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Promissory Narration: Toward a Revised Narrative Homiletic in an Age of Identities

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Abstract: *This essay offers a third way of thinking about experience and identity in narrative preaching—a homiletical-theological one in relation to the character of the gospel as promise. I begin by building on a trajectory of research that sees an intimate relationship between biblical narrative and promise, especially the work of Ronald Thiemann, Christopher Morse, and James Kay. With Kay’s help, I then turn to an especially rich opportunity for revising what Morse first called promissory narration by means of Carolyn Helsel’s appropriation of Paul Ricoeur’s *The Course of Recognition* in relation to the problem of white racism. In the process, I will also bring Ricoeur’s work on promise and narrated identity to help rethink how promissory narration might help narrative preachers work through a course of recognition and transformation of identity in ways that move past the liberal/postliberal impasse about experience that has dogged especially white narrative homiletics.*

One of the most enduring problems of narrative preaching is itself a central homiletical-theological issue: the relationship of gospel to experience. In liberal hands, narrative preaching tends to focus on the movement from experience to gospel by means of narrative form. Following the insight of Stephen Crites’ “The Narrative Quality of Experience” in a Tillichian mode, liberal views often seek to correlate the shape or form of biblical narrative with human narratives in order to evoke some sense of the gospel in the retelling in hearers.¹ In postliberal hands, the focus on narrative preaching bracket matters of form altogether. Biblical narrative—not our human narratives—in deep connection to communities and their practices, is precisely how the gospel *re-describes* human experience. Biblical narrative exists not to confirm our own worlds or experiences, but to carry hearers into the world of the text in all of its otherness. In doing so, a postliberal view of biblical narrative assumes that the Bible *forms* identity insofar as it makes Christian faith recognizable.

This essay offers a third way of thinking about narrative preaching—a homiletical-theological one in relation to the character of the gospel as promise that complexifies the gospel/experience relationship, as well as identity. I begin by building on a trajectory of research that sees an intimate relationship between biblical narrative and promise, especially Ronald Thiemann, Christopher Morse, and James Kay. I will, in the course of this essay, retrace some of that history so as to locate my narrative reflections with respect to eschatology. For my part, I see an especially rich opportunity for revising what Morse first called promissory narration by means of Carolyn Helsel’s appropriation of Paul Ricoeur’s *The Course of Recognition* in relation to the problem of white racism and identity. Helsel, as we will see, relates Ricoeur’s understanding of narrative movement (mimesis) in textual hermeneutics to his view of the transforming self as a

¹ Stephen Crites, “The Narrative Quality of Experience,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 39:3 (Sept. 1971), 291-311.

moment of self-recognition (idem>ipse>self-recognition) in his later work.² In what follows, I will also bring Ricoeur's work on promise and narrated identity to bear in order to rethink how promissory narration might help narrative preachers work through a course of recognition and *transformation* of identity in ways that move past the liberal/postliberal impasse over narrative's relation to experience and gospel that has dogged especially white narrative homiletics.

Promising Narrative: A Recent History

We begin with a caveat: not all of the figures in the history of scholarship that follows here actually use the phrase "promissory narration." They do hold in common an interest in drawing on the literature of speech act theory to explain various elements of how the language of promise works in context: distinctions between denotative and constative speech, the identification of difference between language's locutionary function in relation to its illocutionary and perlocutionary force,³ promise as a "self-involving" speech act,⁴ and the dual agency of a promise as spoken by one and performed by another.⁵ The point with what follows is not to reduce the three figures below together without remainder, but to identify that all of these theologians and homileticians see that biblical narrative and promise actually stand in some sort of necessary prior relation. It is this *juxtaposition* of narrative and promise that distinguishes them from much of the traditional liberal and postliberal ways of understanding biblical narrative in relation to experience and gospel.

Ronald Thiemann's *Revelation and Theology: The Gospel as Narrated Promise*

Thiemann's book aims to describe a non-foundational theology of revelation predicated on the notion of God's prevenient grace. According to Thiemann, God's gracious prevenience could once be assumed as a "background" doctrine, but after the Enlightenment the doctrine itself becomes a position which must be justified. Thiemann wishes to argue that the best way to understand revelation is "in use," but not in a purely functionalist way as Kelsey does.⁶ Instead, the vision that Thiemann has is of "narrated promise," where a unified sense of narrative is joined to the external promise of a dual agency in scripture and liturgy. This notion allows revelation to be both "extra nos" and "pro me." Thiemann writes, "Let all Christian interpretation proceed in a manner which recognizes the absolute primacy of God's promising grace."⁷

² Ricoeur goes so far in his important work *Time and Narrative* (vol. 1, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 53, to speak of three mimetic moments (mimesis 1>mimesis 2>mimesis 3), which seems to stand in some parallel to the three-fold description of the course of recognition.

³ See J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962) and his "Performative Utterances [1956]" (in *Philosophical Papers*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1961). See also John Searle, *Expression and Meaning: Studies in the Theory of Speech Acts* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

⁴ Donald Evans, *The Logic of Self-Involvement: A Philosophical Study of Everyday Language with Special Reference to the Christian Use of Language about God as Creator* (London: SCM, 1963). In his later work, Evans walks back some of the extent of his claims about the logic of self-involvement, but, as Richard Briggs notes in *Words in Action: Speech Act Theory and Biblical Interpretation* (Edinburgh, T & T Clark, 2001), 159-66, does not totally abandon its value either.

⁵ Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim that God Speaks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

⁶ David Kelsey, *Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975).

⁷ Ronald Thiemann, *Revelation and Theology: The Gospel as Narrated Promise* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985), 149. The material on Matthew in the subsequent paragraph is summarized from chapter 6 of the same volume.

Thiemann's notion of "narrated promise" is best exemplified in his chapter on Matthew's designation of Jesus as Son of God. The text narrates Jesus' unfolding identity as Son of Abraham (heir to national promises), Son of David (heir to kingship promises), the named Jesus who saves (the people from their sins), and in the unfolding narrative of Matthew 4 and beyond "Son of God," the one who bears God's intentions. One gets the sense from reading Thiemann that his view of promise in narrative is subtle and reflective of the text's ambiguity. In fact, Thiemann takes pains to point out that the character of God is *absent* from the Matthean narrative at crucial points. God does comment that Jesus is God's Son, the bearer of God's intentions, at crucial points such as Jesus' baptism and again at the transfiguration. The middle section of Matthew's narrative, however, is where Jesus' identity is disclosed as authoritative healer, forgiver of sins, and in the cross as representing precisely the intention of God for sonship: suffering and resurrection. The end of Matthew's narrative proves crucial, theologically speaking. God's raising of Jesus fulfills what God intends (the resurrection prediction is fulfilled in the report in the divine passive in chapter 28; he is raised implies that God did the raising and that God fulfilled promises). The promise/fulfillment motif and its connection to the various visions of sonship earlier on (David, Abraham, etc.) underline God's reliability in the promise. The notion of gospel appears in the text a few times (unlike the word promise, which is really only narrative embodied, not thematized). The gospel at the beginning is linked to Jesus preaching of the kingdom, but by the end of the gospel is linked to Jesus himself, especially when the universalizing mission is connected with the anonymous woman's anointment of Jesus before his death, which will be remembered wherever the gospel is preached in all the world. The connection between narrative and promise here becomes important at the very end where the risen Christ is granted all authority and *himself gives a promise*: Lo, I will be with you until the end of the age. With this narration, the promises of God are not only narratively validated (from the OT on), but carried forward by a Jesus whose identification in divine sonship takes on exalted form in a preview of Trinitarian unity (in the name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit).

In my view, Thiemann's perspective on narrated promise is only of some help for the problem for narrative preaching we have identified above. Thiemann's book is indeed concerned with narration and identity (and therefore postliberal) with promise as a narrated thematic content and in-use context. The language of promise for Thiemann really provides a frame and a set of linguistic rules that makes sense of how God or Jesus can promise anything, but is not so helpful for thinking about how, say, narrative preaching itself can bear such a promise in light of contemporary experience or identities. One crucial implication of his work may be his acknowledgment of the rhetorical force of narrative: the role of point of view and judgments about characters help us to voice theological claims that in turn lead to promise language. With Thiemann, there are only some indirect ways narration can come to theological claims that join remembrance, recognizability, and identity to the forward-looking stance of promise.

Christopher Morse and *The Logic of Promise in Moltmann's Theology*

A few years earlier, Christopher Morse broached the idea of promissory narration in his treatment of Moltmann's theology—and in a way that does move the needle on experience.⁸ Morse argues that one of the ways the early Moltmann gets in trouble in the American scene is in his disparagement of *experience*. Morse contends that Moltmann actually has a specific agenda here, though, that separates him from some (though perhaps not all) Barthian ways of thinking about revelation. For Moltmann, experience in the North American sense of the word is

⁸ Christopher Morse, *The Logic of Promise in Moltmann's Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979).

problematic because promise itself has an event quality that breaks open reality. Experience, by contrast, assumes something is already given in reality and that anything new can be extrapolated from it. In this sense, Morse ends up comparing promise to symbol in a way that helps to elaborate the difference: “A promise is not of the same logical type as a symbol which articulates and thereby lifts to the level of conscious referentiality some pre-linguistic or formerly unconscious state of being...[T]he language of promise does not illumine a prior experience of history which is already in some sense felt or apprehended apart from the instrumentality of this language; it creates this experience.”⁹

To deal with this difference between promise and experience, Morse brings in a form of analysis of ordinary language to help bridge the gap. He calls it “promissory narration.”¹⁰ Following the work of two historiographers, Morse embraces the notion of narratives as being essentially followable, generating interest, and moving toward a conclusion. There is in history a sense that historical narratives require some plausible sense of coherence that makes it possible to follow them, that history is studied because we perceive that some aspect of it “speaks to us” in an interesting/relevant way, and that any narrative receives its meaning by moving toward a telos, a future that gives it meaning. The difference, of course, is in the nature of the resurrection event, which doesn’t beget anything like historical evidence that can be used. At the same time, the telic orientation of narrative invites the question: to what extent is the event of resurrection not so much history as extrapolated, but history *making*, the effects of which (a community, a mission) can be historically studied and narrated. Promissory narration pushes our readings of resurrection narratives (e.g., he is risen, he has gone before you to Galilee) in ways that make some theological and historical sense, though in a more tensive way.

To my mind, Morse does not so much cover the specifics of narration as he rather describes its significance in relation to promise. Narrative is more or less the means by which promise is offered in a way that is followable and telic, but still discontinuous with present experience. Morse’s writing about narrative with the work of historiographers in view might also prove useful for thinking generally about narration, proclamation, and eschatology, but it does not yet help as a fully developed homiletical-theological ground for narrative preaching. That said, there is an implicit future/telos in narration that is perhaps itself the link to integrating eschatology into narrative preaching along the lines of Tom Long’s recent suggestions.¹¹ This telic notion has the potential of at least cracking open overly closed readings of both experience and identity.

James Kay and “Preaching as Promissory Narration” in *Preaching and Theology*

Kay approaches the language of promissory narration from a different point of view. He aims in his writing to paint a comprehensive picture of how a theology of preaching not only helps to describe the contemporary structure of homiletic theory, but may begin to point a way out of the impasses in which it finds itself.¹² Along the way, Kay traces a history of the new

⁹ Morse, *Logic*, 89.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, chapter 4.

¹¹ Tom Long, *Preaching from Memory to Hope* (Louisville: WJKP, 2009), 126, where Long says, “Eschatological preaching affirms that life under the providence of God has a shape, and that shape is end-stressed: what happens in the middle is defined by the end.” With Long, the language of eschatology places both a limit and possibility over what we can claim to know and dismiss as impossible. The “end” places a book end on the series of events we experience and even reframes the muddle in the middle that we experience day to day. Long may be offering something analogous for Morse’s vision of the relation of promissory narration and experience.

¹² James Kay, *Preaching and Theology* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2007).

homiletic and the rise of postliberal homiletics as developments out of Bultmann and Barth respectively. Kay offers a very good history along with a theological commentary that adds significant insight. The New Hermeneutic, which is post-Bultmannian, is about preaching like Jesus in his parables: Jesus' own awareness in his preaching is key to evoking a sense of presence that new homileticians hanker after with their narratives and stories in relation to experience. By contrast, Campbell and postliberals follow Hans Frei to argue for a rather denuded sense of presence narratively offered in terms of Jesus' cumulatively rendered identity. Here, says Kay, two of the three forms of the Word of God (revelation, scriptures, and preaching) are collapsed into the one: the story of Jesus in the scriptures. Such ways of thinking about biblical narrative, says Kay, involve theological loss.

In the final chapter, "Preaching as Promissory Narration," Kay aims to bring the book's whole argument to a conclusion. Using the work of Christopher Morse on promise and Austin and Searle on speech act theory, Kay argues for a form of promissory narration that carries forth the best of the post-Bultmannian and postliberal projects in homiletics. The narration of the story is important, but also renders in the process the promises of God, which are more than simply formatively remembered, but as an act of concurrence self-involve the divine in the moment of preaching. With the help of Moltmann and Morse, Kay hopes to heal the two-sided heart of homiletical theory and theology. Along the way, and into the conclusion, he imagines that the notion of "concurrence" also signals a way of speaking about how theoretical elements (like rhetoric or poetics) might relate positively to his theology. As long as theology (and God) take the lead, we can use rhetoric and poetics in chastened ways that aid the interpretive goal of any good theology of preaching: by making sermon discourse "fitting" to its hearers in their contemporary context.

In my view, Kay, like Thiemann, does not give sufficient information to resolve the problem of biblical narrative for the practice of narrative preaching that I am exploring here. His interest is really at the level of preaching and preacher in relation to God. At the same time, Kay does offer ways to imagine promissory narration as a linking of homiletical theo-rhetoric and poetics in practice. Kay's concern is that promissory narration provides a kind of middle way between an insufficiently theological view of narration in the new homiletic, which gives up the kerygma about Jesus for the sake of articulating his parabolic faith in similarly "enacted" sermons, and the closed narrative world of postliberal theology and homiletics, which foregrounds Jesus' identity, but fails to connect that identity to anything other than a carefully rendered literary character through the narration itself. As a result, Kay's vision of promissory narration takes narrated identity seriously but joins this to a theological naming of the promise: what I call a rhetoric of promise joined to a narrative of identity.¹³ It is this relationship that also allows contextualization to happen: the reiteration of the promise presupposes that we have contemporary hearers in view who are not merely incorporated into Bible land, but spoken gospel promise into their own present reality in faith and hope.

Narrative, Promise, and Recognition: A Homiletical-Theological Vision for Narrative Preaching

Promissory narration has been shown to have a variety of meanings in the preceding review. Promissory narration (or narrated promise) sometimes embodies theological concerns,

¹³ This is true so long as one observes Kay's caveat about assuming God is bound in the same way to our theological musings in preaching. One cannot presume upon divine grace, though in preaching, as a moment of concurrence, one can invoke it. See Kay, 57.

hermeneutical orientations, and can help to organize elements of homiletical theories. From here, however, we turn to consider recent literature on “recognition” which might cause us to reconsider how promissory narration pushes us beyond the intramural concerns of liberal and postliberal narrative perspectives. My argument is that proper attention to recognition, specifically the dynamics of Ricoeur’s *The Course of Recognition*, reframes the way in which promissory narration functions—now with a more differentiated and dynamic way of thinking about identity.

Carolyn Browning Helsel and “The Hermeneutics of Recognition: A Ricoeurian Interpretive Framework for Whites Preaching about Racism”

Hsel is attempting a practical-theological work involving critical race theory and the hermeneutics of recognition of Paul Ricoeur.¹⁴ Her goal is to get white preachers talking about racism and to do so in ways that are not ideal but meliorative. Part of her work has to do with how to explain the reluctance of white preachers to take on the topic and *the difficulty of even getting white preachers to acknowledge their identity*. Another part of this is dealing with the reality of an inadequate theological view of sin, drawing in part on the work of Stephen Ray in *Do No Harm*.¹⁵ To this she adds a theory of gift giving in the service of a kind of mutual gratitude that arises out of bringing now seen identities into dialogue through Ricoeur’s hermeneutic of recognition.

To my mind, Helsel’s work represents on a secondary level a key shift in the way the field of homiletics uses the work of Paul Ricoeur. Ricoeur’s writing has until now been influential on preaching through his work on metaphor, the hermeneutics of suspicion, the surplus of meaning, the dialectic of understanding and explanation, and in narrative—in short, through his hermeneutics of texts. While this influence has been far-reaching, with Helsel’s work, the interpretive wisdom of Ricoeur is brought to bear in a new way: not just texts, but with respect to identity—specifically, to the hermeneutics of the self. While this element is not necessarily new in Ricoeur’s work, Helsel’s use of it to identify the importance of recognition and identity in the preaching task in North American homiletics is new.¹⁶ Helsel’s work repositions the field of homiletics to use the Ricoeurian notion of recognition as means of broaching the role of identity in interpretation.¹⁷ Helsel’s insight is to bring a Ricoeurian hermeneutics of the self to the center of homiletical theory and in relation to the problem of white racism and white fragility. Her vision invites white preachers to bring identities, now “recognized,” into the interpretive ambit of white preaching as an expression of the very mutual gratitude toward which Ricoeur’s theory of recognition tends. Resistance to white racism finds in Ricoeur’s “course of recognition” an interpretive frame for doing identity work in white preaching.

