, that they have inadvertently drifted into proclaiming one or more of these false Christs, as though they are authentic. Preachers listen to one another in part with a view to what is said about God. This can be good, not as a way of policing for heresy but of offering supportive critique and holding one another accountable, bringing to attention the inescapable influence of cultures in and around us all.

Perhaps in Niebuhr's age it was safe to assume that people came to church with positive understandings of Christ, and this still may be the case today, but these other ways of thinking are also present and can stand in the way of people effectively hearing, or the preacher proclaiming the gospel. Effective pulpit communication means acknowledging the realities that shape cultural perceptions of the church, whether these are based in lack of knowledge of the Bible or of the Triune God, or in sinful actions committed in Christ's name, or in the ubiquitous nature of sin and evil in the world. In faith, one may affirm nonetheless that preachers may witness, but that Christ alone, through the Spirit, makes known his identity. He rules even over false Christs and the attitudes, situations, or conditions that they represent. Christ names the sin, evil, and brokenness in the world that God opposes and makes disciples to participate in renewing the world in the manner God intends.

⁶¹ See Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society: 1780–1950* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958). One can imagine, for instance, a racist Christ, a misogynist Christ, a sexual abuser Christ, and so on, all as outgrowths of events related to the church though misrepresenting God.

Meister Eckhart and Fred Craddock: Preaching as Mystical Practice

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Abstract: *This article asks how preaching might be understood as something akin to a mystical practice. To consider this, I do a close reading of a sermon by the medieval preacher and mystic Meister Eckhart. I read Eckhart's sermon through the lens of Fred Craddock's homiletic theory. Particularly important for this is Craddock's suggestion that preaching does more than communicate ideas to its audience; rather, it can serve to lead its audience to an experiential awareness of its message. Interpreting Eckhart's sermon in this way provides a sense of how preaching can indeed function as a mystical practice, bringing its listeners to a consciousness of their oneness with God.*

This article originates in an experience I had leading an adult education group at an Episcopal parish during Lent 2014.¹ As part of a weekly series on Christian mysticism, our group spent an evening reading excerpts from and talking about a selection of the sermons of the medieval mystic Meister Eckhart. As the discussion progressed, it became clear that, while the persons gathered appreciated Eckhart's statements about the union of the human soul and God, they also struggled to comprehend the complexity of his ideas. Finally, someone voiced a concern that I assume many there shared. He stated that he considered himself a relatively well-educated person, and if he couldn't understand what Eckhart was saying, how could uneducated laypersons listening to these sermons in the Middle Ages have possibly gotten his meaning? In reply, I suggested that Eckhart was perhaps not so much interested in his audience intellectually comprehending ideas; rather, his concern was that those hearing his sermons come to an experiential awareness of divine-human union. While I believed my response was correct, the evening's discussion left me with questions. Could listening to Eckhart's sermons have functioned as something akin to a mystical practice for his medieval audience, a practice which brought them to consciousness of God? If so, then how might this process of preaching as mystical practice be analyzed and explained?

Meister Eckhart (ca. 1260–1328) was a Dominican preacher, professor of theology, and mystic.² The Dominican Order, which had been founded in the thirteenth century, claimed preaching as its primary charism. Eckhart's works include scholastic scriptural commentaries and sermons written in Latin as well as sermons preached in German. His vernacular sermons, of which there are over one hundred, were preached in communities of the Dominican Order. The audience for these sermons included his fellow Dominicans as well as laypersons from the towns

An early version of this article was presented at the biennial meeting of the Society for the Study of Christian Spirituality, which was held in Johannesburg, South Africa in 2015. I would like to thank my colleague Beringia Zen, who first suggested to me that Fred Craddock's homiletic theory could be used to interpret Meister Eckhart's preaching.

¹ In beginning with this personal anecdote, I am including the "self-implicating character" of Christian spirituality in this article's discussion of its topic. Sandra M. Schneiders, "The Study of Christian Spirituality: Contours and Dynamics of a Discipline," in *Minding the Spirit: The Study of Christian Spirituality*, ed. Elizabeth A. Dreyer and Mark S. Burrows (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 17.

² An overview of Meister Eckhart's life and works can be found in Bernard McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart: The Man from Whom God Hid Nothing* (New York: Crossroad, 2001), 1–19.

surrounding these communities.³ As will be illustrated by the sermon to be considered in this article, Eckhart was known for making provocative statements about the union of the human soul and God. This eventually resulted in twenty-eight articles from his writings being posthumously judged as being either heretical or suspicious of heresy.

My sense that Eckhart's sermons could be related to mystical practice comes in part from what others have noted about his preaching. For example, Bernard McGinn states that "Eckhart believed that mystical consciousness was fundamentally hermeneutical; that is, it is achieved in the act of hearing, interpreting, and preaching the Bible."⁴ As to the nature of this consciousness that Eckhart wants to evoke with his preaching, McGinn describes it this way: "Eckhart is pleading for us to open our eyes to see what has always been the case, that God and the soul are truly one in their deepest ground."⁵ Bruce Milem suggests that an important dimension of this mysticism is the liturgical context in which Eckhart's preaching would have taken place: "Eckhart uses his sermons to show his listeners the true meaning of the event, the mass, taking place then and there. Especially important is the sacrament of the Eucharist, which enacts the union of God and human beings."⁶ In this article, I will build on such claims made by Eckhart scholars to ask specifically how this eliciting of mystical consciousness might have occurred through Eckhart's preaching. In doing this, I will ask how Eckhart produced an awareness in his listeners that helped them recognize their oneness with God.

Fred Craddock's Homiletic Theory as an Interpretive Lens

Meister Eckhart's preaching can be viewed through the lens of homiletic theory, particularly that of the New Homiletic, which rose to prominence in the 1970s and 1980s. As an important point of introduction, it can be noted that proponents of the New Homiletic suggest that the purpose of preaching is to bring the hearer of a sermon to an experiential awareness of its message. In the words of O. Wesley Allen, "Sermonic content is not propositional truth but a true, existential, transformative experience of the good news."⁷ Furthermore, in a sermon, "The language shapes not simply human beliefs (which is the orientation of propositional sermons), but human perception and experience—in a nutshell, human reality."⁸ What can be noted in such statements is a claim for the preached sermon as an invitation to a new consciousness, a new way of experiencing reality. In this regard, the perspective of the New Homiletic resonates with Eckhart's preaching, in that Eckhart was also attempting to engender a new consciousness among those who listened to his sermons.

The contrast of information reception and experiential awareness which is central to the New Homiletic has also been noted in scholarship on Eckhart's preaching. Milem states that Eckhart's sermons are "more than vehicles for ideas. They can also be seen as events, actions, or performances. From this point of view, what Eckhart says is only part of the story. We also have to ask, what is he doing in saying these things? What kinds of effects does he create?"⁹ Such a

³ Ibid., 29.

⁴ Ibid., 24–25.

⁵ Bernard McGinn, introduction to *Meister Eckhart: The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises, and Defense*, ed. Edmund Colledge and Bernard McGinn (New York: Paulist, 1981), 61.

⁶ Bruce Milem, "Meister Eckhart's Vernacular Preaching," in *A Companion to Meister Eckhart*, ed. Jeremiah M. Hackett (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 346.

⁷ O. Wesley Allen Jr., "The Pillars of the New Homiletic," in *The Renewed Homiletic*, ed. O. Wesley Allen Jr. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010), 9.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Milem, "Meister Eckhart's Vernacular Preaching," 346.

claim suggests that considering a sermon's form can be important in analyzing its function as a vehicle for a new consciousness. My method in this article will be to draw upon the description of preaching found in one of the founding voices of the New Homiletic—Fred Craddock—to consider how Eckhart's preaching might have functioned as a mystical practice for his audience. To do this, I will do a close reading of one of Eckhart's vernacular sermons in light of Craddock's homiletic theory.¹⁰ Through this reading, I will attempt to show that Craddock's vision of what makes for effective preaching provides an interpretive lens with which to understand how Eckhart's sermons might have led his audience to consciousness of their oneness with God.

Fred Craddock gives much attention to the movement that occurs in a sermon. He presents an alternative to the traditional deductive sermonic form, in which movement "is from the general truth to the particular application or experience."¹¹ The alternative to this is an inductively structured sermon, in which "thought moves from the particulars of experience that have a familiar ring in the listener's ear to a general truth or conclusion."¹² This emphasis on beginning with the particulars of experience highlights an important dimension of the inductive sermon, the employment of concrete imagery as an inherent part of its message. According to Henry Mitchell, if a sermon is to bring about an experiential awareness in its audience, it must "be expressed in *concrete terms and images*—not in glittering abstractions, but in day-to-day details and dynamics—the sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and textures."¹³ Relating this use of imagery with the change of consciousness that is the goal of preaching, Allen explains that "sermons then take the listeners on a journey from where they exist to a vision and experience of something new. The vehicle that takes them on the journey is imagery."¹⁴ An inductive sermon is thus directed toward an insight, which comes only at the end of the sermon. The entire movement of the sermon is intended to lead the sermon's audience to an experience of that insight. And the way that movement occurs is through imagery that appeals to the particulars of human experience.

A Reading of Meister Eckhart's Sermon 24

Before beginning this reading of Meister Eckhart's sermon, a brief consideration of what McGinn calls the "mysticism of the ground" is important.¹⁵ The Middle High German word *grunt* ("ground") can refer to "what is inmost, hidden, most proper to a being . . . that is, its essence."¹⁶ As used by Eckhart, this term refers to the essence of both the human soul and God.¹⁷ Eckhart's sermons are concerned with communicating to their audience that this ground is the shared unity of the human soul and God. In fact, the ground functions as a metaphor that is "meant to transform, or overturn, ordinary limited forms of consciousness through the process of

¹⁰ In analyzing one sermon to uncover Eckhart's meaning, I am following a suggestion made by Milem regarding interpreting Eckhart's preaching (Ibid.). This approach is also consistent with New Homiletic theory, in which emphasis is on the movement that occurs within a given sermon.

¹¹ Fred B. Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 4th ed. (St. Louis, MO: Chalice, 2001), 45.

¹² Ibid., 47.

¹³ Henry Mitchell, "The Hearer's Experience of the Word," in *Listening to the Word: Studies in Honor of Fred B. Craddock*, ed. Gail R. O'Day and Thomas G. Long (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), 228.

¹⁴ Allen, "Pillars of the New Homiletic," 13.

¹⁵ McGinn, *Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart*, 37.

¹⁶ Ibid., 39.

¹⁷ Ibid., 41.

making the inner meaning of the metaphor one's own in everyday life."¹⁸ Such a transformation of consciousness based on the mysticism of the ground is the goal of Eckhart's preaching.

The sermon of Eckhart that I am considering here—Sermon 24—begins, as do most all Eckhart's vernacular sermons, with a quotation from scripture.¹⁹ Here, that quotation is from Rom 13:14, which in the Vulgate reads "*induimini Dominum Jesum Christum*," ("put on the Lord Jesus Christ"). Eckhart uses the similar sound of the Latin *induimini*, "put on," and the German *intuot*, "put into," to translate this verse as "put Christ into yourself, interiorize him to yourself."²⁰ He then starts his exegesis by saying, "By putting self aside, a person puts inside himself Christ, God, happiness, and holiness."²¹ Eckhart then identifies what he believes to be his audience's perspective as they begin to listen to the sermon: "If a young boy were to tell marvelous tales, one would believe him; but Paul promises great things and you hardly believe him."²² Thus, at the outset of his sermon, Eckhart states that it is hard for those who hear him to believe in the possibility of divine-human oneness. This is important, as the entire movement of Eckhart's sermon will be to have his audience end at a place very different from where they began.

Next in the sermon, Eckhart employs two images to illustrate what it might mean to say that God is put into one's self. In the first, an allusion to Ps 8, he refers to "what God does with the stars, the moon, and the sun," and he relates this to "the soul, that God has done and does such great things with it and for its sake."²³ He continues with a second image to explain what it is that God does: "I form a letter of the alphabet according to a likeness which the letter has in me, in my soul, but not according to my soul." Eckhart contrasts this with the creation of humanity in the image of God:

But the soul [God] made not just according to an image in himself. . . . Rather, he made it according to himself, in short, according to all that he is in his nature, his being, his activity which flows forth yet remains within, and according to the ground where he remains within himself, where he constantly gives birth to his only-begotten Son, from where the Holy Spirit blossoms forth. God created the soul in accordance with this out-flowing, inward-remaining work.²⁴

Eckhart thus uses concrete, tangible images to evoke the dynamic of the interiorizing of God with which he began the sermon. An image of the heavenly bodies leads to a consideration of God's relationship with the soul. A description of writing the alphabet likewise leads to a consideration of the soul's likeness to God's ground. In this employment of imagery at the outset of the sermon, one can see an appeal to the particulars of experience that characterizes inductive movement in preaching.

¹⁸ Ibid., 38.

¹⁹ The title "Sermon 24" is taken from the numbering of the German sermons in the critical edition of Eckhart's works. This is the standard way of referring to Eckhart's vernacular sermons.

²⁰ Meister Eckhart, Sermon 24, in *Meister Eckhart: Teacher and Preacher*, ed. Bernard McGinn (New York: Paulist, 1986), 284. Citations to this sermon are by page number from this edition. For discussion of Eckhart's translation of Rom 13:14, see Frank Tobin, *Meister Eckhart: Thought and Language* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986), 174.

²¹ Eckhart, Sermon 24, 284.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., 284–285.

Furthermore, through the use of imagery such as this, Eckhart is calling upon his audience to envision what he describes and to come to a conclusion regarding its significance for understanding divine-human oneness. In this, Eckhart is asking his audience to become actively engaged in the sermon. This corresponds well with Craddock's belief that "listeners are active participants in preaching," and that "sermons should proceed or move in such a way as to give the listener something to think, feel, decide, and do during the preaching."²⁵ Eckhart's use of imagery in this sermon asks his audience to become actively engaged in his preaching.

Eckhart continues the sermon with a third image. With this, he goes beyond characterizing the soul based on its creation; rather, he suggests an ongoing state of divine-human unity. He begins with this statement: "It is part of the nature of all things that those above constantly flow into those beneath to the extent that the lower things have the capacity for those above."²⁶ Eckhart then makes an analogy to explain his vision of human nature: "Because God is above the soul, he is constantly flowing into the soul and can never slip out of the soul. . . . As long as a person holds himself under God, he is receiving direct divine inflowing, straight from God."²⁷ Having used, as before, a concrete image to illustrate divine-human oneness, Eckhart goes on to explain how this oneness is to be understood. He says that "the soul receives God not as something foreign to it, nor as though it were beneath God. Whatever is under something is different from it and distant. The masters say that the soul receives [from God] as light receives from light, where nothing is foreign or distant."²⁸ It should be noted that with this statement Eckhart presents his hearers with something of a paradox. He began with an image of God above and the soul beneath; he concludes by saying that the soul cannot be beneath God, as they share an inherent oneness. That is, as the sermon progresses, he says something different than what he had said earlier. As Frank Tobin suggests, a paradox such as this functions as Eckhart's invitation to awareness of divine-human union: "Paradox thus takes us to the limits of our knowledge and helps us to define these limits in our search to know ourselves and God. What is beyond these limits is darkness and, paradoxically, a splendor beyond all our capacity to imagine."²⁹

If this paradox is an invitation to further reflection on the soul's relationship to God, it is developed by Eckhart in the next two movements of his sermon. In these, he suggests how the soul that receives from God also shares an identity with that God from whom it receives. He begins this part of the sermon by making reference to "something in the soul," wherein the soul exists in a shared identity with God. Of this, he says, "It is what it is in another and that [other] is in it; for it is what it is in that other and that other is in it. This other flows into it and it into this other, and here, he [Paul] urges: 'Join yourselves to God, to happiness.'"³⁰ Here, Eckhart is using the literary device of chiasmus, the reversing of order in a sequence of terms, to embody his understanding of the soul and God. Of this literary device, Tobin writes that "it is a means of taking differing concepts and, by intertwining them, making them one."³¹ This can be seen in Eckhart's words. Whereas earlier in the sermon he said God flows into the soul, here he says they flow into each other. Thus the words themselves, and the intertwining form they take, serve

²⁵ Fred B. Craddock, *Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1985), 25.

²⁶ Eckhart, Sermon 24, 285.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Tobin, *Meister Eckhart: Thought and Language*, 167.

³⁰ Eckhart, Sermon 24, 285.

³¹ Tobin, *Meister Eckhart: Thought and Language*, 168.

to embody Eckhart's claim of mystical union. The listener of the sermon is made progressively more aware of this union through the movement of the sermon.

The oneness of God and the soul suggested by this chiasmus is articulated explicitly by Eckhart in the following lines of the sermon, when he says that "in the ground of divine being where the three Persons are one being, the soul is one according to the ground. And so, if you wish it, all things are yours and God as well. Therefore, abandon yourself, all things, and everything you are in yourself, and take yourself according to how you are in God."³² This identification with the unity of the trinitarian persons is further claimed by Eckhart in his discussion of the Incarnation:

God assumed human nature and united it with his Person. At this point human nature became God because he took on human nature and not a human being. Therefore, if you want to be this same Christ and God, abandon all of that which the eternal Word did not assume. The eternal Word did not assume *a* man. Therefore, leave whatever is *a* man in you and whatever you are, and take yourself purely according to human nature. Then you are the same in the eternal Word as human nature is in him; for your human nature and his are without difference. It is one, and whatever it is in Christ, that it also is in you.³³

It should be noted that in these last two statements, Eckhart has associated an imperative with his discussion of divine-human unity. He instructs his hearers to abandon themselves and all things, by which he seems to mean abandoning anything that would serve to distinguish them from God who is the ground of their being.

At first glance, imperative statements such as these might suggest that Eckhart's sermon is different from Craddock's vision of an inductive sermon. In fact, one of the hallmarks of inductive preaching is that it is not imperative in tone. Because the sermon begins with the particulars of experience and moves toward general truth, the hearer is led to that truth and does not need to be told what to do. Application is intrinsic to the sermon's structure in and of itself. As Craddock explains, "The inductively moving sermon is more descriptive than hortatory and more marked by the affirmative than the imperative."³⁴

Nonetheless, I would suggest that the exhortations made by Eckhart in this sermon are consistent with what Craddock describes. They are less a specific application of the sermon than a conclusion based upon the particular experiences and truths that Eckhart has articulated through the movement of the sermon. They are not commanding his audience to do anything; rather, they are describing what is, in the hope that this will be recognized by the sermon's hearers. In considering this difference between making statements about what should be done and making statements about what is, Craddock claims that "the strongest of all imperatives is a clear affirmative that has been embraced."³⁵ This is precisely Eckhart's methodology in this sermon. His call for detachment from self and all things arises from his claim for divine-human oneness. Thus, the imperative statements are a conclusion that follows from the affirmative statements Eckhart has preached.

Eckhart moves toward the conclusion of his sermon with a final transition. He has appealed to his listeners to recognize who they are in the ground of their being. He now asks a

³² Eckhart, Sermon 24, 285.

³³ Ibid., 286.

³⁴ Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 49. Cf. Allen, "Pillars of the New Homiletic," 12–13.

³⁵ Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 49.

final question: “When are you as you should be?”³⁶ That is, when does this recognition take place? Eckhart’s answer draws upon Gal 4:4: “In the fullness of time the Son was sent.” In reflecting on the meaning of this verse, Eckhart leads his hearers to the conclusion he has been moving toward throughout his sermon, that of their eternal oneness with God: “There, there is neither before nor after; it is all present there. And in this ever present view I hold all things in my possession. This is ‘fullness of time,’ and thus I am as I should be. And thus I am truly the only Son and Christ.”³⁷ A comparison of the biblical texts that begin and end Eckhart’s sermon is worth noting. The sermon began with an instruction to “put Christ into yourself,” and it ends with a claim that those who hear the sermon “truly” are “the only Son and Christ.” The realization that comes at the end of the sermon represents the fulfillment of the instruction at the sermon’s beginning.³⁸

Having heard Eckhart’s conclusion, we might now ask how it corresponds with the structure of an inductive sermon. For Craddock, the importance of induction in preaching is that it leads the sermon’s hearers to a conclusion. This is not a propositional statement; rather, it is a personally appropriated truth realized as the hearer has participated in the sermon’s movement. As Craddock describes it, “If [the sermon] is done well, one often need not make the applications of the conclusion to the lives of the hearers. If *they* have made the trip, it is *their* conclusion, and the implication for their own situations is not only clear but personally inescapable.”³⁹ Even more directly, Craddock says, “The listener completes the sermon.”⁴⁰ What Craddock describes in these statements resembles quite closely what Eckhart does in this sermon. He begins with a biblical text, and uses a series of concrete images to explicate that text. These are directed toward an inescapable conclusion—consciousness of the soul’s union with God. The sermon begins with the statement that it is hard to believe in this. It ends in the hope that this union, Christ inside the self, has been recognized. It is an inductive movement toward an experience of this on the part of the hearers of the sermon.