At a key point in her argument, Helsel talks about receiving identity from others, which whiteness in its estranged form fails to do.¹⁸ As an antidote to this inability of whiteness, she

¹⁴ Carolyn Browning Helsel, “The Hermeneutics of Recognition: A Ricoeurian Interpretive Framework for Whites Preaching about Racism,” (PhD Diss., Emory University, 2014). An updated version of her work can be found in her recent publication, *Preaching about Racism: A Guide for Faith Leaders* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2018). I use her 2014 dissertation in this article because of the more detailed treatment of Ricoeur’s work that it offers.

¹⁵ Stephen Ray, *Do No Harm: Social Sin and Christian Responsibility* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002)

¹⁶ Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* (K. Blamey, Trans.; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

¹⁷ In fairness, Jake Myers in his book *Preaching Must Die* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2017) draws in part from Ricoeur’s *One as Another* in his chapter on identity. Beyond that, however, this stream of Ricoeur’s thought seems to have garnered scant attention apart from Helsel’s sustained work.

¹⁸ Helsel, “Hermeneutics of Recognition,” 153.

draws on the work of theologian J. Kameron Carter who shows how Maximus the Confessor offers a way of healing a form of uncritical, self-received identity by means of Christ's reopening of human nature both to God and itself.¹⁹ For Helsel's argument, what is at stake here is whites' inability to bring identity into a dialogical reality that can account for its transformation, especially in terms of an *unacknowledged* white identity that has a distorted sense, a self-received identity, and is thus reified by virtue of its power over others.

Part of the problem, with respect to the issue of narrative preaching in particular, is that narrative is employed in much of the preceding literature review as a focused means of making identity "recognizable," that is, standing in clear, co-constitutive relationship to biblical narratives and the church. There is a sense in its most conservative version that biblical narrative "forms" identity and in conformity with the church as a community of practice for whom that narrative particularly matters. What if, however, the unitary focus on identity and narrative within this tradition has been misplaced? What if the sole issue is not purely "recognizability" over against culture but "receivability" or *transformation* of identity as well? Canadian cultural critic Andrew Potter in the book *The Authenticity Hoax* has noted how a view of identity that gets stuck at the level of purely replicating a traditional identity cannot account for all that happens in the course of a living cultural identity. For Potter identity is not so much an inherited block as a living, tested, and thus transformed reality in relation to others.

A healthy culture is like a healthy person: it is constantly changing, growing, and evolving, yet something persists through these changes, a ballast that keeps it upright and recognizable no matter how much it is buffeted by the transformative winds of trade. In this sense, a culture is like a society's immune system. It works best when it is exposed to as many "foreign" bodies as possible.²⁰

The difference is that Potter describes this cultural engagement as a natural, dynamic metaphor of a healthy body. For Helsel, together with Carter and his reading of Maximus the Confessor, this dynamic openness of identity becomes a matter of theological import. Finding reconciliation through a more dynamic, dialogical identity is being rooted deeply in the Godness of God. Helsel quotes Carter favorably on this point:

In Christ, the gesture of ecstatic openness to God in human self-fulfillment, which is the gesture to receive oneself from God, is necessarily a gesture of openness to all created beings as revealing God. "To be" ecstatically is to receive oneself from other human beings precisely as the receiving of self from God. Hence, being named from God entails being named from other human beings. In undoing whiteness as a theological problem, Christ leads human nature out of this disposition.²¹

With Helsel's framework, I contend, it becomes possible to reconcile as well a Ricoeurian orientation to self with that of the text.

How does this happen? As Helsel herself notes, Ricoeur relates his recognition project in its second step, the shift from idem/recognition to ipse/self-recognition, to a narrative

¹⁹ J. Kameron Carter, *Race: A Theological Account* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 345-46.

²⁰ Andrew Potter, *The Authenticity Hoax* (New York: HarperCollins, 2010), 203.

²¹ Carter, *Race*, 353.

concordance of action *through memory and promise*.²² She notes how Ricoeur appeals here both to memory and promise; memory helps in the present to preserve the idem from the past while promise helps in the present with its future orientation that the self might keep to one's word and commitments (promise) despite change over the course of time.²³ It is here, moreover, where Ricoeur links narrative to promise. It is in narrating ourselves that the shift from idem/identity to ipse/identity *changes*, or is transformed. The course of recognition is here, at this moment, a narrative movement within identity *transformation* that renders persons responsible and capable of action. The transformation, moreover, is specifically related to the "other." Here we begin to cross over from the hermeneutics of text and the hermeneutics of self to the hermeneutics of *action*. That said, it is just as important to remember that the focus of a promise is not on an object, but to a *beneficiary*. Ricoeur ends by locating human promises within a framework of a linguistic past, and a giving of promises, by which our promising can endure, even as we acknowledge how promises can and do go awry. Yet even here the paradigmatic nature of the *divine* promise to Abraham represents just such an anchoring for our promise and action with respect to narrated identities.²⁴ To speak of promissory narration is more than Ricoeur's largely anthropological vision of memory and promise; it entails a God whose promises ground human ones.

Why does *narrative preaching* need such a Ricoeurian vision? When we preach, we engage narrative not merely to form the recognizable elements of identity, nor do we tell narratives, especially biblical ones, merely to evoke experiences already had. My view is that the interpretation of discursive narrative texts, juxtaposed with the recurring open vocative of the promise, helps bring identities in a course of recognition around the hermeneutical table of this text. In this way, promise helps narrative to dialogue with identity so that it is dynamic, fluid—better, recognizable and receivable in transformation. When preachers narrate, we do more than describe or even re-describe. Indeed, in promissory narration the voice of the promiser addresses the face of the ones promised such that the narrative offers more than a surplus of meaning, but a surfeit of gratitude in the mutual recognition of identities around the hermeneutical table.²⁵

Back to the Future: Toward a Hermeneutics of Narrative Text and Narrated Self through Promise

The impasse of liberal and postliberal modes of doing narrative preaching hinged on the questions of the relation of gospel to experience in liberal narrative homiletics and biblical narrative's identity-conferring, re-descriptive capacity for the church in postliberal homiletics. Early models of promissory narration, by contrast, sought either to develop a kind of grammar of promise in text and practice that bounded narrative or argued for a form of narration that also included a fundamental reworking of experience. Kay seems to have grasped that narrative and promise were more than means of policing a boundary to Christian faith, but itself offered a juxtaposed difference that interrupted a premature settling of identity in the name of a recognizable tradition. For Kay, the juxtaposition of narrative and promise opened the question

²² Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 109-134, esp. 127ff.

²³ Helsel, "Hermeneutics of Recognition," 198.

²⁴ Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 134.

²⁵ This joining of the two sides of Ricoeurian hermeneutics in connection with promise represents, to my mind, a fusion of the very possibilities inherent in struggles over narrative preaching with other-directed models of homiletical conversational, as in John McClure's *The Roundtable Pulpit* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995).

of narrated identity to the more contingent and contextual ways that promise addresses hearers beyond closed, self-contained narrative worlds.

What Helsel provides with her use of Ricoeur's *Course of Recognition*—and the way he links promise and narrative—is a way forward for a type of promissory narration capable of viewing identity as more than a static, recognizable essence. The promissory part, though rooted in the anthropological possibility of self-narration in Ricoeur, is grounded in the promises of which we ourselves are beneficiaries. The promise of promissory narration in this configuration does not simply inhere in the narrative itself as one more narrative feature but represents a juxtaposed theological and anthropological means of address and self-involvement by which identity is transformed from the recognizable to the faithful in praxis.

The notion of change and transformation in identity from idem to ipse to gratitude in mutual recognition makes Ricoeur's *Course of Recognition* powerful for dealing with white racism in Helsel's incisive project. With Helsel's work, it may now be possible to envision a form of narrative preaching that does more than bring out some already resident experience of gospel or conforms to some textually self-contained notion of identity, but actually narrates discursively—even as it is juxtaposed with a vocative, identity-altering promise—that interrupts attempts to bracket racialized others, as white fragility often does, with a profound promissory-narrated openness to the world. Richard Lischer once argued that eschatology and the resurrection of the crucified One place a slash across all of our overly self-enclosed, finished narratives.²⁶ Within the arc of Ricoeur's hermeneutics of the text and hermeneutics of the self, there may just be space for promissory narration to help narrative preaching open itself more profoundly to others in gratitude: by means of promise and through the course of recognition.

²⁶ Richard Lischer, "The Limits of Story," in *Interpretation* 38:1 (January, 1984), 37-38. Lischer here speaks specifically of history, but it strikes me that it impacts preachers' own narrative-making capacities generally, even as we faithfully reactivate scriptural narratives in our sermons.

Standing in the Breach: Conflict Transformation and the Practice of Preaching

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Abstract: *In an era of social and political polarization, the question of how to preach amid divided communities looms large. The field of conflict transformation, which emerged as a corrective to earlier conflict resolution and management models, offers new insight into how conflict might serve as a constructive catalyst for change. Conflict transformation provides perspectives and orientations to conflict that are useful to homiletics—but which also challenge assumptions about conflict that are present in the church and in the larger society. This essay introduces secular and Christian approaches to conflict transformation and analyzes some of their implications for preaching, including the claims that conflict is not sinful and could be a way in which God is acting in the world, that conflict transformation requires broad participation and not top-down solutions, and that restoration of right relationships can be more important to conflict transformation than coming to agreement.*

Just before Christmas in 2016, M. Craig Barnes penned a column titled “Why I worry about the pastors of politically divided churches.” In light of the political and social schisms laid bare by the 2016 election, Barnes wrote, “The pastor stands in the pulpit struggling to say something that’s both unifying and prophetic. It’s easy to gloss over the divisive issues of a congregation with a declaration about spiritual unity, and it’s easy to make a congregation afraid of the ‘them’ who are to blame for our problems. But it’s very difficult to preach to a divided ‘us.’”¹

Barnes’ column was one of many pieces on the challenges of preaching that were published following the election of Donald Trump. An Episcopal priest in Greensboro, NC, wrote a column for *Slate* about the tribulations of writing his first sermon after the election.² In his piece in the *Journal for Preachers*, “Renounce, Resist, Rejoice: Easter Preaching in the Age of Trump,” Michael Coffey began, “The task of preaching, at least in my lifetime, has never felt more challenging, profound, and necessary as it does now in the age of Trump.”³ At least three related books have also been published: O. Wesley Allen, Jr.’s *Preaching in the Era of Trump* and Frank A. Thomas’ *How to Preach a Dangerous Sermon*, and Leah Schade’s *Preaching in the Purple Zone: Ministry in the Red/Blue Divide*.⁴

¹ M. Craig Barnes, “Why I Worry about the Pastors of Politically Divided Churches,” *The Christian Century*, December 20, 2016, accessed February 4, 2017, <https://www.christiancentury.org/article/why-i-worry-about-pastors-politically-divided-churches>.

² Bernard J. Owens, “Light of the World: Writing My First Sermon for the Age of Trump,” *Slate*, February 1, 2017, accessed February 4, 2017, http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/faithbased/2017/02/an_episcopal_priest_on_writing_his_first_sermon_of_the_trump_presidency.html.

³ Michael Coffey, “Renounce, Resist, Rejoice: Easter Preaching in the Age of Trump,” *Journal for Preachers* 41, no. 3 (2018): 3–9.

⁴ O. Wesley Allen, Jr., *Preaching in the Era of Trump* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2017); Frank A. Thomas, *How to Preach a Dangerous Sermon* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2018); Leah D. Schade, *Preaching in the Purple Zone: Ministry in the Red-Blue Divide* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2018). Allen more specifically addresses social division wrought by the 2016 election, while Thomas takes a broader view of prophetic and moral

The political and social polarization that has pushed dramatically to the center of life in the United States has not made things easy for pastors and preachers, especially those ministering to divided communities or who feel at odds with their congregations. But preaching in the midst of conflicted or divided communities—or preaching about controversial topics—has never been simple. The 2004 *Listening to Listeners* study of preaching found that “The vast majority of listeners...give strong authorization for preaching related to controversial issues and reveal a very strong desire for their pastors to preach more often about difficult matters of life and faith.”⁵ However, one of the study’s advisory board members, Lee Ramsey, acknowledged that many preachers “simply do not accept this [finding about preaching and conflict] as true.” Ramsey theorized that pastors reject the finding for reasons including a fear of conflict, an unwillingness to engage controversial concerns from the pulpit, and the desire to be liked.⁶ Leonora Tubbs Tisdale offers similar reasons preachers avoid or fear becoming “prophetic witnesses”⁷: fear of conflict, fear of dividing a congregation, fear of being disliked or rejected, and feelings of inadequacy in addressing prophetic concerns.⁸

Few homiletic resources urge preachers to eschew difficult topics in sermons; there seems to be general agreement that preachers have a responsibility to address pressing issues of the day in light of the gospel, divisive or not. Oddly, though, few homiletic resources directly assess the dynamics of conflict in relationship to preaching—or how unexamined beliefs about conflict may be connected to our preaching pitfalls.⁹

This essay proposes engaging *conflict transformation* as a resource for homiletics. Within the larger field of conflict resolution and peacebuilding, conflict transformation is a re-assessment of the values and assumptions we bring to conflict, and of the effects those assumptions have on conflict goals and outcomes. From a theological perspective, conflict transformation claims that Christian orientations to conflict are underdeveloped and in need of deeper reflection and understanding in order to be effective and faithful. Conflict transformation examines the nature of conflict itself, as well as how we respond to it practically, theologically, and homiletically. In this essay I give an overview of conflict transformation, highlighting specific insights from Christian scholars and practitioners, and suggest implications of these for preaching.

The Emergence of Conflict Transformation

The field of conflict resolution began in the 1950s and 1960s as an approach to conflict rooted in processes of diplomacy, dialogue, and problem-solving that would end conflict and

preaching in light of racism, white supremacy, inequality, and other realities that led in part to Trump’s popularity. Schade is focused on churches that are divided socially and politically, especially over controversial justice issues.

⁵ Mary Alice Mulligan et al., *Believing in Preaching: What Listeners Hear in Sermons* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2003), 92.

⁶ Ronald J. Allen and Mary Alice Mulligan, “Listening to Listeners: Five Years Later,” *Homiletic* 34, no. 2 (January 1, 2009): 8–9, note 6.

⁷ Tisdale describes prophetic preaching as “challenging the status quo” and “concerned with the evils and shortcomings of the present social order”; requiring the preacher to “name both what is not of God in the world (criticizing) and the new reality God will bring to pass in the future (energizing)”; and inciting courage in the hearers, empowering them to “work to change the social order.” Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, *Prophetic Preaching: A Pastoral Approach* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 10.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 13–19.

⁹ Stephen Farris noted that despite a wealth of publications about *church* conflict, he was aware of only one book on *preaching* in situations of conflict William Willimon’s *Preaching about Conflict in the Local Church* (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Press, 1987). Stephen C. Farris, “Preaching for a Church in Conflict,” in *The Folly of Preaching: Models and Methods*, ed. Michael Knowles (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 140–153.

restore relationships.¹⁰ Over the years, models of conflict “resolution” and “management” focused on the fundamental needs of the parties involved, and tended to prioritize control, containment and settlement of disputes. In recent decades, scholars and practitioners have criticized such models for their perceived lack of attention to power imbalances and structural injustices.¹¹ Among other things, these scholars argued, focusing on negotiating immediate needs left underlying systemic and relational patterns unaddressed.¹²

As a result of these and other concerns, a new approach, conflict *transformation*, began to develop.¹³ Conflict transformation scholars note that conflicts are not discrete, isolated events between parties but are embedded in relational systems, patterns of engagement, and social structures.¹⁴ As a corrective to previous models, transformational approaches more explicitly take into account contextual realities, with an eye toward addressing asymmetrical power imbalances and injustice. Conflict transformation is thus “a process of engaging with and transforming the relationships, interests, discourses, and, if necessary, the very constitution of society that supports the continuation of violent conflict.”¹⁵

Where earlier models understood conflict to be both intrinsically negative and preventable, conflict transformation scholars consider conflict a natural part of life in human society—an inevitable result of differences of culture, belief, and experience that in proximity produce tension.¹⁶ Conflict itself simply *is*; it is part of human existence. But our responses to it can be constructive or destructive.¹⁷ In this light, conflict need not be a force to be feared and controlled, but can be “a *positive force* to be embraced and harnessed for its potential to ‘open the door’ [to] genuinely meaningful outcomes and real closure, and—equally or more important—restoration of the parties’ sense of both strength and connection.”¹⁸ Conflict can be seen as a “necessary element in transformative human construction and reconstruction of social organization and realities,”¹⁹ and thus “a vital agent or catalyst for change.”²⁰ The ebb and flow of conflict can bring “life-giving opportunities for creating constructive change processes that reduce violence, increase justice in direct and social structures, and respond to real-life problems in human relationships.”²¹

¹⁰ Diana Francis, *People, Peace and Power: Conflict Transformation in Action* (Sterling, VA: Pluto Press, 2002), 6.

¹¹ Carolyn Schrock-Shenk, “Introducing Conflict and Conflict Transformation,” in *Making Peace With Conflict: Practical Skills for Conflict Transformation*, ed. Carolyn Schrock-Shenk and Lawrence Ressler (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1999), 35.

¹² Ellen Ott Marshall, ed., “Introduction: Learning Through Conflict, Working for Transformation,” in *Conflict Transformation and Religion: Essays on Faith, Power, and Relationship* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016), 2.

¹³ I am indebted here to Ellen Ott Marshall’s synthesis (Ibid., 3–6.)