Eckhart ends his sermon with a brief prayer. As we have seen, he has evoked awareness of the soul’s oneness with God with the phrase “in the fullness of time.” He now ends with this petition: “That we come to this ‘fullness of time,’ may God help us. Amen.”⁴¹ Here again is paradox. Eckhart has preached a sermon directing his hearers to an awareness of divine-human unity, the reality of the shared ground of God and the human soul. Thus, the “fullness of time” already exists, and yet at the end of the sermon Eckhart prays that it may arrive. Such a paradox suggests the entire point of Eckhart’s preaching—to make his hearers existentially aware of a truth of which they are unaware. Eckhart prays for his hearers to realize what is, their union with God. The sermon that has been considered here is an attempt to move them toward that realization.

³⁶ Eckhart, Sermon 24, 286.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ In considering Eckhart’s sermon, it can be noted that there is a similarity with one of Craddock’s suggestions as to how to end a sermon, this being to return to the biblical text with which the sermon started. While Eckhart does not literally use the same biblical text at the beginning and end of Sermon 24, there is a connection between the two texts which lends itself to the movement of the sermon. Fred B. Craddock, *Craddock on the Craft of Preaching*, ed. Lee Sparks and Kathryn Hayes Sparks (St. Louis, MO: Chalice, 2011), 159.

³⁹ Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 48–49.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 53.

⁴¹ Eckhart, Sermon 24, 286.

A Shared Ground and the Shock of Recognition

According to Fred Craddock, an inductively structured sermon works because of shared understandings and experiences that exist between the preacher and the sermon's audience. As he explains, "Because the particulars of life provide the place of beginning, there is the necessity of a ground of shared experience. . . . These common experiences, provided they are meaningful in nature and are reflected on with insight and judgment, are for the inductive method essential to the preaching experience."⁴² This notion of shared experience as the foundation of preaching has been critiqued by some homiletic theorists because it assumes a certain homogeneity on the part of the preacher and members of the congregation. For example, John McClure claims that "appeals to common human experience . . . fail to pay true attention to the real experiences of the many people, with their own partial and contradictory stories/lives."⁴³ As for the practical implications of this critique, McClure says that "preachers cannot help but realize that on Sunday mornings they are not simply preaching from, to, or within a framework of common human experience or common ecclesial vision. . . . Instead, they are in a situation of diverse worldly and ecclesial experiences."⁴⁴

Meister Eckhart also assumes the existence of a shared ground, and this informs the construction of his sermons. However, Eckhart's understanding of this is different from Craddock's. As such, it provides for a possible constructive revisioning of Craddock's homiletic theory. Craddock argues for the existence of a shared ground based upon common human experience. What Eckhart has in mind is the shared ground of divine-human unity. In the words of Eckhart's Sermon 5b, "Here God's ground is my ground, and my ground is God's ground."⁴⁵ Using a different metaphor, in the words of Sermon 12, "The eye in which I see God is the same eye in which God sees me."⁴⁶ Of course, Eckhart is not only talking about his ground or his eye; he is describing a divine-human unity that is true for all persons. That is, Eckhart assumes there is a basic commonality to both himself and those who hear his preaching. He is speaking from his awareness of union with God, and asking his audience to join him in that awareness. In McGinn's words, "Eckhart invites his audience to hear what he has heard and to become one with him in the one ground."⁴⁷ While Craddock's inductive preacher makes use of a common experience he shares with his hearers, Eckhart calls upon a common existential reality, the one ground, and he asks his congregants to become conscious of this.

A final element to consider in Craddock's vision of preaching involves two interrelated moments, what he calls the "nod of recognition" and the "shock of recognition." The nod of recognition refers to aspects in a sermon with which the audience can readily identify: "Effective preaching generates a nod of recognition, which is a feeling of familiarity, a sense of being at home. In the message I recognize the message as my message, what I have owned as a Christian

⁴² Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 49.

⁴³ John S. McClure, *Other-Wise Preaching: A Postmodern Ethic for Homiletics* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice, 2001), 49. In response to this critique, Craddock maintains that shared experience is foundational to inductive preaching: "I will continue to trust that even in the multicultural context, beneath the surface people are more alike than they are different and will resonate to the truth that both of you share beneath the surface." Fred B. Craddock, "Inductive Preaching Renewed," in *The Renewed Homiletic*, 54.

⁴⁴ McClure, *Other-Wise Preaching*, 57.

⁴⁵ Meister Eckhart, Sermon 5b, in *Meister Eckhart: The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises, and Defense*, 183.

⁴⁶ Meister Eckhart, Sermon 12, in *Meister Eckhart: Teacher and Preacher*, 270.

⁴⁷ McGinn, *Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart*, 30.

from my Bible, in my church.”⁴⁸ The shock of recognition refers to the moment when a sermon causes the audience to move toward what is unfamiliar, what causes them to perceive reality in a new way. In Craddock’s words, “Effective preaching carries in it and generates in the listener a shock of recognition. We all wish to create the shock in preaching, for people to be startled and see something afresh and anew.”⁴⁹

For Craddock, the key element of these contrasting dimensions of the sermon is that the shock must be generated out of the nod; that is, what is unfamiliar must arise from what is familiar. As he describes it, “The shock should come at the point of recognition. . . . In that very moment in which I nodded over the place in your sermon and said, ‘There I am. I recognize myself.’ There’s the point of the shock. ‘Is that really me?’”⁵⁰ This complementary dynamic between what is comfortable and what challenges the listener to new perception is precisely what Eckhart employs in his preaching. His sermon begins with a source familiar to his audience, the biblical text. What Eckhart does with this text, however, is reflect upon it inductively, leading his listeners to a conclusion of divine-human union as the ground of their being. With this conclusion comes an understanding of oneself anew through a reconsideration of that which is already known. It is, in Craddock’s words, a “shock of recognition.”

In discussing the importance of sermonic form, Fred Craddock claims that “*how* one preaches is to a large extent *what* one preaches.”⁵¹ This article has been an attempt to use this claim to consider how Meister Eckhart’s preaching functions. While this certainly involves the content of Eckhart’s sermons, I have emphasized the form of those sermons, and used Craddock’s homiletic theory to discuss how that form might have mediated mystical consciousness to those who heard Eckhart preach. This suggests that preaching can indeed function as a mystical practice, shocking its listeners into a recognition of who they really are, bringing them to consciousness of their oneness with God.

⁴⁸ Craddock, *Craddock on the Craft of Preaching*, 127.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 128.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 131.

⁵¹ Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 44.

David A. Croteau. *Urban Legends of the New Testament: 40 Common Misconceptions*. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2015. 272 pages. \$14.

Challenging common assumptions or oft-told legends is not an easy task. It is made even more difficult within conservative traditions, but this is what David A. Croteau has done in this book. His use of original language study, place history, and other biblical materials is impressive within his context. For conservative pastors, this book is a helpful tool in challenging some traditional understandings in order to get to larger meaning, or closer to the original meanings of the bible. His chapter structure is helpful in setting out the “urban legend” as commonly understood and then offering a challenge to it using knowledge of the original Greek, archeology, background and historical context. He concludes each chapter with what he interprets the main point of the passage to be. Few pastors should get lost in the challenge sections and find themselves with their faith in tatters at the end.

He is most convincing when he uses language analysis and historical context as his critical tools. However, coming at the “urban legends” from a literal view of the Bible, David is limited in both the materials and approaches he can use. His arguments sometimes suffer from his necessity to show agreement among the gospels, or explain the differences between them. For pastors who do not take the bible as literally as David, his efforts in making the accounts agree are superfluous. His biblical scholarship suffers from this limitation. For example, in Chapter 8, as he discusses John 3:16, he glosses over the accuracy of the “red letters” and says that he is only going to address whether or not Jesus said the words of John 3:16. He concludes that he did not, and that this matters because if Jesus said the words of John 3:16, then perhaps his suffering and death was not necessary. The meaning of the word “gave” changes depending on who speaks it. David argues that since it was, in his opinion, necessary for Jesus to die on the cross to save us, the words of John 3:16 were not spoken by Jesus. This is an example of the dilemma faced by the literal perspective of the author in his critical efforts on biblical texts.

Readers are presented throughout this book with arguments that challenge some of the assumptions of what we have been taught. For example, in Chapter 3 he challenges the assumptions that the shepherds who heard the news of Jesus birth on the hills outside Bethlehem were social outcasts. In Chapter 4 he discusses the words used to describe Jesus as carpenter/master craftsman and other available words used elsewhere in the Bible. His argument and evidence are compelling and his contribution to our understanding of Jesus is worth the read through much of the book.

After examining the forty urban legends in the book, David concludes that many of the legends are a result of lack of knowledge about the context in which the scriptures are set. He does suggest that the challenges of the original language and knowing the background of each story are additional factors, but these factors are of much less importance than the lack of knowledge about the context.

David distinguishes between mistaken legends, which are simply incorrect, and misleading legends, in which only partial information is given. An example of the second: Jesus was a builder, not simply a carpenter. His purpose in providing more precise information about the bible stories is so we better understand God’s word and can better apply it to our lives: “In the end our goal should be to interpret Scripture as accurately as possible, to apply that interpretation to our own lives, and to be transformed by God’s Word so that our lives may bring glory to the One who rescued us from an eternal destiny in Hell” (241).

It is disappointing that David neglected to challenge one of the dominant urban legends of the New Testament: that Mary Magdalene was a prostitute. Fortunately, other biblical scholars have done so, but it would have been helpful for a conservative scholar to have done the same.

As a book for conservative Christians who want to learn more about the Bible, this book achieves its goal. Most readers will learn new things about the times in which Jesus and the early disciples lived. They may gain more understanding of the context of the stories of the bible and better understand the background of those stories.

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Peter Jonker. *Preaching in Pictures: Using Images for Sermons That Connect*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2015. 150 pages. \$15.

Preaching in Pictures by Peter Jonker is the third volume of The Artistry of Preaching Series, edited by Paul Scott Wilson. As Wilson commends, Jonker proposes a creative way to add affective spark and theological imagination to preaching “by effective use of a dominant or controlling image” (x). Jonker unabashedly admits that he began his research on this topic because of his discontent with conventional homiletics’ largely rationalistic and reductionistic approach to sermon preparation and composition. Agreeing with Wilson, he feels a strong urgency to (re)discover the artistic or holistic-aesthetic dimension of preaching practice, namely image-driven rhetoric, for the audiovisual hearers in the pews today.

He specifically argues that along with the two conventional driving forces of the sermon—focus (theme) and function (goal), including a controlling image should become the third force in both sermon preparation and composition. He defines “a controlling image” as “an evocative picture or scene that shows up repeatedly in a sermon and communicates either the trouble or the grace of the sermon theme, thereby helping to accomplish the sermon’s goal” (4). Accordingly, the controlling image is not a simple illustration for the sermon, but a key literary foundation of the sermon or even the implicit or explicit conveyer of the sermon’s message itself. This artistic controlling image of the sermon will greatly enhance the logos, ethos, and pathos of any given sermon, and especially its pathos, Jonker promises.

Overall, Jonker’s argument is innovative and easily applied by any aspiring preacher. Yet his approach is not really new, as he admits. Already, many exemplar preachers have used controlling images in their sermons even though they might not have known or applied Jonker’s specific methodology. In Chapter Two, Jonker first provides fine case examples in order to help the reader understand his approach, and then gives practical tips on where and how preachers can find the controlling image for the sermon. Chapters Three and Four in particular help preachers learn from poets, marketers, and visual artists the basics of formulating the controlling image that can aesthetically magnify the targeted sermon message.

I have a quibble regarding the mention of “hard chair” and “soft chair” in the introductory chapter. Borrowing Fred Craddock’s terminology, Jonker designates the historical-critical exegetical process as the first “hard chair” task of sermon preparation and artistic concerns of preaching activity as the “soft chair.” In so doing, the author seems to suggest that the first task is more academic, disciplined, and critical, thus “harder,” than the second. The “soft chair” is presented as something “secondary” that follows the first, and not vice versa. Yet, most artists and artistic preachers would agree that creating artistic work can be as painful, intellectual, critical, disciplined, and thus “hard” as any academic work. Is it possible that we can reverse the first and the second tasks in our exegetical and sermon composition process? Or how about inventing a combination of the two, something like a creative-aesthetical exegesis, rather than doing first one, then the other? These follow-up inquiries deserve further consideration from serious readers interested in the artistry of preaching.

The last chapter will surely draw the critical attention of preachers who are accustomed to presenting their sermon using screen technology in some way. Here the author goes beyond only verbalizing the controlling image throughout the sermon, and discusses how to show it effectively to the audience as an integral part of the sermon. This discussion is important because in the sometimes reckless pursuit of novelty, many churches for the past decades have installed screens on their church’s walls without properly pondering a “theology of the screen.” How

might the screen image deepen or alter the conception of incarnation? What spiritual difference do we see between the preacher's real-time sermon voice and the virtual sound/sight from the screen? Is the screen image compatible with the religious icon (by the Orthodox Church)? Jonker propels us toward sound theological reasoning over these and more issues.

In the challenging time when interdisciplinary and theopoetical interests are increasing in homiletics and preaching practice, this sort of book is extremely welcome. Jonker's expert knowledge of and sophisticated dealing with poetry and the visual arts add much value to this volume. Any preaching instructor wanting to include a theopoetic aspect of preaching in the classroom will not regret introducing students to Jonker's idea.

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Cleophus J. LaRue. *Rethinking Celebration: From Rhetoric to Praise in African American Preaching*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2016. 120 pages. \$20.

In *Rethinking Celebration*, Cleophus LaRue critiques the celebration homiletic, as it has developed in the works of Henry Mitchell and Frank Thomas, through a theological lens, providing a sketch of an alternative homiletic of “worshipful praise” (32). The overall result is intended to be, “a clarion call for African American preachers to think more deeply about the aims and ends of their preaching—namely to stop putting so much emphasis on celebratory endings to sermons and focus more on the substantive content *in* our sermons” (ix).

Chapters 1, 2, and 3 of *Rethinking Celebration* are respectively focused on locating, reviewing, and critiquing the celebration homiletic. LaRue’s primary critique is that in theory and practice the celebration homiletic has not been theologically grounded in doxology. In light of this, he suggests that the function of the celebration homiletic has been that of “evocative rhetoric,” which has emphasized the goal of the emotional engagement of the congregation at the expense of the means whereby that emotion should ideally be produced (19).

Building upon this critique, in Chapter 4 LaRue engages sources from a variety of fields including philosophy and sociology to argue that the celebration homiletic is more accurately understood as a joyful cultural festivity than as a religious celebration encompassing “worshipful praise” (32). He argues that in Mitchell and Thomas’s homiletic, the most important dimension of celebration has been its function as a pedagogical tool. Instead, LaRue argues that celebration should be doxology through which the Holy Spirit empowers the listeners to remember the sermon and to take action based upon it. Chapter 5 focuses on nuancing celebration as “worshipful praise” so as to diversify the understanding of the ways that celebration could be manifested at the closing of a sermon.

LaRue engages sources from theology, philosophy, liturgical and sacramental studies, sociology, and ritual theory. His work in Chapter 4 in analyzing concepts of “festival” and “celebration” and interpreting them within the black homiletical context has the potential to be valuable material for those engaging similar concepts in a field other than homiletics. Chapter 5 engages numerous voices from mainstream liturgical and sacramental studies, and LaRue’s doxological framing of preaching provides numerous potential intersections with liturgical study.

While this book primarily speaks to challenges that exist in black preaching and black homiletical theory, it is a significant contribution to an ongoing discourse between leading black homiletical scholars. As such, it is an essential read both for those whose work or practice engages black preaching in any way and for those who desire to be familiar with the current state of homiletical discourse. Furthermore, in this work LaRue casts a doxological vision of preaching that has value for all preachers regardless of ethnicity. Even for those who do not practice or teach a celebrative homiletic, this work has the potential to expand understandings of the potential of preaching to engage the people of God in worshipful praise.

This is both a brief book and written in an accessible manner, which render it possible to quickly and efficiently read. While the total page count is 120 pages, without the Appendix and Bibliography, the work comes in at 72 pages.

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Dorothy C. Bass, Kathleen A. Cahalan, Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, James R. Nieman, and Christian B. Scharen. *Christian Practical Wisdom: What It Is, Why It Matters*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2016. 368 pages. \$20.

What happens when you bring together five experts in the fields of religion, education, theology, applied research, and seminary administration and ask them to make the case for prioritizing the unnoticed practical wisdom that resides at the core of the Christian life? The result is this volume of essays that privilege the kind of embodied, emotional, relational and spiritual knowledge that is typically overlooked, ignored, and dismissed in favor of disembodied theoretical knowledge. This is a volume that should be on the shelf of every seminary professor, regardless of their field of expertise because within this book is the kind of scholarship that can rejuvenate one's teaching, mentoring and ministry in profound and refreshing ways.

The first part of the book is a series of five essays by each author that gives a vivid example of the kind of Christian practical wisdom they have either experienced or seen at work in churches, in popular culture, in the natural world, in classrooms, families, and in their own lives. Thus we are shown *what* practical wisdom is before being given the *why*, which they do in the second half of the book. Part Two, with five follow-up essays by each author, provides the intellectual history and academic support for lifting up *phronesis/prudentia* as a crucial aspect of educational and religious life in North America.

Readers familiar with feminist thought may be tempted to chalk this book up to the ongoing project of deconstructing traditional male-oriented rationalistic knowledge in favor of a move toward an embodied, experiential epistemology. While this is an implicit undercurrent of the book, the authors are more interested in aiming to “understand better the nature of practical knowledge in order to enrich knowledge as a whole and not to disparage unjustifiably or rule out completely certain kinds of knowledge” (228). In fact, each author displays their formidable academic “chops” in Part Two which provides theoretical, historical, philosophical, and theological support for the kind of relational knowing that is at the heart of Christian practical wisdom. This book may do for the field of the Christian practical arts what Carol Gilligan's *In A Different Voice* did for a feminist ethic of care in psychological theory and ethics, in that it legitimates and enhances a heretofore underestimated, underexplored, and underserved area of theology and Christian academic study. Their goal is to “generate creative ideas for teaching and learning” that articulate, value and refine Christian practical wisdom (17).

From a homiletical perspective, while this book does not include a chapter on preaching (which would have been a wonderful addition), the insights of the authors are profound and generative for those who proclaim the Word. First, the model of leading with story to help people *experience* wisdom is instructive. “Don't just tell—show,” is the mantra often repeated for new preaching students. This book demonstrates the power of story to convey the deep truths of our faith in ways that engage, give pause and delight.

Second, the exquisite writing by each author models for preachers the kind of vigorous language needed in sermons in order to make the Word of God come alive. Each chapter in Part One of the book ushers the reader into the author's world with finely-crafted prose that quickens the imagination and sparks the curiosity to know more. Whether it is describing the “spooning” love of bodies cradled by divine love (Miller-McLemore), the visceral journey into the soul of a teacher (Cahalan), the healing power of God's Creation on a star-strewn mountaintop (Bass), the sloping floor in the parish hall of an old Lutheran Church (Nieman), or the hard-scrabble rock-n-roll music heard in the pews of Nashville's Ryman Auditorium (Scharen), the first half of the

book trusts the instinctive ability of the reader to “get” what Christian wisdom is before trying to explain and analyze it in an academic way.

But on a more fundamental level, this book invites preachers to think about the wisdom within our own bodies, our experiences, and those of our communities. And not just preachers – any person charged with teaching or embodying the way of Christianity for others will find the double treasures of both deductive and inductive approaches to Christian practical wisdom. From a liturgical perspective, for example, I was grateful for Miller-McLemore’s reminder that “our theology partly resides in body memories” (27) as I help seminary students apprentice themselves to the holy mysteries of the sacraments and rituals of the church.

I would also recommend this book for pastor study groups. Each chapter in Part One provides fertile soil for productive conversation about the heart and soul of ministry. And for those desiring the support of thoroughly documented research, the discursive chapters in Part Two do not disappoint. As evidenced by their intentionally collaborative work on this project, this book demonstrates what is possible when the head and heart (and entire body) are brought into conversation to show us the best of what Christian practical wisdom has to offer.

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Dave Bland. *Proverbs and the Formation of Character*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2015. 202 pages. \$25.

Twenty years ago or more I sat down next to Dave Bland on a shuttle bus at an Academy of Homiletics meeting. As we began talking we discovered a mutual interest in Proverbs. Through the years I have followed Professor Bland's work and used his helpful book reviews, articles and commentaries in my own research and teaching. His excellent 2002 volume in the College Press NIV Old Testament Commentary Series: *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs* is always on my required reading list in courses on preaching biblical wisdom literature.

It is no surprise, then, that I was delighted to learn of the publication of *Proverbs and the Formation of Character*. From the beautiful dedication of the book to his and his wife Nancy's six grandchildren to the eloquent conclusion on the closing pages, this book is one to buy, read, re read and cherish.

Bland's stated goal is to bring together the best scholarship from the fields of character formation and biblical wisdom. And the book lives up to this ambition. It combines insights from the fields of proverbs study, the psychology of character formation, studies of the dynamics of faith formation, and theological and biblical studies of Proverbs.

Bland traces the shifts in our cultural perspectives on character, what he calls a move from a moral to a therapeutic culture, as we have moved from emphasizing virtue to stressing personal values, from community-focused identity to each person as the center of their own world, from character to personality.

Bland perceives Proverbs to be a biblical antidote to this cultural trend. "The aphoristic sayings of Proverbs...are an enduring challenge to a therapeutic mindset that is primarily concerned with making us feel good rather than equipping us to be good" (2). They are a challenge to the notion that wealth is the mark of success, since the sages viewed character as what determines success or failure (xiv).