¹⁴ Ibid., 4.

¹⁵ Hugh Miall, “Conflict Transformation: A Multi-Dimensional Task,” in *Transforming Ethnopolitical Conflict: The Berghof Handbook*, ed. Alex Austin, Martina Fischer, and Norbert Ropers (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag, 2004), 3–4, accessed April 4, 2017, http://edoc.vifapol.de/opus/volltexte/2013/4682/pdf/miall_handbook.pdf.

¹⁶ Thomas W. Porter, *The Spirit and Art of Conflict Transformation: Creating a Culture of Justpeace* (Nashville, TN: Upper Room, 2010), 13.

¹⁷ Schrock-Shenk, “Introducing Conflict,” 30–31.

¹⁸ Robert A. Baruch Bush and Joseph P. Folger, *Promise of Mediation: The Transformative Approach to Conflict* (San Francisco: Wiley, 2005), 256.

¹⁹ John Paul Lederach, *Preparing for Peace: Conflict Transformation Across Cultures* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1995), 17.

²⁰ Miall, “Conflict Transformation: A Multi-Dimensional Task,” 4.

²¹ John Paul Lederach, *Little Book of Conflict Transformation: Clear Articulation of the Guiding Principles by a Pioneer in the Field* (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2003), 14.

While conflict transformation doesn't sideline resolution of the presenting conflict, it emphasizes relational connection as an intrinsic part of lasting solutions and social change.²² Practitioners note, for example, that settlements negotiated externally by third parties are less likely to create durable peace because the groups directly involved have little buy-in and there is no mechanism by which to speak truthfully about wrongdoing or to work toward healed relationships.²³ For systemic and structural change to take hold, participants across various levels of society, from high-level leaders to grassroots activists, need access to the process and its outcomes. Isolated, high-level negotiating processes, along with lack of attention to middle and bottom-up expertise and involvement, leave parties in conflict without sustainable agreements.²⁴ Conflict transformation, by contrast, emphasizes multilayered processes that work toward positive change in the relationships among all who are affected.

Christian Perspectives on Conflict Transformation

Christians who work in conflict transformation have put these theories into conversation with the life of the church. Paralleling the secular belief that conflict is always negative, Christian scholars note that one of the primary *theological* barriers to conflict transformation is the presumption that conflict is sinful. "There tends to be a common and rather strong perspective within Christian circles that conflict represents the presence of sin," says Mennonite scholar John Paul Lederach.²⁵ One reason for this perspective is that conflict is often difficult and painful. "Conflict... is rarely neat and nice or full of warm, fuzzy feelings. There is much about conflict that is just plain messy, chaotic, and anxiety-filled," writes Carolyn Schrock-Shenk. "Often the presence of these reactions has led us to believe conflict is negative precisely because it gives rise to such feelings."²⁶ Rather than acknowledging these feelings as normal and focusing on responding to them in positive ways, we have "determined that their existence means God is neither present nor pleased when there is conflict."²⁷ Christian conflict transformation scholars reject this negative theological interpretation of conflict, saying:

God created this world with no two snowflakes alike and no two human beings alike. Everyone is unique. God adds to this incredible world of difference the freedom to make choices. Then God puts us all into relationship with one another. We are all interconnected, interdependent. What arises naturally from this reality? Yes, conflict! It is part of the created order which God declares "very good...."²⁸

Not only is conflict imbedded in a diverse creation, claim scholars, but *constructive* conflict can be a way God is active in the world. Opposition to injustice, oppression, and evil always involves conflict, and conflict can be a source of energy to change patterns, structures,

²² Stephen W. Littlejohn and Kathy Domenici, *Communication, Conflict, and the Management of Difference* (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 2007), 243–244.

²³ Francis, *People, Peace and Power*, 39–40.

²⁴ John Paul Lederach, "Journey from Resolution to Transformative Peacebuilding," in *From the Ground Up: Mennonite Contributions to International Peacebuilding*, ed. Cynthia Sampson and John Paul Lederach (Oxford University Press, 2000), 52.

²⁵ John Paul Lederach, *Reconcile: Conflict Transformation for Ordinary Christians* (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2014), 67.

²⁶ Schrock-Shenk, "Introducing Conflict," 33.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 33–34.

²⁸ Porter, *The Spirit and Art of Conflict Transformation*, 14.

and people toward right relations and *shalom*.²⁹ Conflict also has the potential to open us to new truth and understanding: “We can begin to understand conflict settings as holy ground, as places where God is present in powerful ways, as opportunities to gain new insight and understanding. Imagine how different our conflicts would be if we could move from an ‘Oh dear, how terrible’ to ‘What is God trying to say to us?’”³⁰ Dealing with conflict can bring out and develop spiritual gifts, such as vulnerability, openness, compassion, and humility. It can even foster experiences of the presence and participation of God: “Conflict can help me understand, like nothing else, my dependence upon something beyond myself, and my interdependence with others—in short, my need for assistance from God and neighbor. . . . The more I work with conflict the more I am aware that this is where God is most fully present.”³¹

Preaching Conflict Transformation

Across multiple frameworks and situations from workplace mediation to international warfare, conflict transformation advocates claim that conflict is normal and inevitable, that conflict holds constructive possibilities for change, that conflict is embedded in systems and contexts, and that key to conflict’s transformation is the restoration of just and whole relationships among those involved. These convictions emerged as correctives and challenges to existing values and practices in the larger field of conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

Similar assessment is needed throughout the church. “In the absence of intentional learning, we [in the church] have picked up society’s ‘fight, flee or sue’ responses to conflict,” writes Schrock-Shenk. “We have seldom been taught how to be proactive in conflict and to understand that conflict transformation is a deeply spiritual task that demands commitment, discipline, new skills, much practice, and constant vigilance from each of us.”³² Putting conflict transformation into conversation with homiletics prompts rethinking and reimagining about the values and objectives we bring to preaching in situations of conflict. Three assertions from conflict transformation have particular implications for homiletical (and possibly ecclesial) approaches to conflict: 1) that conflict itself is not intrinsically sinful or destructive (but that our response to it matters); 2) that effective and lasting peacebuilding requires broad participation in its creation and implementation; and 3) that the quality of relationships, not settlement or resolution *per se*, should be prioritized in conflict interaction.

1. “Be angry, but do not sin...” (Ephesians 4:26)

Of all of the challenges conflict transformation poses to church norms, the idea that conflict could be a *good* thing—or at the very least is not always bad—might be the most difficult for us in the church to swallow. In his book *Reconcile*, Lederach composed a mostly tongue-in-cheek list of “unspoken commandments” for churches in conflict. It includes items like “Thou shalt be nice,” “Thou shalt not listen to thine enemy but shalt prepare thy defense while the enemy is still speaking,” and “Speak not with contentious folk who disagree with thee . . . [but] seek out and talk to others about them.”³³ The list pokes fun at church behavior, but

²⁹ Ibid. Marshall notes that practitioners are not claiming that everything we tend to *associate* with conflict—such as violence and war—is natural and necessary; they are saying that conflict itself is unavoidable, and “how we respond to these moments and circumstances of conflict warrants moral assessment and action” (Ellen Ott Marshall, “Conflict, God and Constructive Change: Exploring Prominent Christian Convictions in the Work of Conflict Transformation,” *Brethren Life and Thought* 61, no. 2 (Fall 2016): 2–3.).

³⁰ Schrock-Shenk, “Introducing Conflict,” 34.

³¹ Porter, *The Spirit and Art of Conflict Transformation*, 17.

³² Schrock-Shenk, “Introducing Conflict,” 34.

³³ Lederach, *Reconcile*, 144–145.

Lederach's larger concern is that "Too often we adjust our theology to match what we actually do," rather than the reverse.³⁴ Christian conflict transformation theorists and practitioners press the church and its leaders to ask more deliberately what we believe about conflict, and what is driving that belief. Ellen Ott Marshall writes, "For Christians involved in this work, theology informs *and is informed by* the study and practice of conflict transformation," including "critical examination of theological convictions that discourage Christians from addressing conflict."³⁵

For preachers who are considering how to address conflict situations, the idea that conflict might be something other than destructive or sinful provides a catalyst for more fully considering what we believe about the purpose and potential of conflict in a diverse world. Perhaps in our unexamined impulse to bring tensions to a close, we offer simplistic views of beatific unity in Christ without seriously considering power dynamics or historical oppression that have caused rents in ecclesial fabric. Maybe our dislike of conflict and the assumption that it results from sin has led to silencing or avoiding situations that needed to be named or changed.

Ephesians 4:26 suggests that anger is not the same as sin—and that some things are worth being angry about. How we deal with our anger and how we respond when there is brokenness between us are deep matters of faith. Lederach writes that signs of sin entering conflict appear "...when we want to be God, when we assume superiority, when we oppress, when we try to lord it over others, when we refuse to listen, when we discount and exclude others, when we hold back deep feelings, when we avoid, when we hate, and when we project blame with no self-reflection."³⁶ Most preachers would easily agree that hate, exclusion, and oppression have no place in a sermon. But it might be harder to accept the idea that it is sin to avoid or to hold back deep feelings, or to assert certain kinds of authority in conflict. Can we let go of our earnest desires—and temptations—to provide answers, to say just the right thing, to render a holy verdict, to sound wise and "prophetic"? As Schrock-Shenk writes, "The measure for whether a response is constructive is not whether conflict lessens. Rather, the criteria are whether the response moves the situation toward more justice *and* the people involved toward right and equal relationships."³⁷ Could we endeavor in our sermons to model the open, collaborative, and constructive responses to conflict that we want to see throughout the life of the church?

2. "The members of the body that seem weaker are indispensable..." (1 Corinthians 12:22)

The interconnectedness of the body of Christ that Paul describes, where all are members one of another, correlates to a major premise of conflict transformation: conflict situations are not isolated incidents but are interconnected with systems and structures across all levels of society. They are not easily resolved with "imposed" solutions from the top down or from the outside in; they require engagement with the context and norms of the situation, and must empower the people themselves to have a voice in solutions. As Diana Francis puts it, "To work for conflict transformation at any level... involves ensuring that those who have been the subjects of structures of domination discover and develop the power to participate in what affects them."³⁸

Peacebuilder Ron Kraybill distinguishes between models of *arbitration*, in which a third party listens to both sides and pronounces a solution, and *mediation*, in which a facilitator helps the parties themselves express to each other the nature of their conflict and make decisions about

³⁴ Ibid., 146.

³⁵ Marshall, "Conflict, God and Constructive Change," 3.

³⁶ Lederach, *Reconcile*, 67–68.

³⁷ Schrock-Shenk, "Introducing Conflict," 31. Emphasis mine.

³⁸ Francis, *People, Peace and Power*, 8.

how to proceed.³⁹ Kraybill acknowledges that arbitration has its place, but contends that truly transformative mediation empowers the people involved, encouraging them to take responsibility, fostering in them a greater sense of investment, and reducing their dependence on others—all of which are “more likely to resolve the specific conflict since both parties have a say in the solution.”⁴⁰ Using a slightly different frame, Lederach delineates *nonviolent advocacy*, in which advocates argue for one side for the purpose of justice, and *mediation*, in which the mediator stays connected to both sides *also* for the purpose of justice. At issue is ensuring that the needs and interests of those affected by conflict are legitimated and articulated (which often happens through advocacy), in order to restructure relationships toward increased equality, justice, and mutually acceptable solutions (often through mediation).⁴¹ These activities “overlap, complement, and, more importantly, are mutually supportive and dependent.”⁴² *Both* are needed in the transformation of conflict, and *both* are aimed at bringing all necessary voices to the table. In different ways, Kraybill and Lederach affirm each of these roles while making strong cases for the long-term benefits and durable change that emerges from conflict transformation approaches.

As preachers assess how to address conflict in a sermon, they might discern between the roles of *advocate* (articulating needs and interests of one side, most often those who are unheard, forgotten, or powerless), *arbitrator* (pronouncing a verdict as a third party), or *mediator* (working to restructure relationships by empowering the parties toward conflict transformation). In so doing, preachers need to consider how they understand their relationship to the congregation. Literature on prophetic preaching in particular seems to set the preacher *over against* the congregation by framing how to preach *to* a divided America, how to preach prophetically *to* hearers, how to prepare a dangerous sermon *for* the people. But the *Listening to Listeners* study showed that in situations of controversy, listeners were not generally interested in getting “answers” from the pulpit. Instead, they showed a “longing for an authentic word from preachers who are willing to risk and join with others in the difficult task of understanding God’s way amid life’s challenges and crises.”⁴³

Conflict transformation offers preachers a way to think about their role in new ways. In conflict transformation, the attention is not on the mediator but is focused on the parties in conflict as the primary problem-solvers—and problem *describers*. “Transformative mediators concentrate on empowering parties to define issues and decide settlement terms for themselves, and on helping parties to better understand one another’s perspectives,” write Robert Bush and Joseph Folger.⁴⁴ Conflict transformation reflects the conviction that parties *themselves* have the capacity and desire to move toward constructive interaction and to find solutions together. Further, the experience of greater clarity, confidence, openness and understanding on their own terms is “likely to have more meaning and significance for parties than outcomes generated by mediator directiveness, however well-meant.”⁴⁵ Understood in this way, conflict transformation

³⁹ Ronald S. Kraybill, *Peace Skills: A Manual for Community Mediators* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001), 26.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 26–27.

⁴¹ Lederach, *Preparing for Peace*, 14–15.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 14.

⁴³ Mulligan et al., *Believing in Preaching*, 91–92. Rather than telling them what to think, parishioners hoped preachers would help them learn how “to think through issues” with the eyes of faith (*Ibid.*, 98.). In fact, listeners “rarely express a desire to hear their pastor or preacher represent a particular viewpoint when speaking about controversial or challenging issues” (*Ibid.*, 97.).

⁴⁴ Bush and Folger, *The Promise of Mediation*, 35.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 70–72. It is important to note that the conversational preaching models I describe do not imagine the preacher simply facilitating the process for others, but as a participant in the conversation and interpretation. Still, emphasis on the empowerment and capacity of the parties involved seems worthy of consideration, and echoes homiletical inductive methods.

aligns with some conversational approaches to preaching, not only because such approaches emphasize the inclusion of multiple voices, but because they “share a commitment to empower a genuine sense of shared responsibility for the preaching and worship of the church among those gathered.”⁴⁶ For example, Lucy Rose has critiqued models of preaching that distance the preacher from the congregation, instead claiming from her experience of connection and solidarity that “the preacher and the congregation are not separate entities but a community of faith.”⁴⁷ She rejects the idea that the preacher has a message for the hearer in the pew to receive, and sees the pastor and congregation as interdependent and joining in common discipleship.⁴⁸ John McClure emphasizes collaborative pastoral leadership that empowers congregations, and proposes a related preaching method in which the actual conversations of the congregation become the substance of the sermon.⁴⁹ These conversational approaches are not simply means to a sermonic end or hospitable orientations to communal congregational faith development. Proponents argue that these are the ways in which the community members—including the preacher—*together* come to know and hear the Word of God. For Rose and McClure (and others), it is within and through the community that the Word of God is *revealed*—not descending from on high, but emerging between and among the members of community *in their interactions with each other*.

These parallels between conflict transformation and conversational preaching can be interpreted in different ways. An initial assessment might see conversational approaches to preaching as providing helpful *methods* for dealing with conflict situations in congregations or for attending to controversial issues in ways that allow for the voices of the congregation to be heard. But a more challenging possibility also exists: might the critiques conversational preaching makes about homiletics, and the critiques conflict transformation makes within conflict theory, be signs that comparable problems of power and authority plague both fields and require greater attention and reevaluation?

3. “First be reconciled to your brother or sister...” (Matthew 5:24)

One of conflict transformation’s most significant shifts from the rest of the conflict field is its focus on constructive interaction and relationship between parties *as a goal*. Marshall writes, “Resolution of particular issues may indeed be part of the process, but transformation pushes for ‘deep-rooted, enduring, positive change in individuals, relationships, and the structures of the human community.’”⁵⁰ As conflict escalates, it generates a sense of weakness and incapacity among those involved, and parties become more self-protective, suspicious, hostile, and closed. “With or without the achievement of agreement,” Bush and Folger write, “the help parties most want, in all types of conflict, involves helping them end the vicious circle of disempowerment, disconnection, and demonization—alienation from both self and other.”⁵¹ In the end, the deep

⁴⁶ David J. Lose, “Preaching as Conversation,” in *Under the Oak Tree: The Church as Community of Conversation in a Conflicted and Pluralistic World*, ed. Ronald J. Allen, John S. McClure, and O. Wesley Allen (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013), 72.

⁴⁷ Lucy Atkinson Rose, *Sharing the Word: Preaching in the Roundtable Church* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 89.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 90.

⁴⁹ John S. McClure, *Roundtable Pulpit: Where Leadership and Preaching Meet* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995), 50.

⁵⁰ Marshall, “Introduction: Learning Through Conflict, Working for Transformation,” 5. Marshall quotes Kraybill, *Peace Skills*, 5.

⁵¹ Bush and Folger, *The Promise of Mediation*, 52–53.

desire of those in conflict is to reestablish positive interaction and to feel competent and connected again; this is what conflict transformation seeks to achieve.