In Chapter One: The Journey of Character Formation, Bland describes wisdom as a lifelong journey grounded in God and inextricably related to the lives of others. He dispels the trivialization of proverbial wisdom in the now famous quip by Will Willimon that reading Proverbs is "like being trapped on a long road trip with your mother" (8). Bland is out to recover the rhetorical power and theological insights of these chapters, "to usher the sentence literature back into the mainstream of discussion and to showing their vitality as a resource in the process of character education" (8).

Chapter Two: The Process of Character Formation, examines the tools the sages used to instill wisdom in listeners/readers. They include verbal instruction, negative and positive reinforcement, observation of life experiences, role playing and the art of discernment. These tools are explored in more detail in chapters four through six.

Chapter Three: The Content of Character Formation, compares and contrasts biblical sentence wisdom with cultural alternative. Bland brings the insights of psychological study of character formation into the conversation, comparing and contrasting them with biblical wisdom. It becomes clear that the sages were not content, as we often are, to help people clarify their values, leaving the content up the individual. They were out to teach core values that shape the young that contribute to the integrity and stability of the faith community. Those values can only be instilled in a theological, communal context.

Chapter Four: The Proverb in Character Formation, brings insights from rhetorical studies and paremiology (the study of proverbs) to bear to unleash the unique character-forming

power of the seemingly innocent proverb, a tool of character formation found across centuries and cultures.

Chapter Five: Character Formation Through Human Dialogue, brings alive the strategy of dialogue in the sages' pedagogy, since, as Bland points out, "Character is formed in conversation" (10).

Chapter Six, and Chapter Seven explore the sages' wisdom with regard to two crucial areas: the use of language and the use of wealth. Chapter Six: Language and Character Formation, explores the theme of the use and abuse of language. Chapter Seven: Wealth and Character Formation, examines the theme of material possessions and poverty. In both chapters Bland makes the profound point that the way we handle gifts from God, language and wealth, not only forms character but also exposes character.

Chapter Eight: Yahweh and Character Formation, focuses on the character of God in Proverbs. God's presence for the sages is neither sporadic nor dramatic, but constant and daily, a persuasive presence behind the scenes in the experiences of daily living.

Chapter Nine: Community and Character Formation, focuses our attention on an aspect of wisdom contemporary culture often neglects: community. The whole community is responsible to mold individuals into responsible members of God's kingdom.

The clarity and depth of Bland's treatment of proverbial wisdom make this a versatile volume. Study groups in churches would find it accessible and practical. Biblical scholars will find it a welcome addition to their bibliographies. Homiletics scholars and professors will want to add it to their reading lists. Preachers will find it valuable in sermon preparation. While I am a big fan of lectionary preaching, I would be pleased to see some lectionary preachers go "off roading" now and then and invite their people to spend some time with the sages of Proverbs as Bland brings their wisdom to life in this important work. It will be time well spent!

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Sally A. Brown and Luke A. Powery. *Ways of the Word: Learning to Preach for Your Time and Place*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016. 265 pages. \$28.

Sally Brown and Luke Powery team up to produce a valuable resource to assist preachers, both the inexperienced and the experienced, in the process of strengthening their ability to preach. Their philosophy for helping preachers is not to teach them to preach but to accompany them on a journey of learning by doing. They want preachers to engage in a healthy “critical reflection” on their preaching which involves thinking more deeply about their preaching practices. Therefore, they take a more personalized approach to the learning process that enables preachers to identify those areas that need improvement and expand on their strengths. Not advocating a one-size-fits-all approach allows preachers to explore avenues of preaching that best fit their skill sets. This whole process, they maintain, is best learned in a group environment (xiii).

The authors also embrace the reality of the cultural and theological diversity of our time. They believe the diversity in theological education is a blessing rather than a burden (xv). As a preaching and teaching team they model this diversity. While representing different genders, diverse religious traditions, and different races, they both are united in the commitment to preaching and to the training of preachers.

The authors team up to write the first chapter. The following chapters are single authored. Brown writes five of them and Powery four. Unlike some co-authored books that display fragmentation from one chapter to the next, this one does not. The writing style is even throughout and each chapter builds on the previous one. Even though the chapters are single authored, the authors still interact with one another in each chapter by including blocked out comments made by the other. The end of each chapter contains two helpful resources. One resource identifies further learning strategies related to the topic of that particular chapter and the other provides a brief bibliography that offers key sources for further reading.

The book approaches preaching holistically. Preaching is embedded in its larger theological and rhetorical context. Thus the opening chapters begin with the Spirit-driven context of preaching, the importance of prayer, and the centrality of worship in the task of preaching. These theological issues occupy the first four chapters.

It is not until Chapters Five through Eight that the authors deal with the more traditional tasks and skills of preaching. Chapters Five and Six focus on the task of interpretation. They first explore the interpretive process from a broader worldview. They rely on the philosophies of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur as they speak of the back-and-forth play involved in the interpretive process between the preacher, the culture, and the congregation. Then the authors hone in more specifically on the task of interpreting Scripture and laying out the process of exegesis.

Chapter Seven provides an overview of the form of the sermon. Two general forms are described: inductive and deductive. True to their teaching philosophy, they advocate versatility. To decide whether to use a deductive or inductive form, several pertinent questions are asked. For example, what do you want the sermon to accomplish? What is the congregation used to? Does the biblical text suggest a particular form? Examples are given of how preaching a text deductively and inductively might look. Again what is refreshing is their openness to all forms for the sake of discovering what best fits the sermon, the preacher, and the congregation. Even though expository preaching is not the preferred form, they do not demean it. They do, however, acknowledge that a pitfall of many preachers is their tendency to explain too much (163). Thus

the authors encourage developing sermons around scenes rather than points which enable listeners to better experience the message (160–164).

Chapter Eight is devoted to the delivery of the sermon. Before dealing with specific delivery skills, they look at it in its theological context and explore the importance of the physical body. They affirm that, “The homiletical body *is* a sermonic text” (188). As they do throughout the book, the authors provide a deeper perspective on certain skills that are too often treated only on a surface level.

Chapter Nine addresses the challenges and opportunities of preaching and technology. The chapter identifies the limitations and the strengths of using technology. While acknowledging the strengths, the chapter leans more toward the limitations of using technology in the sermon. Chapter Ten concludes the book by exploring how preaching transforms listeners into living faithfully in the world. Several practical strategies are offered to help preachers assist congregants in living out their faith in the daily affairs of life. This is a valuable book for both preachers and teachers of preaching.

Dave Bland, Harding School of Theology, Memphis, TN

Jon Meyer Ericson. *The Rhetoric of the Pulpit: A Preacher's Guide to Effective Sermons*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2016. 120 pages. \$19.

The author of *The Rhetoric of the Pulpit* may not be familiar to homileticians, but his command of the classical rhetoric tradition for contemporary public discourse is clearly on display in this book for preachers. Ericson is dean emeritus of the College of Liberal arts at Cal Poly in San Louis, Obispo and a professor of communication who spent years teaching rhetoric and public address at Stanford, Central Washington, and Pacific Lutheran universities. In retirement he serves as the director of adult education in an ELCA congregation and writes from his informed perspective in the pew to help those in the pulpit.

The Introduction invites clergy who aspire to be effective communicators in the pulpit to discover how the rich resources of the classical tradition applied to their efforts in “sermon building” can be their solution. The remainder of the book explores these resources in four chapters organized by the five canons of classical rhetoric: Invention, Arrangement, Style, Memory, and Delivery. This is followed by a series of appendices; ten sample sermon excerpts from Lutheran, Anglican, Episcopal clergy and a Jewish rabbi with helpful introductions as to how each serve as an exemplar of a resource for preachers. Three other brief appendices provide possible resources for pastoral ministry. A bibliography and an index are included. In the final paragraph of the study itself, Erickson restates his aim in writing the book: “to apply rhetorical principles ranging from Aristotle and Augustine to Kenneth Burke and I. A. Richards to the task of sermon building . . . as a helpful guide and companion” for a preacher’s “journey” (71).

In the chapter on Invention, Ericson helps preachers imagine how to come up with what to say about the theological concern of a sermon. He succinctly introduces Aristotle’s three kinds of proofs (pathos, ethos, and logos), expanding logical proofs with appropriate types of arguments (e.g., sign, example, analogy, and cause). He offers twelve suggestions for keeping the sermon’s argument interesting and provides further classical resources to vary the way this can be accomplished. In the chapter on Arrangement, Ericson offers the standard public speaking array of logical (topical), chronological, spatial arrangement strategies, and adds Monroe’s Motivated Sequence as a fourth alternative. Surprisingly, in a book clearly written by a Lutheran layperson, there is no reference to the classic Lutheran sermon pattern of law-grace (public speaking’s problem-solution design). The chapter on Style focuses on how correctness, clarity, appropriateness, and distinctiveness are rhetorical resources that can help preachers negotiate the symbolic nature of language, the creation of identification, and conceptualize the question of meaning. The fourth and final chapter raises the topics of Delivery and Memory. Memorization, he argues, is best used for a poignant moment in preaching. Otherwise, its role is more one of memory since Ericson is a strong advocate that sermons should be preached extemporaneously from well-organized outlines rather than full manuscripts. Classic public speaking concerns for voice, breathing, articulation, pronunciation, pause and rate, eye contact, as well as gesture and movement are all briefly treated.

Since this book arrays the classical resources of public speaking for preachers, I will use the same “strengths” and “stretches” that speech teachers use with students in responding to what is offered here. The strengths of this book are its clarity, brevity, and uncomplicated overview of the resources of the classical rhetorical and contemporary public address traditions applied to the pulpit. For teachers looking for an inexpensive resource for classroom use that introduces these resources and for clergy looking for help in understanding rhetorical resources that can aid in communicating what they have to say, this volume provides helpful aid. The stretches of this

book are that the author provides a rhetoric of preaching that views the homily or sermon merely as a particular kind of public speaking that aspires to be effective (see the subtitle). He appears largely unaware of contemporary homiletic discussion concerning the role of rhetoric, the turn to the listener that has occurred and been challenged in contemporary homiletics, and even the concern with distinguishing being effective from being faithful. Though he mentions the Academy of Homiletics once, the only contemporary homileticians he appears to engage at any length are Joseph Sitler (1986), Donald MacLeod (1993), Craig Loscalzo (1992), and Barbara Brown Taylor (2009)—and even these are cited more as examples of an idea rather than engagement with the idea.

Though this is far from the “exciting new approach” the venerable James J. Murphy would have us believe on the book blurb, *The Rhetoric of the Pulpit* is a contribution to the venerable genre down through the ages of “a rhetoric of preaching.”

Robert Stephen Reid, Academy of Homiletics Rhetoric Working Group Convener, 2000–2016

James Wm. McClendon, Jr., eds. Ryan Andrew Newson and Andrews C. Wright. *The Collected Works of James Wm. McClendon, Jr.*, vol. 3. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016. 281 pages. \$60.

This is the third volume in a set of three that collects works by Neo-Anabaptists' most important systematic thinker. But this volume consists of *sermons*. Here is a theologian who writes *about* preaching and exemplifies it himself as one who also pastors a congregation.

James Wm. McClendon, Jr., grew up a Baptist. After a transformative experience in 1975 with John Yoder's *The Politics of Jesus*, he spent the remainder of his scholarly life interpreting the Gospel for heirs of the Radical Reformation, not just Baptists proper but also Brethren, Mennonites, Adventists, and others in Christianity's "third steam" (neither Catholic nor Protestant). Now there is growing consensus that his systematic theology—separate volumes on *Ethics, Doctrine, and Witness*—constitutes a theological landmark for the Radical Reformation point of view.

McClendon died in 2000, but not before taking an interim pastorate with a Church of the Brethren congregation in Pasadena, CA near Fuller Theological Seminary where he was Distinguished Scholar in Residence during his final ten years. Many of the sermons in this collection come from that period, and exemplify precisely from the pastoral setting the *practical* perspective that characterized his theology. As God's grace changes lives and church doctrine serves discipleship, so preaching, McClendon believed, helps the church to *be* the story it proclaims. When properly "prophetic," it trains a congregation's members to see their lives and context in gospel light, and to feel themselves directly addressed by the risen Christ. As with Bonhoeffer in 1930s Germany, priority must go to the story told in Scripture, not to the fashions of the present age. All the while Christ must shine forth not only through the preacher's words and skills, but also (and most importantly) through what his or her own life embodies and truly *is*. "The hearer must hear not merely me but Christ in me" (256, 257).

The publisher no doubt intends volume 3 of McClendon's *Collected Works* for theologians, not just for pastors. But if the book is another window into McClendon's theological perspective, pastors and teachers will certainly benefit from its relevance to their in-the-saddle concerns. In Part I of the collection, four sermons address the season of Advent. Here the theme of difficulty—something pastors know very well—finds comfort and healing on the anvil of hope. The birth pangs of the new age underscore sorrow, but the reality of "Christ present" (29) defeats resignation and fuels forward-looking passion.

Part II concerns "The Path of Discipleship." God has promised the end of war, McClendon notes in the provocative sermon entitled "Has God Made a Mistake about the Future?" But prophecies are calls to action. If the church cannot control what goes on in the wider world, the dream can "come true in us"—in our own refusal to learn war—and so can demonstrate the possibility of life freed from the myth of cynical realism (40, 41). Twelve more sermons in this section deepen the sense of stark difference between true loyalty to Christ and life lived by ordinary lights.

This theme continues in Parts III and IV, which consider existence engendered by Easter and sustained by the Spirit's presence in the community. Now, in some twenty-three further sermons, the anxieties of discipleship come into play as well as its shape and substance. One sermon is called "I Have My Doubts," and takes off from the Johannine passage on Thomas. Another considers the challenge of interpreting a Bible that may seem to support polygamy and slavery, not to mention war. Still another, called "Starting Over," was McClendon's first sermon

as interim pastor of his church, one that had suffered what he calls a “setback.” It offers one example of a strategy he recommends, that of the preacher invoking his own life story as illumination and encouragement. Here disappointments and struggles obvious from his own “bent” shoulders help him make the point that with God’s help the congregation can “confront losses” and “build again” (212, 215).

The book ends with three brief appendices, the last of which is again a sermon, simply titled “How to Preach the Gospel.” The phrase encapsulates the book’s subject matter. Even with the steep price, the book is worth getting—perhaps for your own bookshelf and certainly for any theological library.

Charles Scriven, board chair, the Adventist Forum, publisher of *Spectrum* magazine

Steven W. Smith. *Recapturing the Voice of God: Shaping Sermons like Scripture*. Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2015. 230 pages. \$25.

Preachers from every walk of faith struggle preaching creatively. Preachers may easily be tempted to preach with the same structure every week in the pulpit, whatever style they choose. Steven Smith pursues how to effectively communicate Scripture in manners that honor the shape of the Word over the sermon structure. Smith, professor of Preaching at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, as well as vice president for Student Services and Communications, re-envisions the art of expository preaching. True expository preaching, according to Smith, is representing what God has already said (10).

Recapturing the Voice of God is designed for preachers seeking to faithfully represent God's word behind the pulpit. It is loaded with resources that ministers may find useful for any additional study on topics in which they are interested. Smith looks at preaching by genre, which is broken down into Story (Narrative, Law, Gospels/Acts, and Parables), Poem/Wisdom (Psalms, Wisdom Literature, and Prophecy), and Letter (Epistles and Revelation). Law is added into the Story form because it is surrounded by narrative (68). He argues that the context for the giving of law is vital to the preaching of it (71). Each chapter begins with a brief look at interpretation of the genre, addressing hermeneutics. That is, however, not the point of this book; exposition and preaching is the purpose. The chapters also include a section on crafting the sermon, which is followed by a sample sermon. Tacked at the end of each chapter is a small list of reflection questions and recommended resources for preaching that specific genre. At the very end of the book is a selected bibliography, which is in fact rather extensive and sorted by genre for helpful guidance. There is also a name index, subject index, and Scripture index for easy references.

Smith represents the conservative view of Scripture and its use for preaching. That is to say, he believes all Scripture is accurate and useful (2). In addition, he believes that preachers are charged to preach truth, no matter how difficult it may be. For what is worse: The preacher who tells lies or the preacher who will not preach the truth (19)? Smith is bold, and his writing style will boldly challenge any preacher to spend time in sermon preparation truly representing the text. Smith dislikes moralistic sermons, and if a sermon can be preached without preaching Jesus, then it is not worth preaching in the church assembly (54). This relates to his fundamental belief that all sermons, no matter what text is being preached, should connect to the gospel of Jesus Christ (45). This may be one of the more controversial beliefs he has on preaching. Even though he promotes the inclusion of Christ in every sermon, his defense on this position is lacking. The strongest defense Smith gives is to use the New Testament to interpret all Old Testament texts, since the New Testament is God's own commentary on his first covenant (50). In spite of this, preachers reading this book will find ways of improving their sermon technique.

The book has a strong focus on preaching from the big picture. Micro analysis of a verse is not a favored technique, but preaching large sections in one sermon is something that Smith would find acceptable because it sees the text on the macro level. For instance, the terse approach of Minor Prophets works in favor of preaching the entire prophet's message in one sermon (174). Especially in narratives, sermons should be focused on the text, not the story (97). What he means by this is that Mark tells the Transfiguration account one way, and Luke another way; preachers should preach the text (what Mark wrote) and not the story (the Transfiguration) to best represent the voice of God. In conjunction with this, when the reader knows that a psalm is based on a story (Psalm 51 and David and Bathsheba, for instance), Smith still pushes that the

sermon focus on the text and not the story. True expository preaching is preaching the text, not what is behind the text (135).

Overall, *Recapturing the Voice of God* boldly promotes the authority of Scripture and the need to preach each style of text through a different style of sermon structure. The form should shift from genre to genre, but the heart of theology – the art of representing God’s word, remains the same. The church needs preachers who communicate God’s message as told through Scripture, and this book will prepare preachers for that task.

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Kenyatta R. Gilbert. *A Pursued Justice: Black Preaching from the Great Migration to Civil Rights*. Waco: Baylor University Press, 2016. 224 pages. \$39.95.

What does it mean to preach prophetically? This is the question Kenyatta R. Gilbert, Associate Professor of Homiletics at Howard University School of Divinity, asks in his second project, *A Pursued Justice: Black Preaching from the Great Migration to Civil Rights*. Building upon his initial work (*The Journey and the Promise*, 2011) in which he introduced the concept of trivocal preaching, defined as preaching “marked by three constitutive orientations the scriptural voice of prophet, priest, and sage” (Gilbert 2011, 11), Gilbert extends his research with a contextually focused, in-depth analysis into the first voice, the prophetic--more specifically prophetic Black preaching. As one third of the African American preaching triad, Gilbert defines prophetic Black preaching as “God-summoned discourse about God’s good will toward community with respect to divine intentionality which draws on resources internal to Black life” (6). Furthermore, prophetic Black preaching is emancipatory language that concretely names obstacles preventing justice. Centered on the primary (1916) and secondary (1921 or fall 1922 and following) waves of the Great Migration, *A Pursued Justice* examines the connection between “social justice as an aspect of the human condition” (xii) through historical, sociological, and homiletical analysis.

Chapters 1 and 2 provide an overview of the complexity of southern Black life that gave impetus to the Great Migration, its impact upon northern Black religious communities, and the homiletical practices during the period of Black resettlement. Examining the socioeconomic factors that influenced the exodus of approximately 1.5 million Blacks, Gilbert shines a spotlight on the failure of Black uplift during the period of Reconstruction and the subsequent feelings of betrayal at the lack of progress. A critical aspect of these chapters is Gilbert’s work on homiletical practices. In the South, he writes, there were two predominant methods, the Traditionalist and Spiritualists. Although different in homiletical foci, both methods did little to challenge the status quo. Instead, Black preachers in the South preached messages that “provide[d] a channel for parishioners to cope with existing socioeconomic norms” (13). While there were likeminded preachers in the North, Gilbert offers as exemplars the prophetic preaching of Bishop Reverdy C. Ransom, Reverend Florence S. Randolph, and Reverend Adam Clayton Powell, Sr., from Black institutional churches, whose cultural and contextual consciousness mingled with hermeneutical agility sought to reform society “through biblically based Christocentric justice proclamation” (50):

Their prophetic discourse sought to achieve three major objectives: to expose and provide criticism to the multiple contradictions affecting Black life; to create a channel of authority for listeners to exercise hope and maintain their dignity and humanity; and to provide fitting assistance for large numbers of Blacks in the period who sought to rebuild and restructure their lives in the urban North (24).

Chapters 3–5, which constitute the second half of the project, contain a historical biblical analysis of the Old Testament prophet, examine the commonalities between the Hebrew prophets and the preaching of Gilbert’s northern exemplars, and provide a preaching paradigm which is later used as a rubric for sermon analysis. Chapter 3, which is the heart of the project, explores the life and call of the Hebrew prophet. The exploration serves as the foundation upon which Gilbert develops his Exodus Preaching Paradigm. Based on the principles of justice, which

concern “the distribution of material resources, fairness to one’s neighbor, righteousness toward God, the proper use of the created order, and personal responsibility for communal wellness” (61), the preaching paradigm contains four markers that together establish a paradigmatic model of prophetic Black preaching. Prophetic Black preaching

(1) unmasks systemic evil and opposes self-serving, deceptive human practices; (2) remains interminably hopeful when confronted with human tragedy and communal despair, (3) connects the speech-act with just actions as concrete praxis to help people freely participate in naming their reality, and (4) carries an impulse for beauty in its use of language and culture (68).