Christian conflict transformation theorists and practitioners offer theological backing to this perspective. Schrock-Shenk points to intrinsic human interconnectedness, noting, “We were created to be connected, both with God and with each other. We fear losing that connection when conflict bursts into our lives.”⁵² While conflict can lead to pain, violence, and disconnection, she continues, *constructive* conflict “can bring surprising new growth and intimacy and understanding to our relationships.”⁵³ Porter suggests that working through conflict is a way to know God better, as well. He asks, “What if we believed that the ‘enemy’ was an opportunity to see ourselves, our world, and even our God in new ways? This belief would significantly change the way we approach conflict.”⁵⁴ Participants in conflict transformation have experienced deep spiritual and relational growth that occurs through the cultivation of vulnerability, humility, compassion, and honesty needed to truly engage those on the “other side.” Some describe conflict as opening holy ground or a holy path, creating an opportunity for revelation, encounter, and transformation with God and other people. In other words, as conflict transformation focuses on the rebuilding of the relationship between the parties—including the restoration of their sense of strength and empowerment—it carries with it other outcomes that feel transformational and even revelatory beyond the conflict situation itself.

Christian theorists frequently turn to language of *reconciliation* as theological grounding. “Reconciliation is about the transformation of people and their relationships,” writes Lederach. “It means change, moving from isolation, distance, pain and fear toward restoration, understanding, and growth. As shown often in the Bible story, the basic purpose of God acting in history is reconciliation.”⁵⁵ Homiletician Richard Lischer also sees reconciliation as the *missio Dei*: “The mystery of God, captured in a message about what God has done, is now entrusted to us. And what God has done, on both a macro- and a microcosmic scale, is reconciliation.”⁵⁶ For Lischer, that reconciliation is the focus of God’s action and purpose means that it should also be the impulse of preaching. His blunt question, then, is also the question around which this essay has been dancing: “How can our sermons participate in God’s big plan? How can they rightfully become instruments of reconciliation?”⁵⁷ This is not a typical question for homileticians, who more frequently discuss the theology of proclamation or persuasion, the dynamics of heralding the Word of God, or the importance of giving testimony. Yet Lischer’s question is especially significant when we find ourselves at a loss preaching to congregations in crisis and conflict. We can ask, *how can sermons rightly become instruments of reconciliation?* But conflict transformation asks in response: *What do proclamation, persuasion, heralding, and giving one-sided testimony do to and for people in conflict? Are they able to bring about reconciliation and transformation?* Precisely these kinds of concerns led to the emergence of conflict transformation within the field of peacebuilding.

In answering his own question, Lischer critiques the argumentative rhetorical tradition of which preaching is heir, and points somewhat unenthusiastically to alternative models (narrative, inductive, and even conversational preaching).⁵⁸ But for Lischer, it is not the form of the sermon

⁵² Schrock-Shenk, “Introducing Conflict,” 27.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Porter, *The Spirit and Art of Conflict Transformation*, 17.

⁵⁵ Lederach, *Reconcile*, 104.

⁵⁶ Richard Lischer, *The End of Words: The Language of Reconciliation in a Culture of Violence*, The Lyman Beecher lectures in preaching (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 133.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 134.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 154–155, 158.

but the preacher’s “constancy of vision” for reconciliation with enemies that matters most.⁵⁹ This constancy of vision is other-oriented, continually seeking to understand and embrace the other and to keep doors open for an unknown future together.⁶⁰ The idea that our orientation to conflict matters is also a conviction of conflict transformation practitioners. Schrock-Shenk states that our capacity to work through conflict constructively has much to do with our attitude. “How we view and feel about the self, the other, conflict, truth and even God often determines how we work with conflict,” she writes.⁶¹ More profoundly, Lederach argues that the moral imagination needed to truly transcend conflict “bursts forth as part of a life journey that cares about the nature and quality of our relationships and communities and about how we move from relationships defined by division and fear toward those characterized by respect and love.”⁶² “Solutions” to conflict are not a matter of resigned settlement or tacit agreement, but are about transforming the quality of the relationship and *even the people themselves* so that their *desire for* and *commitment to* right, just, and loving relationship is itself a hoped-for outcome.

In *The Promise of Mediation: The Transformative Approach to Conflict*, Robert Bush and Joseph Folger called on their colleagues to assess the values that underlie mediation practices for conflict. “An understanding of one’s goal for the process—one’s purpose for interacting with disputing parties—is essential for understanding what a mediator can and should do during a mediation session,” they wrote, because “purpose drives practice.”⁶³ Conflict transformation is the result of scholars across the field seeking to clarify the values and goals of their work, and to make corrections where values, goals, and practices have been misaligned or at cross purposes.

The purpose and practice of preaching has long been debated, and there is not a single, uniform answer to the question of what preaching should be and do. But for preachers who seek to preach amid conflict, Lischer’s question, *How can sermons rightly become instruments of reconciliation?* is given new import in conversation with conflict transformation. As Lischer notes, “Preachers have a lot to learn about reconciliation from people who practice it on the ground.”⁶⁴ At a minimum, conflict transformation suggests that many of the theological and practical assumptions we bring to conflict need re-examination. Our homiletical models and methods and even our beliefs about what preaching does and should do might actually work *against* true transformation of conflict, even if reconciliation is our aim. Lischer writes that “In the end, the preacher strives to make the language of the sermon true to its subject by deploying words in such a way that they are consistent with the ministry of reconciliation.”⁶⁵ But “deploying words”—if done by only one voice, or from the belief that conflict is a problem to be remedied, or without interaction of the parties, or with an unexamined desire to skip ahead to resolution—may be from the get-go inconsistent with a ministry of transformative reconciliation. Conflict transformation pushes homiletics to examine again how our purposes drive our practice, and whether or not our preaching amid conflict accomplishes what we say we want it to.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 158–159.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 160.

⁶¹ Schrock-Shenk, “Introducing Conflict,” 28–29.

⁶² Lederach, *The Moral Imagination*, 176.

⁶³ Bush and Folger, *The Promise of Mediation*, 119.

⁶⁴ Lischer, *The End of Words*, 151.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 158.

John A. Davies. *Lift Up Your Heads: Nonverbal Communication and Related Body Imagery in the Bible*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2018. 152 pages. \$26.

The body can communicate “status, relationships, attitudes, emotions, intentions” and more, both by itself and in conjunction with speech (1). Biblical writers exhibit an awareness of this contribution of the body in communication, including copious references to the body and its members, to provide and clarify meaning. John A. Davies notes, however, that when seeking help from biblical commentaries to understand the meaning of a movement, gesture, posture, or metaphorical idiom that references the body or its members, the reader is often left wanting. Davies brings together biblical and extrabiblical references to similar movements in ancient contexts of close “geographical proximity, hegemony, and linguistic milieu”—iconography from ancient Western Asia and the Mediterranean, and movements from modern-day Western Asia (in which one may cautiously note some possible continuity with the ancient world)—to begin filling this gap and to encourage further reflection and research (12). His work is intended to be “accessible to the general reader” and keeps references to Hebrew and Greek to a minimum in the main text, while ensuring that the footnotes are adequate for those wanting to dig deeper (14).

Davies limits his focus to “conventional and stylized” movements that are meaningful in multiple contexts, including movements in which clothes or props function as an extension of the body (2). Every page is covered with biblical references in which each movement is found. Of particular interest might be the attention given to how translations handle these movements. For instance, Davies notes where translations tone down physical movement (lit. “fall on their face” becomes “bow down” [1 Cor 14:25]), and where the reader might fail to recognize physical movement (Pharisees’ “elaborate greetings in the marketplaces” [Matt 23:7] are said to involve lengthy physical displays of deference) (78). He also points to translations that provide an interpretation of the movement with or in place of the movement (lit.: “who will shake [the head] at you” becomes “who will bemoan you” [Jer 15:5]) (21–2).

Chapters are organized according to the body part mentioned, starting with “The Head.” Raising the head, readers are told, can signal “joyful confidence” or “proud exaltation,” lowering the head indicates “shame or grief,” nodding the head points to “assent or signal to proceed,” and shaking the head from side to side suggests “sympathetic grief” or “derision” (21–2). Specifics involving ears, forehead, mouth, hair, nose, and more are also included. A full chapter is devoted to “The Eyes” because of their expansive use in communication. Since regular eye contact in conversation is customary, the reader is told to interpret explicit mention of eye contact as “reinforcing” the communication in some way (“But Jesus looked at them and said, ‘For mortals it is impossible, but for God all things are possible’ [Mark 10:27]) (57). Other points of discussion include the meanings of particular attitudes and emotions manifested in the eyes.

“The Neck, Torso and Whole Body” chapter reveals that the neck can “stand for the whole person,” represent “the vulnerability of human life,” and is often translated as “soul” (68). While discussing the chest, Davies notes that in Luke’s crucifixion account, it often goes unnoticed that the crowds “beat their breasts” on their way home. This communicates “humiliation and mourning” and, as a gesture associated with women, is notable here for its attribution to men (71–2). Loins, bowing, kneeling, prostration, and more are also given attention. “The Arms and Hands” states that while the right hand is associated with traits such as power and honor, the left is associated with their opposites. It is thus significant that Jesus says in Matt 25:33–34 that “sheep” will be directed to his right hand and “goats” to his left (100). Hand signals, reaching, touching, holding and more are also discussed. In “The Legs and Feet”

readers see that reference to “standing still” indicates the “heightened significance of any following action” and specifically shows respect for the dead (134). Knees, the feet and footwear, walking and running, and more are also addressed.

Lift Up Your Heads serves as a welcome resource to introduce readers to the richness of meaning communicated nonverbally in the Bible. The book reveals the ubiquity of nonverbal communication such that its presence can no longer be passed over or seen as inconsequential for understanding. I was left desiring more sustained attention to particular texts and a more rigorous discussion of the implications of this recognition of reading bodies as vital for faithful interpretation. Behold, Davies achieved what he set out to do! He hoped to “stimulate further reflection” (152) and he certainly has accomplished his goal for this reader of the Bible.

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Ahmi Lee. *Preaching God's Grand Drama: A Biblical-Theological Approach*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019. 183 pages. \$22.99.

The world is a stage and we are the players, or so sums William Shakespeare. This iconic metaphor weaves throughout Ahmi Lee's work as she aims to combine facets of *traditional* and *conversational* homiletics into a *theodramatic* model. This third model is needed, Lee contends, as homiletics contains two disparate worlds that manifest the extreme ends of a spectrum. In chapter 1 she begins by offering a broad overview of traditional homiletics, from its inception to John Broadus's *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons* (32). While Lee does not intend to be comprehensive, she does propose key qualities that manifest throughout all but the last 75 years of homiletical history, summarizing that traditional homiletical sermons use propositional and deductive methods that aim to teach the divine truths found in Scripture. She contrasts this with conversational homiletics in chapter 2. After briefly sketching the evolution of the New Homiletic as a turn toward the listener, Lee examines conversational preaching through the work of three homileticians: Lucy Rose's conversational preaching, John McClure's collaborative preaching, and O. Wesley Allen's ecclesiological preaching. She concludes that their work collectively embodies the cultural shift from the universal to the particular, focuses on the primacy of testimony, and decentralizes the pulpit.

In chapter 3, Lee presents a substantial critique of conversational homiletics. She begins by examining influential traits of postmodern philosophy before delving into two primary critiques of conversational homiletics. First, Lee asserts that conversational preaching has adopted postmodernism's disillusionment with language and its deconstruction of social reality, which erodes confidence in scripture and an ability to find meaning therein. Building here, she shows how the community of readers must now generate their own meaning to fill the void, which is problematic as even the best exegetical intentions can be misled. Lee's solution is a critical realistic stance with a primary hermeneutic of faith.

Lee then shifts into her second aim: proposing a mediating option between traditional and conversational homiletics in the construction of a theodramatic homiletical model. She begins with Hans Urs von Balthasar's dramatic approach to theology in chapter 4, adding the voices of N.T. Wright concerning biblical authority and Nicholas Lash on embodiment of the text. Her exploration culminates in Kevin Vanhoozer's dramatic theology, emphasizing scripture's own ontological integrity. The Bible is a "script" to be performed in a unified Christian message. Preachers are tasked as directors interpreting the script to lead the church, a company of players. Lee expands on this idea when building a theodramatic homiletic in chapter 5. In this model God is the leading performer; scripture offers clear, meaningful guidance; and the listener is an improvisational actor within God's larger epic narrative. Preaching aims to reorient listeners to the story of scripture and encourage them to join in with their own fluid movement. Chapter 6 expands on these themes as Lee explores distinctive aspects of the theodramatic model: gospel uniqueness, the preacher/director also as actor, church participation in the epic, and the broad scope of God's past, present, and future dramatic action.

Lee's theodramatic model offers an expanded picture of the preacher as director, who carefully examines God's past actions and future promises in scripture to lead the church into a continuation of the story. New scholars can benefit from her overarching perspective of the homiletical field and scholars interested in the dramatic tones of preaching will find a helpful conversation partner. However, when assessing the success of her stated aims there are significant gaps. In her critique of conversational homiletics, she places Rose, McClure, and

Allen in an antagonistic postmodern position against traditional homiletics. In doing so, she not only inadvertently collapses centuries of homiletics into a modernist perspective, but also disconnects “traditional” homiletics from the conversational model. She creates a simplistic binary rather than seeing these three scholars as contributors to homiletical evolution. Her work also includes very limited interaction with women and African American scholars, a significant omission because both conversational and modern homiletics necessarily engage these perspectives. Because of this, she misses a significant question that conversational preaching asks of our discipline: Where does power reside? Lee only addresses power in terms of authority and then primarily the authority of scripture. She does not engage with the power dynamics of mono-voiced preaching and thus, her theodramatic model fails to address a true concern for conversational homiletics. While the listener/actor is inspired to fluidly move, movement is still in response to the single voice of the preacher/director/actor who holds the power of curating a message.

Lee’s theodramatic homiletic fits in well with the New Homiletic’s turn toward the listener as she provides a powerful image of action within God’s holy epic. Unfortunately, she oversimplifies key voices and ignores others, preventing both traditional and conversational homiletics from true representation in this book.

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Antoinette Clark Wire. *2 Corinthians*. Wisdom Commentary. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2019. 239 pages. \$39.95.

Students in seminary classes in biblical interpretation often seek to identify what a biblical author wanted to happen in the congregation(s) to whom the author wrote a particular book. In most cases, the answer is “We do not know what happened.” Professor Antoinette Clark Wire, who taught at San Francisco Theological Seminary and the Graduate Theological Union, argues that *2 Corinthians* opens just such a window with respect to what happened after Paul wrote *1 Corinthians*. Because Wire’s reconstruction of the situation is quite distinctive, the preacher cannot simply pop *2 Corinthians* off the shelf and turn to the comments on the passage at the center of the sermon. One must be familiar with her larger interpretive point of view.

In her earlier work, *The Corinthian Women Prophets* (Fortress, 1991), Professor Wire contends that Paul writes *1 Corinthians* in response to women prophets in the congregation who were acting in ways that the apostle perceived as disrupting the community. In Wire’s view, the apostle aims to restrict the behavior of the Corinthian women prophets.

Paul writes *2 Corinthians* because the women have *not* heeded Paul’s proscriptions in *1 Corinthians*. In the second volume, however, Paul does not speak as an authority prescribing behavior, but writes in a way that seeks to maintain relationship. Paul defends his work among the Corinthians and seeks reconciliation by accepting the differences between his perspectives and those of the Corinthian community.

The preacher, thus, should read *2 Corinthians* not as a source of proof texts for doctrine nor as a simple continuation of *1 Corinthians*, but from the perspective of its own distinct rhetorical purpose. Wire’s viewpoint imposes upon the preacher the responsibility to alert the congregation to the particular dynamics of the changed rhetorical situation.

Within the detailed comments, Professor Wire reads each text from the standpoint of three different (but related) fields of concern. The first is a broad focus on what the text assumes about “all bodies or beings in what we now call an ecosystem on this earth within a functioning universe” (xlvi). These are overarching matters of world view. The second focus is the social, political, and economic world, with attention to such things as the significance of the Roman empire for interpretation. The third focus is a close-up look at the letter, specifically at how Paul seeks to accomplish something specific in the text in regard to the Corinthian situation. The volume cites texts from other ancient documents that play into the commentary. An example: the Roman proclamation that the birth of Augustus is gospel (good news).

Professor Wire’s interpretive perspective is a case study not only for preaching, but for a possible way forward in many circumstances in which pastoral dynamics change: face conflict, accept difference, claim continuing relationship. Of course, interpreters may sometimes come to situations in which they think it is not possible to get beyond conflict, to accept difference, or to continue relationship.

Along the way, Professor Wire names the parts of *2 Corinthians* according to their function in the categories of ancient rhetoric. In a contemporary situation similar to the church in ancient Corinth, the preacher could ponder the degree to which the ancient rhetorical function might suggest a contemporary function for the sermon. In a contemporary situation dissimilar to that of ancient Corinth, the preacher might ponder how Paul’s way of drawing on core values might help the preacher draw on core values in making sense of a new and different kind of situation.

This volume, like others in the Wisdom series, contains short pieces by other scholars. Some of these pieces deal with exegetical matters. Still others, of particular interest to preachers, are meditative and even homiletical. While the author did not write this volume as a commentary for preachers, the preaching community will be interested in it. The range of voices between the two covers of the book testifies to the integrity of the series which aims to honor the diversity of the interpreting community, including diversity within feminist interpreters.

In *The Corinthian Women Prophets* and *2 Corinthians*, we have something that should be standard in scholarship: studies of two related biblical books by the same scholar that allow a single line to guide the interpretation of both books.

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Wayne E. Croft, Sr. *The Motif of Hope in African American Preaching during Slavery and the Post-Civil War Era: There's a Bright Side Somewhere*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2017. 158 pages. \$36.99.

The legacy of hope throughout African American history is nothing short of a miracle. Surprisingly, there are few studies that explicitly explore the anatomy of African American hope, particularly as manifested in Black preaching. Wayne Croft's *The Motif of Hope in African American Preaching During Slavery and the Post-Civil War Era* helps to fill this void in the literature. An experienced pastor and professor, Croft articulates a richly textured account of the motif of hope in African American preaching, chronicling its evolution during slavery (1803–1865) and the post-Civil War period (1865–1896). Drawing on prayers, spirituals, and especially sermons, he proposes that hope morphed in the African American pulpit during and after slavery in ways that addressed both this-worldly and other-worldly concerns. This concise, illuminating book will be of interest to students and teachers of preaching and scholars of rhetoric, history, and African American culture.

The book opens by delineating Croft's methodology. Defining hope as the anticipation of something better than the present, Croft employs a historical perspective and core investigative questions to explore this homiletical motif. The remainder of the book is arranged into four chapters. The first chapter surveys contemporary African American scholarship on hope. Croft engages a range of homileticians and theologians, including Henry H. Mitchell, Cleophus J. LaRue, James H. Cone, Major J. Jones, and A. Elaine Brown-Crawford. Though these scholars' work sharpens the lens Croft uses to consider the motif of hope, he concludes that they do not offer an in-depth analysis of this major dimension of the African American experience. The second chapter demonstrates how the motif of hope is visible in slave preaching. Due to the paucity of extant slave sermon texts, Croft considers this motif through secondhand reports of slave preaching as well as prayers, spirituals, and slave revolts. His analysis of the slave revolts led by the preachers Gabriel Prosser, Denmark Vesey, and Nat Turner is especially intriguing. He surmises that during slavery hope was understood as "freedom from oppression," a freedom to be experienced both in the present and in the future (64).

Chapters 3 and 4 focus attention on the homiletical motif of hope after slavery through looking at the sermons of two noted preachers: African Methodist Episcopal bishop Daniel Alexander Payne (1811–1893) and famed folk preacher John Jasper (1812–1901). In chapter 3, Croft finds that Payne's preaching reveals that hope did not diminish after slavery, but instead shifted from a focus on freedom from oppression to a focus on racial equality. Chapter 4 highlights how the motif of hope is not "a central" theme of Jasper's sermons, but is an "essential" one (118). Though Jasper's sermons are primarily dominated by other-worldly hope, they also reveal traces of this-worldly and "apocalyptic hope"—that is, hope that anticipates God bringing an end to evil and suffering at the end of time (106, 121, author's emphasis). The book concludes with a helpful summary and a delineation of several areas for future research.

The Motif of Hope in African American Preaching provides a much-needed treatment on the nature of hope in Black preaching during and after slavery. Drawing on sermons as primary source material, Croft presents a nuanced portrayal of hope as both this-worldly and other-worldly. In so doing, he challenges James Cone's early work, *Black Theology and Black Power* (1969), that claimed that in the post-Civil War period, Black preachers settled for an other-worldly hope (90). Croft's argument against Cone would be further substantiated through surveying a larger sample of preachers' sermons. Inclusion of women preachers would

particularly be a welcome addition. Though Croft acknowledges that African American women preachers existed in the era of his study, such as Jarena Lee, Maria Stewart, and Julia Foote, he states that the dearth of sources available from the period makes it difficult to examine the evolution of hope in their sermons (xiv). I wonder if this could be rectified through a broader conception of how varied sources can reveal sermonic content. This was done in Croft's investigation of the nature of hope in slave preaching through considering prayers, spirituals, and slave revolts. What if autobiographical material, sermon and speech excerpts, and descriptions of women preaching were drawn upon to find the motif of hope?

In short, *The Motif of Hope* is a rich piece of scholarship that opens new avenues for research. It will be of interest to scholars desiring to learn more about the theology and history of African Americans. Moreover, pastors and preachers will be enriched through its inspiring presentation of hope in Black preaching. Croft reminds us of the multivalent nature of African American hope as other-worldly and this-worldly—a hope that is desperately needed in our world today.

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Scott M. Gibson, ed. *The Worlds of the Preacher: Navigating Biblical, Cultural, and Personal Contexts*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018. 164 pages. \$23.

Preachers confront myriad worlds in terms of the diversity of biblical interpretation, congregational makeup, and varying values that have arisen from rapid social, economic, political, cultural and ethical shifts. What might be the essential awareness that preachers need in the face of such an abundance of information? This book provides some key lenses based on Haddon W. Robinson's "four worlds of the preacher," aimed at helping preachers navigate their coordinates and understand what to do with them. The various authors are committed to Robinson's "four worlds" as part of a process of discovering, communicating with, and expanding upon Robinson's claims.

The introductory essay by Scott M. Gibson provides an overview of Robinson's life and preaching. In chapter 1, Robinson identifies the four worlds of preachers that are: 1) the world of the Bible; 2) the modern world; 3) the world of those who listen to the preacher; and 4) the world of the preacher, based on the history, language, and cultural aspects of each of the four worlds. In chapter 2, Steven D. Mathewson looks at the Old Testament world and identifies four aspects that preachers need to consider in order to preach effectively. These are an understanding of the text, including its genre and language, an understanding of ancient cultures, an application to the modern world, and finally, the preacher's world in terms of the way the preacher thinks about and deals with her or his life. Duane Litfin focuses on the New Testament world in chapter 3 and advocates a model of "applied theology" (40). Chapter 4 deals with developing the personality of a preacher. Gibson argues a preacher can work effectively for the gospel if the preacher has a well-developed character and life by practicing the virtues of confession, repentance, and holiness in the Holy Spirit (71–72). In chapter 5, Matthew D. Kim writes about the challenges and opportunities for ethnic and cultural diversity when preaching to one's contemporary culture. Kim addresses problems with preaching that overlooks ethnic diversity, makes suggestions for ethnic and cultural unity, and provides insights for celebrating diversity. Chapter 6 expands upon the world of listeners in terms of culture, language, and history (90). Jeffrey Arthurs looks at the gap between the Bible and listeners based on Robinson's three developmental questions (91). He suggests strategies that preachers might employ to enter and bridge between the world of their listeners and that of the Bible. In chapter 7, Patricia M. Batten concentrates on local churches and highlights the importance of understanding the history, culture and language of a local congregation. Victor D. Anderson, in chapter 8, argues that preaching affords a vision that goes beyond participating in God's mission for the world (116). He outlines the characteristics of God's mission and shows how preaching declares and enacts that mission. In chapter 9, Scott Wenig explores the importance of understanding the history of the text and the importance of language and culture in seeing behind the text. Chapter 10 presents three ways the preacher might create images in a culture dominated by images. Donald R. Sunukjian suggests expanding the images of a biblical author, creating a modern image that is similar to the intention of the biblical author, or creating images through visualization of modern situations, such as the use of examples, scenarios, and the truth applied to modern experiences.

In sum, this book contributes to a balanced and comprehensive understanding of the preacher's world. While it emphasizes theocentrism, it does not ignore the importance of people. It challenges the dangers of an anthropocentric distortion as well as the individual characteristics of preachers. The need to consider so many different possibilities is challenging for many

preachers. However, biblical preaching is more than just explaining the truth of the Bible. The preacher's challenges lie in the endless struggle of reconciling the Bible with today's culture, the congregation, and the preacher's self. Preachers may well need an extended version of each chapter of this book. It is also necessary to recognize the gaps between generations. In conclusion, when a preacher sincerely and faithfully responds to God's calling in the Holy Spirit, Robinson's four worlds can be usefully expanded upon and profitably used in the living field of any preacher.

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Hee An Choi. *A Postcolonial Leadership: Asian Immigrant Christian Leadership and Its Challenges*. Albany: SUNY Press, 2020. 277 pages. \$89.93.

In *A Postcolonial Leadership*, Hee An Choi offers an eye-opening analysis of the current situation and the challenges of Asian immigrant Christian leadership in the US context, and proposes postcolonial leadership as a new leadership model for Asian immigrant Christian leaders. The author develops her project in three parts.

In the first part, she investigates theories of leadership in both secular and Christian contexts. Whereas trait theory examines what distinctive qualities of individual leaders enable them to exercise effective leadership, transformational leadership theory concerns what inspires people to follow the leader and how it transforms the values and environments of the organization. While these theories relate to the dynamic between leaders and followers, feminist theory seeks to reveal the structure in which predominately male leaders exercise leadership and attempts to deconstruct and reconstruct such a privileged power structure. Choi presents feminist leadership as an alternative leadership model that affirms a collaborative, participatory, democratic, and horizontal leadership style through empowering others and sharing power, in opposition to the top-down hierarchical model of leadership. In addition, she seeks to create a new type of Christian leadership beyond the traditional male-centered clergy leadership. Exploring the understandings and models of Christian leadership in scripture and Christian history, Choi discovers women's leadership as a potential resource for a new Christian leadership model.

The second part investigates current understandings and challenges of Asian immigrant leadership in the United States. According to Choi's analysis, because privileged white male leaders have occupied the leadership positions, the traits of white male leaders are considered the normative qualities of ideal leadership. Meanwhile, as the privileged whites have reinforced the prejudice that denies the leadership of other racial-ethnic groups by producing negative stereotypes of them, African Americans, Latinx, and Asian Americans have been marginalized from the opportunities to hold leadership positions. However, as shown in the civil rights movement and the immigrant rights movement, African American leaders and Latinx leaders created distinctive leadership styles by resisting the white normative leadership and its supporting structure as well as advocating and serving their racial-ethnic communities.

Similarly, Asian immigrants have struggled to overcome the barrier to leadership opportunities due to racial prejudice. The challenge to Asian immigrant leadership is more complex because of the conflict between the values and morals of Asian communal culture and the US individualistic culture. The conflict between self-confidence and self-awareness is an example of such a challenge. A person seeming to lack self-confidence is disqualified for leadership in the United States. However, self-confidence is not a positive trait for leaders in Asian countries. Instead, self-awareness, which is a way to cultivate the self in a harmonious and balanced relationship with the community, is recommended for Asian leaders. Thus, showing respect for authority with humility is not a sign of lacking self-confidence but of the commendable practice of self-awareness. In the same manner, Choi analyzes other similar challenges of Asian immigrant Christian leadership, which they face through the living in the United States as a crossing boundaries person of marginality and hybridity.

Although the hybrid identity of Asian immigrants causes challenges for Asian immigrant leadership, Choi finds it can offer a unique potential to develop a new type of leadership. From this perspective, in the final part, she proposes postcolonial leadership as a new leadership model for Asian immigrants. She defines postcolonial leadership as "a leadership that has existed and

been performed in the space of immigrants, the oppressed, the marginalized, and the voiceless,” (218) which develops “a consciousness of difference to acknowledge the difference with authenticity in each person and community” (189) and creates “a common ground” to challenge “postcolonial institutional power” in solidarity with others (189). Hybridity, authenticity, communality, and individuality are the features of postcolonial leadership. Hybridity empowers Asian immigrant Christian leaders to deconstruct the colonial hierarchy, which legitimizes discrimination, and reconstruct the postcolonial power by hybridizing their living world. Authenticity enables them to continue to make their own voices heard within multi-intercultural immigrant contexts. Communality and individuality in the form of “leading together in solidarity” (210) secures individuals as the agents for collaborating communal leadership.

Choi’s research is significant for preachers because a primary way to exercise leadership is speech and the majority of Asian immigrant Christian leaders are preachers. Her analysis of the postcolonial self as the foundation of postcolonial leadership is helpful for Asian immigrant preachers to find their own preaching voice in the postcolonial self, instead of assimilating to the preachers idealized in the colonized mind. This study will help them go beyond the stereotype of Asian/Asian American preachers, which is internalized not only in other racial-ethnic groups but also in themselves consciously and unconsciously, to become transformative public speakers.

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Paul Hertig, Young Lee Hertig, Sarita Gallagher Edwards, and Robert L. Gallagher. *Breaking through the Boundaries: Biblical Perspectives on Mission from the Outside In*. American Society of Missiology Series 59. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2019. 186 pages. \$38.

This volume, which is one of the newest entries into the long-running American Society of Missiology Series, seeks to integrate the continually emerging—and much-needed—emphasis on the “other” in biblical studies with the equally needed emphasis on global contextualization in missiology studies. The focus of this approach is to articulate the essential role that Gentiles played in bringing God’s plan in scripture to fruition in order to address how the church can understand how God works—and how others find God—outside the traditional evangelistic approaches of predominantly Anglo-Western, protestant denominations.

This volume is composed of ten chapters, which includes an introduction and conclusion. In the introduction, Paul Hertig reminds us quite sharply why the phrase “the other” is even in our vocabulary: “We reside in a world of polarities. . . . God’s kingdom, however, is not confined by polarities. In God’s world we are all in this together” (xvii). Hertig argues that much of theological scholarship has focused for too long on hostility and suspicion, and it is time to “come full circle” and re-establish an overarching hermeneutic of hospitality instead (xxi). Hertig closes the introduction with a brief discussion of Jesus, demonstrating how his care and concern for Gentiles (especially Gentile women) should be the guiding principle for this ongoing conversation.

In chapter 1, Sarita Gallagher Edwards focuses on the story of Abraham, emphasizing that the father of the Judeo-Christian religion was, for almost his entire life, a stranger in a foreign land. Edwards presents Abraham as both one who blesses and one who is blessed by the other. The promise given to Abraham in Genesis 12 can only come to fruition, Edwards argues, through Abraham’s interaction with the other, the stranger. It is in these interactions that Abraham is both blessed and blesses those around him.

In chapter 2, Edwards continues by focusing on the flipside of the coin in Abraham’s story—Hagar. Most treatments of this portion of Abraham’s narrative focus squarely on Ishmael and whether he is the child of promise. Edwards, here however, focuses on Hagar, the Egyptian servant who becomes affiliated with Abraham’s house and becomes the conduit through whom the larger Gentile population will receive—and reveal to Israel later—God’s blessing.

In chapter 3, Hertig focuses on how Egypt and Midian’s religio-political cultures shaped Moses both as a theological and political leader. His emphasis, as was Edwards’ emphasis in previous chapters, is not necessarily on Moses, but on those characters who are traditionally treated as background characters—Zipporah (Moses’ wife) and Jethro (Zipporah’s father). Hertig argues that it is actually Zipporah and Jethro who provide Moses with the needed theological framework for understanding who God is and what God is calling Moses to.

In chapter 4, Robert L. Gallagher shifts the focus downstream a few centuries to the time of Samuel, Saul, and David. Israel, now at least a confederation of tribes, has somewhat successfully migrated into the land of Canaan but they have lost that memory and have now developed hostilities with their Gentile neighbors. Gallagher, however, argues that Gentiles—especially the Philistines—while hostile, were also integral to Israel’s development as a nation-state, from providing safety for the ark of the covenant to providing safety for King David.

In chapters 5 and 6, Young Lee Hertig focuses on two stories that highlight women in the Hebrew Bible—Ruth (chapter 5) and Esther (chapter 6). She focuses on how both of these women begin as outsiders, as migrants, who become insiders who significantly contribute to

their new national home, thus both continuing God's mission of blessing the nations. Important in both stories is the allegiance shown between the migrant outsider and a national ally.

In chapter 7, Paul Hertig argues that the Magi from Persia clearly demonstrate the long-lasting influence of Esther's quiet faith. These outsiders who have been waiting for the Messiah who will come from Israel to bless all the nations bring these glad tidings to a nation that has forgotten its purpose. Fear had become the watchword of the day under Herod, a word that is defeated by the word of hope from these traveling scholars.

In chapter 8, Robert L. Gallagher focuses on the story of Cornelius (Acts 10) and how this story becomes—and should remain—the paradigmatic text for further Christian mission. This outsider is clearly called by God, much like Abraham, to become an insider that brings a new perspective to the entrenched faithful, much like Ruth. The entire story is built around the theme of hospitality, which serves as a microcosm for the entire biblical witness of God's work among humanity. Gallagher then, in the volume's conclusion, offers a call to continue this work.

In the final assessment, the authors stick true to both their focus and intent, that being to articulate an evident theology of hospitality that binds God's interactions with humanity without defaulting to uncritical interpretations of scripture to do so. That, however, does bring up two concerns about this volume. First, much of the hermeneutical work in this volume seems to read at a devotional commentary level, which is likely an unintentional byproduct of the overall intent to read the selected texts under a certain theological lens. Second, although the stated interpretive approach was to ground interpretation in the original context before applying the teachings to the contemporary context, often the opposite appears to have happened. However, this is a much-needed text for ongoing theological conversation. It would make an excellent secondary reading in many intercultural studies courses or supervised fieldwork settings like CPE or urban ministry contexts.

Rob O'Lynn, Kentucky Christian University, Grayson, KY

Marcus Pound. *Theology, Comedy, Politics*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2019. 120 pages. \$18.

As the title suggests, central to Marcus Pound's concern is the place of comedy within theology today. Pound, a theologian and assistant director of the Centre for Catholic Studies at Durham University, has focused his previous research largely on Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek, French philosopher Jacques Lacan, and the intersection of psychoanalysis, theology, and trauma. In his current work Pound draws principally upon Lacan's work to explore the theological and political implications of comedy.