These principles are then used in chapters 4 and 5 as Gilbert not only analyzes selected sermons of Ransom, Randolph and Powell, but their heirs (Martin Luther King, Jr., Sandy F. Ray, Katie Cannon, etc.) as well. Gilbert concludes his project with a call to prophetic Black preaching.

This project, narrowly focused, warrants universal attention because the time for truth telling and concretely naming reality is now as African Americans are continually affected by a host of systemic ills marshalled against them. Unfortunately, too many Black pulpits, once powerful voices against injustice, are now in crisis. However, all is not lost as Gilbert provides a path forward. This scholarly work based on the theme of justice, traces the homiletical practices of a select group of preachers from the South to the North during the period of the Great Migration. With historical and biblical analytic precision, Gilbert sounds a clarion call for a return to prophetic Black preaching. While the primary audience for *A Pursued Justice* is the Black pulpit, its applicability to the pew and beyond is undeniable.

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Elaine Graham. *Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Public Theology in a Post-Secular Age*. London: SCM Press, 2013. 288 pages. \$120.

Contrary to modern secularists' prediction that religion will gradually wither away as societies become increasingly modernized and secularized, religion continues to be a significant force in social and political arenas today. While the continuing effects of secularization persist, a recent public resurgence of religion indicates a newly emerging post-secular condition in western societies. In this book, Elaine Graham, a renowned practical theologian at University of Chester engages with this new reality particularly in the UK and proposes a new path of public theology "between the 'rock' of religious resurgence and the 'hard place' of institutional decline and secularism" (xxvii) in a post-secular age.

This book is comprised of three parts: "Post-Secular Society," "Post-Secular Public Theology," and "Public theology as Christian Apologetics." Part one analyzes the distinctive nature of the post-secular context. The author describes the 'post-secular' as an ambivalent and contradictory space where two apparently incompatible currents of enduring secularism and religious resurgence co-exist without an easy conflation. Personal religious affiliation and the institutional power of religion continue to decline, but the visibility of religion in public affairs becomes apparent. Not only are the conventional demarcations between 'public' and 'private' blurred, but also "the categories of 'secular' and 'religious' co-exist in complex inter-relationship" (63). This paradoxical nature of the post-secular society poses a challenge to the traditional secular construal of the public realm as a neutral space in which religious voice has to be excluded to ensure its neutrality and free communication of all participants. It also calls for a new paradigm of public theology.

Part two examines the nature of public theology and various manifestation of public theology. Public theology by nature locates itself in the boundary between the secular and the religious. Public theology is concerned with public issues beyond the community of faith and seeks to communicate its theological and ethical deliberations to the public square by making its particular theological claim and language accessible and intelligible to those who do not share the Christian faith. However, this bilingual nature of public theology includes an implicit danger of losing its particularity of discourse in the process of translating into common language. With critical attention to this inherent dilemma of public theology between "fidelity to its own traditions" and "openness to a diverse and critical public domain" (71), the author provides comprehensive contours of various approaches to public theology, including postliberal theology, radical orthodoxy, and evangelical identity politics. The author acknowledges the strengths of each approach, but concludes that all have limitations in responding to a post-secular condition in contemporary societies.

Part three presents Graham's own proposal for public theology as a Christian apologetics of presence. In her articulation of public theology, the author attempts to synthesize particular strengths of postliberal theology with her basic liberal stance. Public theology needs to be rooted in biblical and theological tradition but it also must be understandable/comprehensible to non-Christians in the public square (232). However, public theology as a Christian apologetic does not seek a rational defense of Christian belief, nor is it an appeal to believe propositional truth claims. Rather, it is an invitation to participate in a new way of life by appealing to transformational truth, which is witnessed by the incarnational and performative action and word of the Christian community. Public theology's accountability is measured by its facilitation of the Church's commitment to the marginalized and of transformative praxis for justice and

liberation in the public square. “The primary expression of public theology, then, will be in practical demonstrations that authentic faith leads to transformation” (215). Thus, public theology is first and foremost a Christian “apologetic of presence” in a post-secular age.

While homiletics and preaching are not direct objects of the book, this book is beneficial to the preacher who is called to the path between a rock of ‘mystery of word of God’ and the hard place of ‘mystery of everyday life.’ This book is a valuable resource for preachers to understand the newly emerging preaching context and their proper role as resident public theologians. In a post-secular society in which the division between the secular and the religious is breaking down, the preacher’s role cannot be confined to developing a distinctive identity of the Church. Rather, the preacher needs to help the congregation understand the public vocation of the Church, which calls Christians to show concern for the common good of society. The preacher as a resident public theologian helps people understand increasingly complex local and global contexts in which they live, and how to live as good disciples in everyday life and witness to the gospel in the public. For these tasks, the preacher not only needs to know the contemporary context, but must also articulate and rearticulate relevant theological expressions of faith in the public square. This book provides a comprehensive contour of a post-secular context and a way of doing theology in public. This book is a thoughtful guide for both theologians and preachers who are concerned about public issues, public Christian witness and doing theology in public.

Yohan Go, Boston University School of Theology, Boston, MA

Patrick W. T. Johnson. *The Mission of Preaching: Equipping the Community for Faithful Witness*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2015. 237 pages. \$25.

For the last twenty or more years, the church in the west has found herself under the postmodern, post-Christendom, and post-secular context and has seen the gap between the gospel and Western culture rapidly widening. As Leslie Newbigin rightly describes, the church today is indeed in a *missionary* context and thus engaged in a missionary encounter with Western culture (18). However, the difficulty and complexity in coping with this challenging context sometimes makes pastors, preachers and lay ministers become more and more counter-cultural, ironically broadening the gap.

Against this tendency and from his missional passion, Patrick Johnson, in his book *The Mission of Preaching*, provides a brilliant proposal on his missional homiletic in answering to the following question: “What would be involved *homiletically* in a genuinely missionary encounter between the gospel and Western culture?” (22). According to Johnson, a missional homiletic is preaching that “confesses Jesus Christ, through a missional interpretation of scripture, in order to equip the congregation for its witness to the world” (22).

In order to develop his missional homiletic within the current homiletical landscape, in chapter one, the author engages in a close dialogue with three testimonial homileticians, Thomas Long, Anna Carter Florence and David Lose, focusing on their mutually resonating images of preaching as witness, testimony, and confession. Closely analyzing each position, Johnson, following Lose, chooses confession as the most appropriate model for our missional context and his missional homiletic.

Chapter two examines Barth’s missional ecclesiology reflected in his *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Reconciliation* in order to situate his missional homiletic within the broader framework, which is especially grounded in Barth’s understanding of the “sent” church and of the commission given to both the church and individual Christians as bearing witness to Jesus Christ. The task of witness is given to the community as a whole, not to the selected individuals. In this sense, the author asserts that it is crucial to discern the nature, content and function of missional preaching, differentiating it from various forms of the witness of the church.

Chapter three explores missional literature to draw out possible implications for missional homiletic, based on the eight patterns elaborated in *Treasure in Clay Jars: Patterns in Missional Faithfulness*, a practical-theological study of the characteristics of missional congregations in North America, which brings the theory of missional theology into mutual critical dialogue with lived experience and actual practices.

While it is greatly helpful to read all of these first three chapters, what the author means by missional homiletic is thoroughly described in chapter four, joining all three trajectories. In this section, his definition of missional homiletic is most fully explained segment by segment and later summarized in conclusion with four main homiletical threads: 1) a community of preachers who equip a congregation, 2) the necessity of confessing Jesus Christ as the essential and common content of proclamation, 3) a missional hermeneutic for interpreting scripture and 4) understanding preaching in relationship to the multiform and primary witness of the community (225).

Although there are many, I will name a couple of unique contributions of Johnson’s missional homiletic. First, he presents a communal preaching ministry within a local congregation as a model for missional homiletic. Since there are people whom God has gifted and called to the preaching ministry, he strongly suggests that their multiple voices should be

incorporated in the process of preaching by gathering to interpret scripture and sharing preaching responsibilities. In this sense, while Johnson acknowledges the earlier proposals of Ronald Allen and John McClure, he differentiates his model from theirs by contrasting his communities of preachers with their communities of interpreters (150–51, 218–19). However, Johnson's suggestion could be more appealing if he deals with Lucy Rose's similar proposal on conversational preaching which also invites laity to preach.

Second, the author situates the witness of preaching in relation to the broader and multiform witness of the congregation, which is logically prior to individual Christians. Moreover, he explicates the uniqueness of preaching by defining it as the form of regular proclamation that ties together its multiform witness and by further clarifying its three functions/activities of centering, contextualizing, and kindling confession within the Christian community (220). In other words, missional preaching arises from and moves into the witness of the congregation (210). As Lose indicates in the foreword, Patrick Johnson shows a missional turn of homiletics from performative preaching to (trans)formative preaching to equip the congregation for its witness. In this sense, this book is an excellent example of interdisciplinary work integrating three areas of theology, that is, homiletics, ecclesiology and missional theology.

Still, there is a critical question to be raised. While he acknowledges that there is no clear distinction between church and world in the conclusion, the overall arguments in this book tend to run on the very distinction, not sufficiently reflecting on the complex and overlapping relationship between individuals, communities, and societies but simply assuming the relatively homogeneous congregation and the linear movement from church to world under the lead of missional preaching. As a result, his missional homiletic is restricted to intra-ecclesial discourse, not seriously considering the inter- and extra-ecclesial discourses in terms of who, what and where to preach for mission. Conversational homileticians may express a similar concern about Johnson's proposal. In a sense, since the mission of preaching is mainly conducted on each congregational level like a gated community, there still lies a lurking danger in the way that a single church ironically might become counter-cultural and isolated both from other churches and the world, thus undermining the collective effort for God's mission, which is clearly not what he envisions with his missional homiletic.

Despite this critical question, Johnson's contribution cannot be overemphasized. I strongly recommend this book to homileticians, pastors, preachers and lay leaders alike. Anyone who takes the mission and proclamation of the church seriously will hugely benefit not only from Johnson's refreshing and thoughtful explications of his missional homiletic but also from his careful interdisciplinary work for the sake of God's mission to and for the world.

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Joni S. Sancken. *Stumbling Over the Cross: Preaching the Cross and Resurrection Today*. Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2016. 234 pages. \$28.