Noting that "comedy happens when things go wrong and especially when language goes awry" (14), Pound asserts that the trinitarian nature of God is the comedic foundation of theology and ecclesiology. The three-and-one God shows language going awry. Christ's life, death, and resurrection are comedic acts that cross "all sorts of theoretical boundaries and dramatic types" (50). And, since Christianity is born from a joke, the Church is called "to sustain that joke in a manner that literally outwits our current modes of enjoyment and their problematization within the late-capitalist market economy" (18).

Chapter 1 analyzes how and why Western philosophical, historical, and theological traditions shifted away from critically considering comedy. Pound highlights the development of a false binary between tragedy and comedy. For instance, Plato and Aristotle see comedy as a "lesser mode of knowing" (23), and Aquinas describes humor as a respite from "the tension of reason's study" (26). Pound argues that this dichotomous move is exacerbated by secular liberalism of the twentieth century that minimized the church's subversive uses of humor. In response, Pound adapts Donald MacKinnon's theology of tragedy to show that a hard separation between it and comedy is unnecessary. Both can be seen to guard against idealism, frame a kenotic life, and inform ethics.

In chapter 2 Pound examines the metaphysical assumptions of Kant, Hegel, and Kierkegaard on comedy. This feels as dense as it sounds, but thankfully Pound follows up his analysis with sections that develop proposals for an understanding of comedy. For him, comedy offers an eschatological view of what the world could be. It plays "a key role in the development of humankind contributing to the growth of Spirit and freedom" (61). Comedy can reveal "the hubris of our idealism" or demonstrate "our earthly distance [from] how life might otherwise be" (64). These insights help frame the rhetorical and theological possibilities of comedy.

Pound continues this pattern in the next chapter, examining Lacan's use of Freud. This study of psychoanalysis leads Pound to assert, somewhat unexpectedly, that comedy has a sacramental nature within the church. His argument is that comedy gives "momentary expression to unconscious desire" (75) while also reorienting us to "an invisible and inaudible object that speaks to us through the contours of our desires" (85). Pound correlates this object with Christ's presence in the Eucharist. Further, comedy like communion is both "irreducibly subjective" and that which links us together (82). Finally, Eucharist like humor "escapes all those barriers that oppose it" (88).

I am simplifying Pound's argument here, which seems to be crafted for a certain kind of philosophical theologian who is well versed in the developments of white, male North Atlantic thought. This is not to say that the book is inaccessible for those without such proficiencies or interests. In fact, Pound's recounting of the medieval *risus paschalis* and the York *corpus christi* plays to more modern scenes from Monty Python and *Friends* is humorous and helpful in illustrating key theological points to the reader. These moments left me wanting more examples

and more inclusion of the church's use of humor beyond largely white sources. I am thinking here especially of the subversive uses of humor in the black church.

Still, Pound's project is especially helpful for the ways it examines the intersection of comedy and politics. Pound critiques post-modern capitalism's use of humor as encouragement toward isolated enjoyment. He argues that this move tempts us to settle for market driven solutions to our existential questions that then lead to the denigration of others and contribute to a "superiority theory" (108). Particularly prescient in this moment of pandemic is Pound's assessment that "our commitment to the good of the market can quickly become pathological" (101). By contrast, Pound advances the church's potential as "a counter-joke to capitalism" (95). The "laughter of the saints" reframes desire, works outside of the market, and critiques capitalism (108). The cross of Christ is a "kenotic—comic—outpouring...that disturbs the traditional symbolic balance" (115). As Christ initiates a new order in the church, so the church is called to sustain the comedy of Christ, principally through love. Here Pound points to how both love and comedy can be condensed into a single image, offer the pleasure of surprise, give a gift you didn't know you wanted until you received it, invite a reciprocal and sustained relationship, and look beyond the two partners of a joke. Reflecting on the homiletic possibilities of these modes of comedic love would likely require a little work for most, but such work could provide some possibilities for confronting the political and theological challenges of the present moment.

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Amos Yong. *Mission After Pentecost: The Witness of the Spirit from Genesis to Revelation*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2019. 284 pages. \$19.

In *Mission After Pentecost: The Witness of the Spirit from Genesis to Revelation*, Amos Yong examines the mission of the Holy Spirit (*missio spiritus*) in scripture through the three-fold hermeneutical lens of pneumatology, the theological interpretation of scripture, and missiology. Identifying our current context as a post-mission era, the author frames the theological conversation around several subsidiary assumptions. A new mission paradigm, the author proposes, must be developed in light of our postcolonial, post-Western, post-Enlightenment, and post-Christendom context. The question that must be asked, the author propounds, is how do we “buttress, even galvanize, the Christian mission enterprise when it is being assailed from so many sides” (5).

Rather than retaining the “modernist project” (5) that is classical mission, the author submits that a mission theology must be developed which “is not motivated by an effort to recall the glory days of modern mission” (7) or perpetuate “reading the Bible from the perspective of bygone days...since the worry is that any missiological takeaway in that case will only perpetuate what is now a failed missionary enterprise” (7–8). It is with this goal in mind that the author emphasizes the need to embrace new approaches to reading scripture which include political and ethnic/racial perspectives, and the emerging field of pneumatological mission theologies. In adopting this latter Spirit-centered approach, the author seeks to answer the overarching query of the text: “How might a reengagement with scripture today from such a day of Pentecost starting point and pneumatological perspective generate next steps for Christian mission in our late modern context?” (10).

The author divides the text into two parts. In Part I, Yong explores the theme of the divine wind (*ruah*) within the Old Testament. Proceeding canonically, with a few exceptions, the author follows the motif of the divine *ruah* through the Hebrew Bible—focusing first on understanding the pneumatological passages within their literary context before extending the conversation to missiological concerns and contemporary applications. The author begins with an initial examination of the Spirit of God in Genesis during creation, and then systematically follows the missional presence of the Spirit through the Pentateuch, Historical Books, Wisdom literature, and Prophets. In Part II, “Divine Breath and the Christian Scriptures,” Yong continues his theological examination of the Spirit in the New Testament canon. Examining the movement of the divine *pneuma*, the author investigates the missional role and expression of the Spirit of Christ in the Gospels, Pauline literature, the Catholic letters, and Johannine epistles.

As a Pentecostal systematic theologian, Yong’s strength lies in his vast knowledge of the global theological conversations pertaining to pneumatology. While framing the conversation as a three-fold enterprise integrating theology, pneumatology, and missiology, the most substantial contribution to the field of mission studies emerges in the concluding chapter, in which the future of Christian mission is revisited. In this chapter, Yong contends that in our post nation-state world, a reframing of Christian witness must acknowledge that the “other” is now our neighbor. In reflecting on the testimony of the *ruah/pneuma* in the Old and New Testaments, the witness of the contemporary global Church should thus be worshipful (directed towards God), neighborly (caring for the other), sanctified (holy and set apart), collaborative-dialogical (reciprocal, not one-directional), forgiving (to both the oppressor and oppressed), and sojourning (witnessing on the way) (280–283).

Albeit an ambitious task, Yong achieves his goal of presenting a “theological vision of the missionary God expressed in and through the work of the divine wind” (14). Structurally, the inclusion of discussion questions at the end of each chapter and voices of scholars from around the world make this text appropriate for both individual and corporate study. Well-researched and biblically grounded, *Mission After Pentecost* is a valuable resource for seminarians, academics, and preachers who are theologically-minded and ready to grapple with the complexities of navigating a post-western and post-Christendom interpretation of scripture.

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Jared E. Alcántara. *The Practices of Christian Preaching: Essentials for Effective Proclamation*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019. 192 pages. \$24.99.

Alcántara opens with a provocative question: “What does Charlie Parker have to do with preaching?” (1). Charlie Parker, a jazz music star in the 1930s, was said to “woodshed” until he got better (2). It was after his “woodshedding” that Parker rose to fame. This is what Alcántara wants preachers to do as well: “woodshed” or practice their homiletical skills until they get better. This book is about practices for preachers so that they “will enhance their proficiency, grow in their commitment, and flourish in their homiletical ministry” (5). The five practices are: 1) Preach Convictionally, 2) Preach Contextually, 3) Preach Clearly, 4) Preach Concretely, 5) Preach Creatively.

Chapter 1 is an admonition to preach Christian sermons and not the “pseudo-gospels” (22) we are tempted to preach: 1) the Gospel of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism, 2) the Gospel Dressed in a Flag or Banner, 3) the Gospel of Prosperity, 4) The Gospel of Discipleship without Grace, 5) The Gospel of Grace without Discipleship. Chapters 2–6 discuss each of the five practices in detail. The conclusion offers three biographical examples of the power of practice: Warren MacKenzie (an accomplished ceramics artist), Ray Allen (an NBA basketball player), and Marth Graham (a renowned dancer).

Alcántara’s book is a pedagogical piece of art. This volume is simple, but not simplistic. The illustrations and graphics are numerous (33 total) and helpful, reinforcing the core ideas. His suggestions or warnings are always presented in sets of five. Each chapter opens with a narrative to draw the reader in. There is a website for this book which includes videos of sermon clips and discussions, learning activities for each chapter, and discussion questions. The collaborators for the online videos include Jerusha Matsen Neal, Ahmi Lee, Kenyatta R. Gilbert, and Matthew D. Kim. The website also includes a professor view of the chapter pages which includes a link to download extra discussion questions based on the videos. Scripture is used to build a foundation for each of the practices. For example, it shows how scripture points to the conviction behind preaching (44-47) or how scripture uses clarity to communicate to everyday people (109-110).

The book is practical. Each chapter has a list of imperatives instructing the reader how to carry out the practice being discussed. For example, among the instructions given in chapter 4 it says, “Remember that repetition and restatement are your friends, not your enemies,” and “Use colloquialisms” (118-119). Even the chapter titles are imperatives: Preach Convictionally (chapter 2), Preach Clearly (chapter 3).

This would be a great book for an introductory preaching class or for a seasoned homiletician who wanted to review some of the basics of preaching.

Andrew Hicks, Harding School of Theology, Memphis, TN

M. Eugene Boring, *Hearing John's Voice: Insights for Teaching and Preaching*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019. 351 pages. \$29.99.

If the literature of the New Testament were to be divided between works that make their appeal to the head as reasoned argument and those that make their appeal to the heart as spiritual revelation, the Johannine tradition of texts would be the latter. This is likely why the vast majority of preachers are in unfamiliar territory when preaching from this witness to Christ. If we are honest, we feel far less sure-footed in proclaiming gospel from texts that are so unashamedly apocalyptic. Even though most of us were taught that apocalyptic was “the mother of all Christian theology,” as Käsemann so famously declared in 1960 (*New Testament Questions*, 102), this way of looking at the world is alien to us. How often do we choose the lections from *Revelation*, and how fearful is that decision when we do? Similarly, there are only a few texts in 1 John that are favorites, while the other Johannine epistles are not even Sunday lection choices. In the year that the Gospel of John dominates the lectionary, don't most preachers settle for approaching these stories with the same homiletic hermeneutic that worked when preaching the other Gospels? We typically treat them like a biographical AD–30 story of Jesus life, death, and resurrection rather than a prophetic revelation of the story of the Christ worshipped by a turn of the century Johannine Christian community.

In *Hearing John's Voice*, Boring assumes this homiletic and pedagogical context as the resistant reading most Christian preachers and teachers bring to these writings. He sets his task as the sherpa who can guide us to discover the wonder and wisdom of these otherwise strange voices. In three distinctly different genres, one of the three dominant expressions of what became the orthodox Christian expression of faith, Boring explores how these texts proclaim utter confidence in the Christ who providentially controls a believer's redemption. The volume is divided into four parts, each of which seeks to turn on its head the way preachers and teachers approach typically approach these texts.

In the first chapter, Boring begins with the assumption that the seer John's revelation provides the revelatory hermeneutic that discloses how this community approached its understanding of the world. Boring maintains that its revelatory hermeneutic best provides contemporary preachers and teachers with the teleological worldview that discloses the theology of all three expressions of Johannine faith. The revelation provides the formative key that unlocks the strange, prophetic, imagistic, apocalyptic world that was second nature to the people who worshipped the redeemer Christ. The revelation helped them to hear anew from their risen Lord and helped them made sense of their lives in a senseless world.

The remaining three chapters assume the hermeneutic insights Boring derives from the seer's vision as the appropriate apocalyptic framework to assist contemporary preachers and teachers find their way into this strange world of angels and demons, violence and power, insiders and outsiders. It is often depicted more in symbols than in substance, but is far from a flight into otherworldliness. Boring treats his exploration of these texts as an expression of the utter confidence of the community of the beloved disciple's God whose controlling hand is made apparent to those who believe. Argument is not needed to convince his readers of these truths, for this faith community receives apocalyptic revelation as prophetic truth.

In chapter 2, Boring explores this hermeneutic by turning to an analysis of the book of Revelation. We would likely turn to this work last, hoping that we had already found our footing in the other texts. It is, however, this Christian apocalypse that offers the most full-throated revelation of the Christ of faith and the One True God from a divine vantage point. Here a

prophetically-interpreted past and divinely-appointed future are presented as the eschatological present out of which a believer is invited to understand her or his life. It was a culturally customary way to present divine truth that offers hope when hope may seem far from daily reality. Boring divides the apocalypse into five portions (Rev 1, 2–3, 4–5, 6–18, and 19–22) and explores the development of a revelatory hermeneutic in each of these divisions.

Chapter 3 takes up the three Johannine epistles. The revelatory hermeneutic becomes a way to thematically consider the cultural exigence of the churches that comprised this tradition of Christian faith. Apart from the letters to the seven churches in Revelation, it is here we learn what this community identified as its core commitments and the issue with which it struggled: how to negotiate the tension of Christ’s humanity and divinity, its response to those who did not share its God-centered worldview, the role of leaders in sustaining the integrity of a faithful response, etc. Boring argues that these are issues the church still faces: how is the church called to be faithful in a pluralistic world, especially when there is fragmentation within Christian expressions of faith and disputes about what constitutes a relevant Christology?

Only in chapter 4 does Boring bring his readers into the Johannine world with which we who preach and teach are most familiar. The reader of *Hearing John’s Voice* who has journeyed to this point is now prepared to experience the story of Jesus through the images and framework of this apocalyptic community’s understanding of a victorious Christ and a God who helms the “mission control of the universe” (Rev 4–5). How readers are to understand the story of this Gospel is first framed by the faith testimony of this community in its great Christological affirmation (1:1–18). The remainder of the Gospel is then considered in its two halves: the *triumphal* entry and presence of the Incarnate Word who engages and confronts the world (1:19–12:50) and the *triumphant* departure and return of the Incarnate Word who overcomes the world (13:1–21:25).

Homileticians might consider teaching an advanced preaching course in which this homiletic hermeneutic helps shape the message preached from each genre of the Johannine tradition. *Hearing John’s Voice* should be on the shelf of any preacher who would seek to shape a sermonic appeal that is aligned with the appeal of the text, for only an immersion in this world of Johannine thought can help the preacher or teacher imagine what faithfulness to this community’s Christ might be. In this way a preacher or teacher can hope to speak to the heart and call forth faith in a way that is faithful to the tradition of faith that has been handed down to us in these sacred texts.

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Donyelle C. McCray. *The Censored Pulpit: Julian of Norwich as Preacher*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books/Rowman & Littlefield, 2019. 141 pages. \$90.

Donyelle C. McCray's book, *The Censored Pulpit: Julian of Norwich as Preacher*, explores the person and work of the medieval English visionary through a homiletic lens. McCray's goal is to "present Julian of Norwich as an instrumental figure in the history of Christian preaching" (5), and to raise broader questions about what it means to preach. McCray notes that her own understanding of preaching shifted while studying Julian; McCray now regards preaching as "drawing others into the extravagance of the gospel—its joy, horror, and inscrutability," none of which requires a pulpit, a formal liturgy, or traditional authorization (4).

Julian lived in 14th century England as an anchoress, "a religious solitary who expressed her spirituality by vowing to live in a fixed room or cluster of rooms attached to a church" (7). At age 30, Julian became gravely ill, and in what seemed like her final days she received a series of sixteen religious visions. After she recovered, she wrote the visions in detail in two dramatic accounts, making her the first woman known to have been published in English (8).

Despite not having any of preaching's "authorizing credentials," McCray argues, Julian's anchoritic vocation itself should mark her as a preacher, because "To be an anchoress was to be a living sermon" (20). In modeling holiness and virtue, an anchoress represented a "living metaphor of Christian hope" (8). Further, Julian's writing can be regarded as "uplifting written discourse"—a medieval understanding of what constituted a sermon (27–29). Julian describes the radical love of God in dramatic imagery and humble and gentle vernacular, which McCray suggests is an expression of Julian's humility as a woman as well as a strategy for gaining a hearing in a world resistant to female authority. Julian cannot deny her call to proclaim God's love, and thus "seems to be taking up the authority to preach even as she relinquishes any claim to worldly wisdom" (32).

Julian's primary source material for exegesis is not scripture, but the physical body of Jesus (46). Her visions of Jesus's agony on the cross become the means to interpret salvation, kenosis, grace, and even solidarity with other humans who suffer. Julian's intent is to help others "have a multisensory experience of the Passion and a living encounter with Jesus' weak body," as she has had (56). McCray articulates in Julian a preacher desirous of eliciting in others the experiences of God's intimate love, culminating in "oneing"—a process in which "the soul cleaves to God and achieves a synergy with the divine will" (93). For Julian, the central aspects of the preaching task are to equip listeners to deepen their Christian identity and sense of agency, cultivating in them an appetite for divine wisdom (105).