In *Stumbling Over the Cross*, Joni S. Sancken, an assistant professor of homiletics at United Theological Seminary in Dayton, OH, offers her fascinating theological perspective on how to preach the cross and resurrection of Jesus as the core belief of Christianity. Along the way she engages with the complexities of the 21st century congregational situation, such as the growing pluralistic challenge and ever-present reality of existential suffering. The author contends that our “cross-less” pulpits (which bypasses non-negotiable truth) must proclaim God’s redemptive action in the fullness of Christ with unalienable theological confidence, even in the midst of the ontological tension between God’s hope grounded in scripture and the persistent shadow of the cross.

The author begins by unfolding the reasons why a preacher struggles to address Christ’s crucifixion at Calvary with the congregational ‘Good Friday’—akin to an existential brokenness, and why the church loses its confident voice that the gospel of the agony of the cross and the promise of resurrection has the potential to (eschatologically) nullify the powers and principalities and to inaugurate God’s restorative grace amid our brokenness. Chapter two provides diverse insights of Christological perspectives inherent in preaching on the cross and resurrection; for instance, God’s solidarity with humanity in Jesus, God’s unlimited grace and forgiveness, God’s in-breaking reign, and God’s liberation and healing powers as well. Following the author’s survey of Christology for preaching, in Chapter three, she encourages the preacher not only to strengthen Christian-cruciform identity but also to cultivate interfaith sensitivity and awareness of the fellow Abrahamic traditions (Judaism and Islam) by unveiling signs and hallmarks of religious pluralism. Put differently, the author emboldens the preacher to engage respectfully with other religions since, from her viewpoint, such dialogue imparts opportunities to preclude Christianity’s past misunderstandings of other religions, such as anti-Semitism and the Holocaust, to practice a cruciform-sense of openness and to deepen the theological integrity of Christianity’s core beliefs.

In Chapter four, the author argues that preaching on the cross and resurrection that highlights Jesus’ peculiarity and its distinctive narrative plays an indispensable role in forming counter-cultural discipleship. Said another way, preaching the cross can bring about a transformative reorientation of the congregation: namely, they liberate the church from a consumer-driven culture and its unfaithful practices *toward* participation in “God’s work of eradicating the powers and principalities from every corner of our world” (123). This aim is also achieved by witnessing to the God-driven eschatological reality in the world. In Chapter five, this publication concludes with the author’s practical wisdom for how to proclaim the crucified and risen Jesus Christ as Christianity’s cornerstone by suggesting a variety of concrete methods and occasions.

This volume holds value for preaching teachers and preachers who need Christological grounds and theological depth for preaching that is relevant to the congregation’s existential reality between the shadows of darkness and God’s in-breaking rule in terms of an already-not-yet eschatology. Along with that, three strengths of this volume might also be the author’s brilliant insight on 1) how to present a balanced and fair interreligious dialogue by keeping theological integrity, honesty, and radical hospitality; 2) a cross and resurrection-focused homiletic through the practice of interfaith dialogue; and 3) the author’s homiletical proposal for the three key rhetorical virtues of vulnerability, compassion, and bearing witness for preaching

toward even people of other religions. Her astonishing homiletical approach, I think, deserves attention and warrants further discussion, especially regarding the current issue of Christian preaching in times of religious pluralism. This volume, finally, will help not only preachers but also all lay Christians who stumble over the cross and the resurrection of Christ in congregational ministry.

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Teresa Berger and Bryan D. Spinks, eds. *Liturgy's Imagined Past/s: Methodologies and Materials in the Writing of Liturgical History Today*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2016. 35 pages. \$35.

Liturgy's Imagined Past/s provides an account of multiple aspects of Christian word and worship on a global level spanning across several centuries. The book's multiple contributors examine a wide variety of liturgical life including the significance of clergy vestments, hymns, corporate prayers, the architecture of the early Christian church, the Coptic Church, monasticism, the Reformation and beyond. Although the book's primary audience includes liturgical studies scholars and students, the content draws from the integration of historiography and aspects of systematic theology. Berger and Spinks have provided exemplary liturgical scholarship despite the scarcity of several ancient manuscripts and the challenges of recovering traditions and theological intentions from the ancient world.

In chapter 5, Berger raises the issue of the Church's history on embracing gender-obliviousness as deeply embedded in the fabric of corporate worship and especially its liturgical life. The author refrains from deconstructing liturgical history, but rather attempts to make sense of it with respect to the role of gender. Not until the twentieth century have some faith traditions begun including women among the ranks of ordained clergy in significant numbers. Furthermore, until the latter part of the twentieth century the Church's oral and written liturgy across ecumenical lines exclusively used masculine pronouns when referring to Divine attributes. However, Berger as one of a few scholars have raised the issue of the role of gender in worship in the form of style and implied associations beyond mere words and expressions. "A few faith communities aim for more 'masculine' worship experiences so as to counter a perceived feminization of worship that they see expressed, for example, in the preponderance of 'girly worship' songs" (138). The relevance of such claims rests in the idea that liturgy contains an implied gender associations through its means of expression and its perception by the respective participants. One cannot assume that aesthetics within the context of worship entails gender neutrality in terms of its appeal.

The book makes a significant contribution to the discipline of liturgical studies. "Teresa Berger is undoubtedly correct in referring to the underlying suppositions of contemporary liturgical approaches to historical analyses, which emphasize fragmentariness, discontinuity, difference, and are obviously fueled by a 'hermeneutics of suspicion'" (113). Nevertheless, more attention to liturgical difference would strengthen the volume, such as an additional chapter or two that discuss how African Diaspora Christian communities in the Americas have appropriated aspects of formal worship in conjunction with their forms of sacred traditions. A significant portion of liturgical studies literature has omitted the influential role of sub-Saharan Africa on Western religious practices in terms of its use of rhythm, tones, and various other sensibilities.

One of the book's greatest strengths lies in its concise theological explanation of the Sacrament of The Lord's Supper as it relates to the Passover meal prior to the death of Egyptian during the ancient world and how Christ revisited the sacred celebration prior to his crucifixion. Bruce Gordon, the author of chapter 7 reminds the reader that "the Lord's Supper is a bringing to mind or revisualizing of Christ's death on the cross" (194). Furthermore, the author implicitly claims that the Lord's Supper should not become dismissed as a mundane ritual but rather essential for keeping the memory of God's work of salvation alive and worthy of thanksgiving in the form a continuous celebration.

The contributors devote the latter sections of the book to the Reformed tradition and Evangelicalism as early movements which began an era of gradual decline of centralized authority which serve as a reference point “to imagine the future” (231). The book emphasizes how Jesus Christ functions as the sole source of authority for Christianity (242). However, such generalized assumption must consider that surface level theological homogeneity becomes challenged through diverse spiritual experiences, ethnic variety, its accompanying linguistics, and the distinct characteristics of local church organizational structures.

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Terence Cuneo. *Ritualized Faith: Essays on the Philosophy of Liturgy*. Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 2016. 228 pages. \$85.55.

Ritualized Faith: Essays on the Philosophy of Liturgy, is a third single-authored Oxford University Press title by The University of Vermont's Marsh Chair of Intellectual and Moral Philosophy, Terence Cuneo. The book comprises a collection of articles and book chapters from 2012 to 2015 that appear in journals and edited volumes dedicated to discourses in psychology, philosophy, religion, and theology. Cuneo describes his essays as philosophical explorations in liturgy. He sets them apart by pointing out that "nearly no one in professional philosophy works on the topic of liturgy" (1). Though he does footnote some names (Adams, Pruss, Hütter, Toner, Baber, Wolterstorff, and James K. A. Smith) who probe Eucharist and liturgy philosophically, and one might add Jean-Luc Marion and his chapter "The Present and the Gift" in *God Without Being*, as Cuneo states, the number is small. Cuneo's central concern is the detachment of contemporary philosophy from lived religious life. That includes scriptural and textual interpretation, fasting, prayer, almsgiving, religious education, hymn singing, icon contemplation, social engagement, and especially corporate worship. For Cuneo, contemporary philosophy has failed to "deepen our understanding of what it is to be a religiously committed agent and how one ought to be such an agent" (6).

In order to rectify philosophical neglect of liturgy, Cuneo brings attention to the embodied practices of Christian congregations and those especially enacted by Christian Orthodoxy. The practices appear in a different order in his text than how I am listing them here. But they include service book prayers, iconography, liturgical singing, and rites of the Lord's Supper, baptism, and remission (remission constituting deliverance from the grip of sin, which he describes as deep disorder of moral, legal, aesthetic, and therapeutic dimensions that may or may not be morally culpable), funerals, and liturgy's connection to moral living. Cuneo investigates the liturgical actions of Orthodoxy as resources for participants to think about who God is as Trinity, as redeemer of the world and humanity, and what it means for followers of Jesus to recognize and live into the divine summoning to love God and neighbor, even the neighbor that we consider our enemy (25, 189–90). As Cuneo declares, "[w]hen in the liturgy the assembled bless what God blesses, want what God wants, stand with those whom God stands with, they enact what are surely some of the most important ways by which one can love God" (33). Liturgy immerses us into the mind and ways of God.

Though Cuneo paves a philosophical way forward with liturgy, or perhaps by virtue of his philosophical approach, his argumentation veers in moments toward the abstruse and can at times sound contained. In chapter 3 Cuneo introduces a challenge to John Schellenberg's Hiddenness Argument, a claim regarding the nonexistence of God. In chapter 4 Cuneo completes his response to Schellenberg by elucidating upon the capacity of ritual reenactment in liturgy to reorient and "revise" the narration of one's life. Cuneo disentangles meticulous formulations of religious skepticism and doubt. But one wonders if he could accomplish a similar resolution with less exposition upon Schellenberg and more direct troubling of atheism's plausibility. I also found curious the understandable, but not particularly novel rooting of Cuneo's central philosophical premises regarding liturgy in the thoughts of Alexander Schmemmann. For a text philosophizing about liturgy, why not ground the argumentation in the work of a groundbreaking philosopher? The frequency of Nicholas Wolterstorff too, referenced in approximately a tenth of the total pages also made Cuneo's precedent of philosophizing about liturgy seem less new.

How might a figure like Judith Butler who recently published *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (Harvard, 2015) inform Cuneo's philosophizing of liturgy? What would Cuneo make of other voices that engage liturgy with theoretical lenses that often look past it, like postcolonialism? Here, I am thinking of writings by Kwok Pui-Lan and Stephen Burns, Cláudio Carvalhaes, and Jin Young Choi. Cuneo states that he is "committed to the central components of Christianity, as they are understood by the Orthodox church" (214). Yet is *the liturgy* also present in the life of congregations of color and free church traditions? I raise such questions not as alerts related to identity politics, but rather as under-examined considerations for texts conceptually mining worship of God as a unifying Christian activity. Without digressing further, *Ritualized Faith* exemplifies how philosophy illuminates the efficaciousness of liturgy for advanced graduate study. The last chapter delves into Cuneo's conversion to Orthodoxy, his spiritual journey, and his doubts and stands to benefit any liturgically inquisitive classroom.

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