McCray's interpretation of Julian's writings in the medieval context is wide-ranging and full of gems, such as the reminder that medieval publications (including Julian's) were often read aloud as a community activity—meaning that Julian's published writings perhaps functioned more like traditional sermons than we might expect. Additionally, Julian's many references to saints and apostles (John the Baptist, Saint Cecelia, Mary Magdalene, the apostle Paul, and Mary the mother of Jesus, among others) suggest parallels between Julian and various models of the preacher, from prophet to pastor to apostle to lover. McCray concludes the book with comparisons between Julian and more recent examples of "non-traditional" preachers, such as retreat leader Evelyn Underhill and singing evangelist Mother Willie Mae Ford Smith.

The strength of *The Censored Pulpit* is the multifaceted way McCray uses Julian to examine and reimagine preaching, including the meaning of authority, proclamation, and even exegesis. But this is also where the argument becomes muddled. McCray's stated priority is to

identify why Julian should be considered a preacher. But to do so, McCray aligns Julian with preaching's "outsiders," historical and contemporary, and the ways in which they similarly subvert or challenge "accepted" understandings of preaching. Thus, is McCray's primary concern to demonstrate that Julian meets the criteria of a preacher, or that the criteria on which preaching is identified should be changed, or both? Put another way, is it most significant that Julian be understood as a preacher, or that Julian as a preacher redefines what preaching is and can be? Moreover, to whom is this concern addressed: the censored context of the medieval church in which Julian lived, or the contemporary homiletical field?

In a sense, these questions are not so much a critique of McCray's work as they are an acknowledgement that homiletics sits in an historical stream full of possibilities for reinterpretation, and hindrances to imagination and vision. The questions of who "counts" as a preacher and what constitutes a sermon are well worth asking, and McCray has added a worthy partner to the conversation.

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Richard Voelz. *Preaching To Teach: Inspire People to Think and Act*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2019. 103 pages. \$13.61.

This is the fifth book in the Artistry of Preaching Series, which is designed to address some of the neglected sides of preaching. In this volume, Richard Voelz offers a renewed understanding of the role of teaching in the sermon. Voelz reframes the traditional understanding of teaching to define teaching as “enacting radical democratic practice in the search to alleviate oppression and domination” (xviii).

He opposes the sharp distinction that some have made between teaching and preaching, beginning with C. H. Dodd, and more recently by Paul Scott Wilson. As he looks at the trajectory that preaching has followed through the centuries, he shows how many earlier theologians and preachers like Augustine, Alan of Lille, Calvin, and Alexander Campbell prioritized teaching over preaching, or as Voelz says, preaching as teaching.

Voelz takes his theoretical framework from the field of education and specifically the theory of “critical pedagogy” based on the work of Paulo Freire and Henry Giroux. Throughout the book, he maintains that the preacher-as-teacher “can undergird all aspects of preaching” (xxvii). It is not siloed for special occasions.

The book contains five chapters. Chapter 1 addresses the preacher as a “transformational intellectual, someone who contributes to the formation of public life beyond the walls of the church” (xxix). Preaching is described as intervention: “Preaching makes regular interventions into the lives of listeners to help them think in ways that empower them for transformative living” (9). This kind of critical pedagogical preaching focuses on “places where suffering and oppression occur, looking to enact emancipatory practice, democratic change, and exercising civic courage” (9).

Chapter 2 explores how critical pedagogy calls preachers to teach “toward a vision of the public sphere” (xxix). Currently much preaching addresses only the needs of the individual and the faith community. However, Voelz maintains that “. . .preaching is a communicative event that seeks to construct a vision for the public sphere *beyond* ecclesial gatherings” (23).

Chapter 3 describes the contrast between the traditional teaching sermon and the sermon that engages critical pedagogy. Traditional teaching is reproductive teaching, simply reinforcing the values of the dominant culture. It prepares recipients primarily for the work force, for developing technical skills, and for getting a good job. Critical pedagogy offers both a critique of the contemporary society and hope, or radical imagination, for the future (37). It imagines “the world otherwise.” Critical pedagogical preaching envisions the world through the lenses of the kingdom of God.

Chapter 4 analyzes the relationship between preacher as teacher, congregation, and authority. The teaching sermon is conversational, not meaning a style of delivery but “a kind of embodiment of authority” (55). The authority of the preacher is grounded in relational and experiential authority, “where meaning and authority remain continually under negotiation” (56). It is more collaborative. At the end of chapter 4, Voelz offers an example of the kind of form such a sermon can take while acknowledging that many different forms will serve the critical pedagogy paradigm.

Finally, chapter 5 contains three sermon examples that exemplify the preacher as teacher. These include sermons by Casey Thornburgh Sigmon, Brian Blount, and the author himself. I am wondering if the two sermons by Blount and Sigmon in the final chapter were intentionally prepared with the critical pedagogy paradigm in mind or whether they naturally embodied it, and

Voelz identifies this pedagogical paradigm already, at least in part, practiced by some preachers. As I read other sermons by individuals like Ellen Davis, Fleming Rutledge, and Alyce McKenzie, it seems they are practicing a kind of preacher-as-teacher model. Voelz's work provides a clearer theoretical foundation for this practice, unpacking the details of critical pedagogy, applying it to the practice of preaching, enabling others to see its value, and equipping homileticians and preachers to more intentionally integrate it into their work.

Voelz has taken the discipline of teaching that has laid dormant since the early 1970s and infused it with new life for the task of preaching. His paradigm will enable preachers to naturally embed teaching into the narratives of their sermons. It will also assist preachers in regularly addressing the injustices marginalized communities face and make it a natural part of their preaching responsibilities.

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William Willimon. *Leading with the Sermon: Preaching as Leadership*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2020. 194 pages. \$18.99.

No one likes to see an opportunity squandered, whether it might be the chance to dine with a long-admired celebrity or to use free tickets to see Hamilton. “Alas,” we say, “what a wasted chance for fun.” But when we watch a wasted opportunity cost other people, stunting growth and even causing harm, we become not merely wistful, but downright agitated and alarmed. William Willimon is in the latter camp. He writes as one who has walked the trenches and observed up close the costs to congregations when pastors fail to use the preaching moment to lead with visionary courage. He writes as an impassioned overseer of the flock, as his role of bishop (of the North Alabama Conference, United Methodist Church (UMC)) called him to be for several years. So, not surprisingly, his tone is urgent here—at times bordering on curmudgeonly. But it is not fundamentally negative, for not only has he watched agonizing, slow failures of leadership in the pulpit, he has also coached and taught numerous pastors the art of leading well while preaching. He has celebrated as that focused and courageous practice has borne fruit in numerical growth, missional engagement with communities, and deepened discipleship.

At its core, this book has one task: to strengthen the synergistic connection between preaching and leadership in the minds, hearts, and habits of pastors. These concurrent practices strengthen, correct, and inform each other. The book’s primary audience is current pastors, and secondarily those preparing to preach. It argues that too many preachers understand their leadership as something which manifests itself in other settings than the pulpit, primarily in meetings with elders and other leaders of congregations. For them, preaching as an entirely separate task having vaguely to do with comforting. Thus they fail to take advantage of the rich platform they have been given right within the worship service to shape culture, catalyze ministry, invite repentance from sin in all its forms, and even face painful truths about their congregation. As we would expect from Willimon, the book is rooted in a robust theology of the preaching, rooted in God’s self-proclamation through human speech as it summons, confronts, and inspires.

Not only does Willimon make the claim that good pastoral leaders will make use of their preaching to lead well; he further claims that preaching well actually grows pastors into better leaders. It forces them to sharpen and articulate their vision in memorable ways, to articulate losses and failures within the congregation with honest, gentle courage, and to name their growth with grateful joy. Willimon departs from preaching *per se* to offer useful insight into leadership, drawing from the wisdom of Gil Rendle, Ron Heifetz, Peter Steinke, and others to call pastors to do the hard work of excellent administration, empathetic listening, and thoughtful presence with their congregants. The conviction that a pastoral leader must be willing to introduce tension and to surface underlying pain is central to Willimon’s leadership (and preaching) philosophy.

One area where this book could have been stronger is in its breadth of consideration of how leadership looks different in various ethnic groups, subcultures, and denominational or even parachurch structures (such as prison, hospital, campus, or recovery ministries, where preaching takes place but in significantly different forms). Most examples seemed to be drawn from either Willimon’s own preaching or his supervision of UMC pastors in the South. Relatively little consideration was given to how gender, ethnicity, socio-economic factors, or other markers of culture would cause leadership in the pulpit to be expressed, received, and conceived differently. For example, a few of his examples which seemed to be framed as positive models of straight

talk would be received as shaming by some congregational subcultures (29, 168), and could alienate or immobilize some listeners. Despite this, Willimon's book achieved its worthy goal of connecting preaching and leadership, bringing in numerous insights into both along the way. Willimon writes out of deep love for the church. He longs for its flourishing, and his book will challenge and equip pastors to lead as they preach, with courage, hope, and bold vision.

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Karen Bray. *Grave Attending: A Political Theology of the Unredeemed*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2020. 259 pages. \$29.49.

Karen Bray's new book is significant as a work of political theology grounded in affect theory. Her concern is for the unredeemed, those whose moods fail to measure up to the narratives and metaphors by which neo-liberalism and its alliance with certain forms of Christianity would presuppose for our lives. Redemption, after all, is more than a garden variety theological narrative or metaphor; it is at root an economic one. Where persons suffer from moodiness, the realities of life in the presence of disabilities, or any other form of marginalized existence, there is a struggle between the prescribed happy ending of the late capitalism and the reality of life in brokenness. It is in this gap where Bray writes about a doing of theology that opts out of neo-liberal and traditional Christian theological coercion and an economically defined vision of redemption.

Affect theory plays a large role in Bray's book, and homiletics has until now taken little notice of it. A little familiarity with it helps to guide the reader through her deconstruction of the language of redeeming. Bray follows the work of scholars like Lauren Berlant, whose signal writing in *Cruel Optimism* lays out how tending to affect helps us to see and understand why human beings emotionally hold to the very dreams that make life miserable. We believe, say, in the promise of America even though it is a cruel taskmaster. There are the values that we think we know; more important are the values of what we really know in our bones and lives. Can you feel even now how what our culture or politics calls optimism might actually be cruel? (And would it be so hard to smile?) Affect theory presupposes that the life of the emotions precedes what we say or think about realities. Affect theory wishes to tend to the truth of emotions and bodies even in the face of what is professed by the powerful as True.

Bray's book proceeds chapter by chapter through a series of negations: "Unbegun Introductions," "Unsaved Time," "Unproductive Worth," "Unwilling Feeling," "Unreasoned Care," and "Unattended Affect." The first five of these negations follow clearly: affect theory opens up space for rethinking the value of those constructions that organize human life by way of prescription—what is timely, worthy, emotionally positive, and reasonable—especially insofar as they aid the neo-liberal economic project. The final chapter, "Unattended Affect," is a bit of an outlier in that Bray uses affect theory to unpack her own mystifications around race, white supremacy, and power. Along the way, the reader begins to see how affect theory takes apart not just theological constructions that demand so much of Bray in her "moodiness," but in her own will to power as a white woman.

Bray's book is a demanding read. It is also important to preachers. Those familiar with trauma theory will note that attending to wounds pushes back on theological conceptualities that speak of redemption and suffering in ways that rush prematurely to closure and fail in the end to truly attend to the other. Bray's use of affect theory is similar: "grave attending" is a lot like Shelly Rambo's Holy Saturday—it is an in-between space that cannot presume that resurrection will erase its memory in happy-ending redemptions. These are always good lessons for preachers to learn. Beyond that, however, it drives preachers to a deeper respect for a kind of lively theological anthropology that truly does the work of "grave attending" and in the process discovers not so much redemption as the deep and moving solidarity of the unredeemed.

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James Henry Harris. *Beyond the Tyranny of the Text: Preaching in Front of the Bible to Create a New World*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2019. 182 pages. \$24.99.

In *Beyond the Tyranny of the Text*, James Harris proposes a liberative homiletical model grounded in the Black preaching tradition and the hermeneutics of Paul Ricoeur. Harris argues that preaching must grapple with the “world in front of the text” if preaching is going to participate in liberation (2). This prioritization of the world in front of the text does not negate exegesis or the world of the text; rather, it allows a new hearing of the text to envision transforming liberation in the present. While Harris gives Ricoeur credit for the hermeneutical theory, he recognizes that Black preachers have often done what Ricoeur theoretically describes. The work offers “a five-part method and theory for getting in front of the text that includes, *reading, re-reading, un-reading, writing, and re-writing* (or the act of actually preaching the sermon)” (3).

Each of the book’s five chapters focuses on one of the steps in Harris’ methodology. The first chapter discusses how to read the text with liberation in mind by getting in front of the text. The reader approaches the text with liberation as the context which allows the reader to interpret from a liberative position. For Harris, this reading seeks to envision a “new horizon and a new world absent of oppression and injustice” (16). Harris follows Ricoeur in asserting that interpretation depends on recognizing the sense of the text as being negotiated in a possible world projected by the text. In other words, Harris gives priority to what the text means to people today, in the context of liberation, even while not completely dismissing what the text meant in its original context; “Meaning is textual and contextual” (22). After the initial step of reading that grapples with text and context, chapter two discusses the need for re-reading. Re-reading recognizes that the first step, reading, is never finished in the process of sermon development. Re-reading also asserts that the preacher should never allow the written word to obfuscate the poetry and aesthetics of preaching, which require ongoing attention.

Chapter 3, which discusses un-reading, is a core component of Harris’ methodology. The process of un-reading seeks to resist hegemonic readings that have subjugated people. Harris argues that new meanings can only come to the front when harmful, traditional meanings are unlearned. Un-reading also contends that preaching ought to participate in liberation. The world in front of the text opens the way for liberation to be appropriated and actualized in the present world because it calls the congregation to liberating praxis. The fourth step is to start writing, which requires a synthesis of aspects from the previous steps. The focus of writing is not to produce a perfectly polished sermon but to refine understanding and explanation in written form. This process continues in the final step, which includes re-writing and the actual preaching of the sermon. The final chapter explores how un-reading and the world in front of the text can allow the sermon to “pursue a proleptic vision of the text as an instrument of transformation and freedom” (127). Each of the chapters contains sermon excerpts on the book of Jonah. These provide practical examples of the methods described by Harris. The sermon excerpts also concretize the conceptual category of liberation through the exploration of race in preaching. The work includes an appendix that provides insights for un-reading particular passages.

Beyond the Tyranny of the Text excels as an interdisciplinary work that discusses homiletics and hermeneutics. Harris provides a vision of liberative preaching that can be actualized through an application of Ricoeurian hermeneutics. Harris should be commended for making major aspects of Ricoeur’s interpretation theory accessible to preachers. With the skill of a seasoned scholar, he offers a robust dialogue between theory and practice. He models how

Ricoeur's central dialectics, especially explanation and understanding, can provide a new model of textual liberation preaching in the world in front of the text. Harris understands preaching as an interpretation and converses with Ricoeur to describe how preaching can be a liberative interpretation. Harris writes from the Black context and about Black preaching, at the same time, his five-fold model can be utilized by any preacher willing to take up the arduous task of preaching liberation. While there is more work to be done for preaching paradigms to embrace the world in front of the text, *Beyond the Tyranny of the Text* adeptly continues Harris' lifelong theological understanding of preaching liberation.

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Amy Plantinga Pauw. *Church in Ordinary Time: A Wisdom Ecclesiology*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2017. 188 pages. \$20.

In *Church in Ordinary Time*, Amy Plantinga Pauw makes the case for an ordinary-time, or wisdom, ecclesiology. Ordinary time refers to the liturgical periods which fall between major feasts of the Christian calendar. Pauw elevates ordinary time as “a metaphor for our creaturely existence,” adding that “[a]n ordinary-time ecclesiology emphasizes that the church lives in the gap between the resurrection of Jesus and the last things as God’s creatures” (1). An honest admission of the liminality of creaturehood prompts Pauw to explore biblical wisdom traditions, which deal unabashedly in the ordinary, in-betweenness of creaturely life. From wisdom traditions, Pauw draws forth a theology of creation which becomes the backbone of her ecclesiology. With characteristic perception and pastoral sensibility, she takes on various accounts of church which deny or evade the reality of the dimensions of creaturehood. She suggests, alternatively, an ecclesiology which holds in tension the vast scope of all creation, with the particularity and created conditions of life on earth. She proposes an *earthy* ecclesiology rooted in the “original grace” of creation, which imagines the church not aside from the world, but as deeply entrenched in the world and intertwined with creation. This ecclesiology is characterized by contingency and parity with fellow creatures, while it “resists the ecclesiological temptation to center its attention on what makes Christians different from other creatures” (13). Ultimately, a wisdom ecclesiology imagines church to exist not merely for the sake of the world, but rather “for the world in its solidarity with the world” (34).

Even as Pauw blurs the social, religious, and cultural boundaries which so often preoccupy the Christian imagination, she does not forfeit the uniqueness of Christian faith nor the potency of the gospel. The book itself takes on a trinitarian structure, with three sections that focus respectively on God the creator, Christ as wisdom enfleshed, and the Spirit that guides the church through the various seasons of life. In the first section, Pauw draws the readers into a theology of creation which admits the smallness of earth, and the conditions of creaturehood. Here, she delineates a wisdom theology which affirms the alterity of God, arguing that “God is not on one end of the same ontological scale as creatures” (26). This divine alterity is an essential component to her wisdom ecclesiology, which imagines church to live alongside creation, not as mediator between creation and God. At times, however, the resolve with which Pauw discusses divine alterity seems to preclude the possibility of theodicy. How might suffering creatures appeal to a supremely Other God? A theology of suffering seems to hang in the backdrop, only narrowly addressed, in Pauw’s discussions of finitude.

In the second section, Pauw emphasizes the humanity of Jesus as she articulates a wisdom Christology. Creaturehood is marked by dependence upon others—a radical contingency and parity—which Jesus displays throughout his life. Many theologians have all but sterilized the womb of Mary to protect the divinity of Jesus from the fleshiness of birth. But Pauw reclaims the full humanity of Jesus, arguing that “any theological proposal that makes the flesh of Jesus essentially unlike other human flesh sabotages human salvation” (19). Her embrace of Jesus’s humanity extends to the church, calling the church to recognize its interdependence with the rest of the earth. In the final section, Pauw describes the church in the power of the Spirit as the church moves through the rhythms and cycles of the Christian calendar. Each chapter focuses on a different liturgical season, including Ordinary Time, Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, and Pentecost. This final section of the book functions like a practical charge to Pauw’s readers, helping us to imagine a wisdom ecclesiology in action.

Pauw's project is surprisingly timely for the most extraordinary of times, offering an ecclesiology which easily rises to the occasion of ecological crisis, and now, a global pandemic. Perhaps her emphasis on the alterity of God lets God off the hook too soon, when much of wisdom literature voices a desire for a divine account for our frail, finite conditions. And yet, her aim in this project is not to offer a defense of God, nor an explanation for human suffering, but rather to reorient the church to its place in creation for all the many seasons we endure—be they ordinary, or extraordinary.

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Sarah Travis. *Metamorphosis: Preaching after Christendom*. Eugene: Cascade Books, 2019. 134 pages. \$19.

The Western church is failing. Church membership, worship attendance, and the financial resources of the church are in decline. With the end of Christendom in North America, the institutional church, especially the mainline Protestant church, is in limbo, particularly its practices, structures, purpose, mission, and fundamentally, identity. In this new context, Sarah Travis argues, “What is required is metamorphosis—a change in the form of the church itself—from Christendom to something new” (11). Travis is keenly aware of the reciprocal relationship between preaching practice and the ecclesial identity formation. In her homiletic response to the current situation, she has searched for and constructed a post-Christendom ecclesial identity. Postcolonial theory provides a new and critical lens for her work.

In chapter 1, Travis takes a brief detour into the history of the establishment and disestablishment of Christendom in the Western world. After the Constantinian Turn, the relationship between church and state had radically changed and Christianity was established as the dominant religion in the Roman Empire. “The church of Christendom mimicked the Roman Empire” and became captive to an imperial framework for its identity and purpose (34). With the end of Christendom, the church had not only been disestablished in society, but it also struggled to understand its ecclesial identity and purpose in a post-Christendom context.

In chapter 2, the author articulates a post-Christendom ecclesiology based on an alternative narrative frame to Christendom’s stories of triumph and superiority. A social trinitarian theology, theology of incarnation, and baptismal theology provide the foundation of a new framing story that helps the church disentangle itself from the power of Empire or states and faithfully reflect the life of the Triune God. A post-Christendom ecclesial identity (or identities) is a diverse, plural, porous, fluid identity (50). Preaching is a central practice that can deconstruct Christendom ecclesial identity and nurture an alternative identity and purpose to the church.

In chapter 3, the author constructs a theology of gospel, which functions as a hermeneutical lens for interpreting the Bible for preaching practice. Through historical examination of colonial history, she reveals and deconstructs the binary construction of the gospel of Christendom and demonstrates the complexity of the gospel, arguing “Gospel is about both life and death” (69). Along with the question of “What is good news?” the question of “For whom is this good news?” become a crucial point to consider for the interpretation of gospel. Finding good news requires listening to the perspectives of others, especially that of the marginalized and vulnerable. In this non-binary understanding of gospel, the current disestablishment of the church, though it may seem like bad news, can be good news that leads the church to new life through metamorphosis.

In chapter 4, Travis proposes what she calls metamorphosis preaching, a homiletical guide, that helps preachers lead churches into new liberating and life-giving narratives of the church. Three key movements of metamorphosis preaching are “metanoia: change of mind and heart,” “exodus: change of position,” and “kenosis: change of identity” (88–98). The first movement of metamorphosis preaching is metanoia, which includes a rejection of Christendom’s narrative of superiority and triumphalism, and repentance of damage done to others by and within the church (90). Exodus refers to an intentional change of position “from captivity to freedom, from the center to the margins, and from home to diaspora” (94). The last movement of metamorphosis preaching is the change of identity by making space within us through self-emptying and making ourselves vulnerable. The identity of the church is not fixed and

permanent but fluid and porous, and thus metamorphosis preaching seeks to challenge listeners' conventional and comfortable positions and invites them to open themselves to others for transformation.

In the final chapter, Travis offers examples of what metamorphosis preaching looks like. Four sermons demonstrate how preaching can lead churches to a journey of metamorphosis moving toward a post-Christendom narrative.

Many preachers in North America feel that we are entering into uncharted territory. Preachers are desperate to find tools to navigate this strange new reality. Sarah Travis offers an excellent map for this new reality of the church to search for and construct a new ecclesial identity and purpose in a post-Christendom world. Instead of holding onto an old paradigm of Christendom, she invites readers to have the courage to be a new church—one that is vulnerable and radically open to others for transformation through death and resurrection. Sarah Travis is thoroughly theological and practical in this book. I highly recommend this reading for all preachers who want to lead their congregations into a journey of metamorphosis.

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Teresa Berger. *@ Worship: Liturgical Practices in Digital Worlds*. New York: Routledge, 2018. 146 pages. \$126.99.

In *@Worship: Liturgical Practices in Digital Worlds*, Teresa Berger provides a theoretical framework for understanding online religious practices. She combines liturgical studies, theological reflection, digital media studies, and cognate disciplines, such as gender theory, to inform our understanding of virtual liturgical practices, and she reflects on her personal experience as a *digital immigrant* entering the world of online devotional activities.

Berger contends that online worship is an embodied activity as it cannot take place without a physical body to access a website or mobile application. She also deconstructs the notion of a pure binary between people and technology. For instance, technological enhancements like contact lenses and artificial joints have become a natural part of an individual's body. I found Berger's logic to be cleverly disarming to the common rebuttals against technology and digital worship, which can be seen in Franz and Frederick Foltz' book, *Faith, Hope, and Love in the Technological Society* (Cascade, 2018).

By offering historical examples, Berger illustrates that non-conventional understandings of presence and participation are not exclusive ideas to the technological world. She writes that Peter Damian, a hermit during the Middle Ages, developed his own notion that the whole church is *virtually* present during the reciting of the liturgy, even if an individual is alone (24). Berger also notes that while not being physically present due to illness, Claire of Assisi had a vivid vision of a Mass, whereby she was able to recall who was present in the service (25). I believe that the strength of Berger's research is the history that she brings to her readers, who may not be aware or realize the correlation of these historic accounts.

The author tackles the question of what makes an online gathering a faith community. She considers media theorists' criteria for digital communities, such as interactivity, signals of personal concern, and openness. For example, Berger mentions how for thinkers such as Nathan Jurgenson, human connection is more than physical proximity and "breathing the same air" (38). Likewise, for Berger, liturgical communities have not been bound by the notion of physical co-presence, but a broader belief in the communion of saints.

Drawing upon her Catholic identity as a point of comparison, Berger indicates that online religious spaces look remarkably traditional in order to provide participants a semblance of the familiar. Virtual flowers, virtual candles, and typed confessions mirror brick-and-mortar practices. Praise and worship through online videos add sound to the visual resemblances.

Berger also provides some guidance for thinking about online sacraments. She cautions against quick answers which do not consider the careful nuance and complexity of questions regarding digitally mediated sacraments. Provisionally, Berger offers that medieval theologians expanded their understanding that baptism could be received by water, by blood, or by desire, suggesting that desire could provide a possible framework for digital sacraments.

Students and scholars with an interest in digital religion will benefit from Berger's thorough multimethodological examination of digital worship. While media platforms are constantly evolving (even since the book's publication), Berger's framework still has purchase for emerging platforms, such as using Zoom for worship services during the COVID-19 pandemic. Consider for example her consistent line of argumentation that "in digitally mediated worship, 'perceived co-presence' rather than 'physical co-location' becomes a defining feature" (106).

The author describes the tension between what people allow in digital liturgical practices and what God can do. As she indicates, God does not have any difficulties venturing through the cosmos and cyberspace. In fact, God can operate with ease in such virtual spaces. The difficulty is reconciling the human and physical aspects of such divine encounters. While this tension is true, it is more pronounced in some religious traditions than in others, depending on their theological and sacramental beliefs.

Amid the religious and technological genre, this present book is similar to Deanne Thompson's *The Virtual Body of Christ In A Suffering World* (Abingdon, 2016), which makes a theological case for virtual presence and meaningful digital connection. However, *@ Worship* provides additional historical and theological framework for such a perspective. As online worship has become a common practice, this book is a valuable volume for understanding worship among pixels.

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Kathleen (Kathy) Black, with Bishop Kyrillos, Jonathan L. Friedmann and Tamar Frankiel, Hamid Mavani and Jihad Turk. *Rhythms of Religious Ritual: The Yearly Cycle of Jews, Christians, and Muslims*. Vol. 1. Claremont, CA: Claremont Press, 2018. 165 pages. \$19.99.

Rhythms of Religious Ritual: The Yearly Cycle of Jews, Christians, and Muslims from Kathleen (Kathy) Black, Bishop Kyrillos, Jonathan L. Friedmann and Tamar Frankiel, Hamid Mavani, and Jihad Turk presents a collection of ritual practices based upon the religious calendars of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim communities.

Black is an ordained minister in the United Methodist Church and professor of homiletics and liturgics. Friedmann is a cantor, composer, musicologist, biblical scholar and professor of Jewish music history. Frankiel is a professor of comparative religion. Mavani is a professor of Islamic studies. Turk is the founding president of Bayan Claremont, an Islamic graduate school designed to educate Muslim scholars and religious leaders. Bishop Kyrillos is an auxiliary bishop of the Coptic Church. (More details regarding precise title and institutional affiliation as well as research interests can be found in the book.)

Intended as a guidebook for religious leaders and laity, the text arises out of interfaith collaboration between Claremont School of Theology [CST], the Academy of Jewish Religion, California (a Jewish seminary), Bayan Claremont (a new Islamic graduate institution), and the University of the West (a Buddhist educational institution). Also located on the CST campus is Saint Athanasius and Saint Cyril Theological School (a Coptic Orthodox Christian seminary) (6). The authors state upfront that the collection is not comprehensive. It will not satisfy all readers. Important observances may seem missing. For example, the pages on Christianity do not discuss a phenomenon like the potluck meal or give serious attention to charismatic, evangelical, or free church traditions of color and others not easily identified by the largely Anglo-Catholic and Orthodox based ways of considering and doing liturgy.

Yet the book excels in its first-page vision that the 21st century is marked by religious diversity, and it can no longer be assumed that the United States is a Christian country, if that assumption were ever correct in the first place (xiii). “[F]ewer and fewer persons practice any form of religion,” extended families frequently comprise religious diversity, and “there are religious ‘hybrids’ among us who are Christian/Buddhist or Jewish/Christian because of interreligious marriages or personal affiliations to more than one religious tradition” (ibid.). In short, the U.S. and the world are multireligious. Therefore, *Rhythms of Religious Ritual* is timely and illuminating.

The authors also note how ambitious or “ludicrous” their attempt at intertradition work is (3). Celebrating high holy days can markedly differ within traditions. “The Islamic celebration of Edi al-Adha will take on different practices by African American Muslims who converted to Islam through the teaching and influence of Malcolm X than American Muslims who immigrated from Turkey or Iran” (4). They are careful to recognize the array of Jewish belief historically divided between Ashkenazic and Sephardic communities, and the varieties of Islam marked by the leading Sunni and Shia traditions, as well as the mystical influence of the Sufis. Demographic statistics lead the discussion of each tradition (9, 75, 125). The Pew data, however, is better taken as a departure point for further exploration than current data. Yet for all of its limits, *Rhythms of Religious Ritual* is accessible, informative, and respectful.

The authors state that reasons, history, and theological significance of rituals do not necessarily nurture religious community (155). Even so, *Homiletic* readers might be surprised to learn what a Zeraa is—a roasted bone (often a shank bone, but broiled beet can be substituted for

vegetarians) that symbolizes the first “paschal” lamb offered on the night of the Jewish Exodus (28). For us, of course, Christ is not Jesus’ last name (78). But the absence of a season or day in Christianity to commemorate textual revelation from God, as seen in Shavuot for Judaism or Ramadan for Islam, may seem curious (156, 164). Homileticians in particular might also find it interesting that preaching (*khutbah*) happens twice at Eid-ul Fitr (“Feast of Breaking the Fast”), (142).

Citations are infrequent in *Rhythms of Religious Ritual*, and it includes no index. The narrative reads more like an annotated glossary. In a classroom it may suit undergraduates best. Yet it could also serve as a handy reference for any seminarian or doctoral student as long as the self-identified limits and promise of the book are kept in mind. The work here is swift and sharp enough to make required reading on an exam list, and fulfill the authors’ ultimate hope of reducing religious violence with shared peace and life coursing through the people who follow the God of Abraham.

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Cláudio Carvalhaes, *What's Worship Got to Do with It? Interpreting Life Liturgically*. Eugene: Cascade Press, 2018. 266 pages. \$33.00.

In *What's Worship Got to Do with It? Interpreting Life Liturgically*, Cláudio Carvalhaes offers up a revolutionary and holistic vision of liturgy as organically rooted in human and other-than-human life and living. Writing from a commitment to the liberation of all persons, particularly those who have been oppressed and marginalized, and with a winsome *joie de vivre*, Carvalhaes centers the life and the living of the marginalized, the poor, and the earth as the primary concern of Christian liturgy. Divided into three primary sections: “liturgy of the church,” “liturgy of the neighbor,” and “liturgy of the world,” Carvalhaes explores liturgy’s place in Christian tradition, its ethical possibilities, and its connections with the complex, violent socio-political realities of the twenty-first century (ix).

In the first section, containing chapters 1 through 5, Carvalhaes addresses the “liturgy of the church,” or traditional aspects of Christian liturgical theory and practice. In chapter 1, he argues for a liturgical ethic of love attuned to unjust economic and political realities. The second chapter is a co-written essay by Carvalhaes and Paul Galbreath exploring Easter through qualitative engagement of the worship of three congregations. They argue that Easter casts a transformative political and ethical vision for the world. In chapter 3, Carvalhaes engages baptism with care for the human, ecology, and the economic devastation of white supremacy and capitalism. The first section concludes with chapters 4 and 5 exploring the liberative possibilities of Advent and Pentecost, respectively.

In the second section, “liturgy of the neighbor,” comprising chapters 6 through 9, Carvalhaes engages ethical problems related to the hierarchies and disparities impacting liturgy. In chapter 6, he grounds prayer in a critical reading of the racist and ecological injustice of our world, and he constructs a nondominant vision of prayer that leads those who pray to disrupt racism and to enter into solidarity with all persons who are racially minoritized by systems of white supremacy. Assessing the oral/aural ways in which power can be expressed and nurtured, in chapter 7 Carvalhaes theologically engages the liturgical acts of listening and speaking with deep care for minoritized experiences. In chapter 8 he develops a “hermeneutic of the knees,” exploring the ways in which dominant Christian liturgical propriety has, in combination with the forces of colonialism, done great harm, and he argues for embodied power, fluidity, and diversity that disrupts patriarchy, heteronormativity, and any other dimensions of dominant Christian worship (158). This section concludes with chapter 9, which interprets prayer as an act of labor and dance committed to the healing of the wounds of the world.

In the chapter 10, the first chapter of the final section, “liturgy of the world,” Carvalhaes imagines preaching through the lens of liturgies of the church, the neighbor, and the world. He argues for preaching that draws us into connection with each other and the world. Exploring the tendencies to singularly focus either on liturgical tradition or new liturgical expressions, in chapter 11 he constructs an alternative in which the focus of liturgy is a commitment to the preferential option. In chapter 12, Carvalhaes explores the virtual dimensions of online worship, offering a theology of digital worship focused on the creation and nurturing of communal connections that move beyond technical questions to a communal ethic.

The conclusion encapsulates Carvalhaes’ primary theme of connecting worship to life and living in a way that leads to the pursuit of justice. He writes, “. . . using the beauty of rituals, liturgies, and symbols, and the history and experiences of people, it [liturgy and liturgical theology] has to work for justice!” (241).

In the field of liturgical studies, far too much of our Western canon is silent on or is disconnected from the unjust realities of our world. Carvalhaes' approach to liturgy models a radically different way of engaging liturgical theory and practice. While unwaveringly presenting his radical vision for worship, Carvalhaes shapes his arguments in a manner that is accessible to those of us deeply formed in the Western liturgical tradition and, as the case may be, dominant Euro-American liturgical theory and practice. He carefully and critically engages the work of numerous prominent scholars in the field, while also engaging an array of voices that may be less familiar within the field of liturgical studies. This work provides lay persons, clergy, students, and scholars essential and ground-breaking frameworks and language at the intersection of liberation theology and Christian worship.

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