BOOK REVIEWS


Reviewer: Eric Price, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, IL.

Homiletics as a discipline holds that biblical texts should speak to contemporary contexts. The preacher’s task, as John Stott famously phrased it, is to stand between these two worlds and show how Scripture connects to listeners’ experience. However, different scholarly approaches to homiletics tend to prioritize either the biblical text or the listeners’ context as the primary generator of a sermon’s meaning. Ahmi Lee, assistant professor of preaching at Fuller Theological Seminary, has provided a theological account of the homiletical transaction that helps us hold to authorial intent while still viewing lived experience as a valuable lens for interpreting Scripture.

Lee offers her proposal as a via media between two dominant approaches to homiletics, what she terms the traditional homiletic and the conversational homiletic. These two approaches are distinguished primarily by their epistemology. For the former, meaning is a fixed entity discoverable through proper biblical exegesis. For the later, meaning is an open-ended entity which arises from communal reflection. Traditional homiletics is “text-centered,” whereas conversational homiletics is “reader-centered” (2). Lee’s goal is to propose a homiletical “third approach that builds on both of their strengths” (3).

To do this, Lee surveys the strengths and weaknesses of traditional and conversational homiletics. There is much to commend in the traditional homiletic, namely “its foundational theological conviction that God has spoken” (21). Yet she notes
some inadvertent side effects: the uncritical restriction of a congregation’s interpretive authority to the preacher (22); the sermonic reduction of Scripture’s various genres to bare propositions (24-25); the view of application as something distinct from interpretation (25-26); and the equation of biblical truth with “dominant culture” interpretations of Scripture (27).

Lee then surveys the conversational model through the writings of three adherents: Lucy Rose, John McClure, and O. Wesley Allen, Jr. As an outgrowth of the New Homiletic, a conversational model recognizes that “people interpret texts from their own social location, inescapably colored by a miscellany of experiences that fashion their attitudes and perspectives” (52). Lee explains the postmodern epistemology that underlies the conversational homiletic and, while valuing its emphasis on human experience, nonetheless critiques it for “(1) the loss of confidence in Scripture’s ability to communicate a discernible meaning, and (2) the turn to the community of readers to generate meaning as a solution to this perceived problem” (70).

Moving to her constructive proposal, Lee surveys the use of drama as a metaphor for theology. Drawing from the work of four theologians who develop this metaphor – Hans Urs van Balthasar, N.T. Wright, Nicholas Lash, and Kevin Vanhoozer – she demonstrates its utility for moving beyond the traditional-conversational homiletic binary. The metaphor of drama captures God’s ongoing action in the world, as recorded in Scripture and experienced in the lives of his people. Yet Scripture also functions as an inspired script that calls us to respond to God’s initiative from our various social locations and participate in the ongoing drama of redemption. “In this way the theodrama is able to steadily hold together proposition and experience, coherence and particularity, and divine action and human participation” (111).

Lee presents a theology of preaching that is integrated with dramatic theology. For overcoming the impasse between traditional and conversational homiletics, what is significant about theodrama is that it tells us “the sermon should examine
the world of, behind, and before the text so that the congregation hears what the text is saying – what it might have meant to the first hearers, what wisdom it holds for the present context, and what response it invites from them” (135). Whereas the traditional and conversational homiletics fall short by absolutizing one of these worlds, a theodramatic homiletic “provides hearers” a “conceptual framework” (121) of theological continuity to unite God’s past actions with his present and future actions through the congregation.

Lee notes that “a theodramatic homiletic is not an inventive, original approach to sermons” (151); rather, it re-captures a holistic preaching hermeneutic that has been stifled in different ways by the traditional and conversational models. In this way, a dramatic homiletic views contextual exegesis as essential to interpretation but does not absolutize the listeners’ context as the sole or primary locus of Scripture’s meaning.

In recent years, evangelical homiletics has made important steps toward integrating homiletical theory with theological hermeneutics. Lee’s proposal contributes to this ongoing development. Preaching God’s Grand Drama articulates a homiletical theory that is textually attentive and contextually sensitive. It takes seriously epistemological challenges raised by postmodern homiletics yet also shows evangelical theology has resources to address them. Lee’s model is neither static propositionalism nor reader-response theory, but a creative, theologically grounded account of how God’s transcendent truth connects with, and can be interpreted through, the immanence of human experience. In the field of homiletical theory, Lee’s proposal is now essential reading.

Reviewer: Timothy S. Warren, Dallas Theological Seminary, Dallas, TX.

Alcántara, having earned a Ph.D. at Princeton Theological Seminary, is Associate Professor of Preaching, occupying the Paul W. Powell Endowed Chair of Preaching at Truett Theological Seminary. His thesis is straightforward: “Preachers who cultivate life-giving preaching habits through deliberate practice will enhance their proficiency, grow in their commitment, and flourish in their homiletical ministry” (5, 190).

After establishing that preaching should be Christian at its core with the five practices he promises to elaborate emanating from that center, Alcántara views preaching’s primary task as witnessing the gospel. Chapter one defines the gospel, detailing what it is not and what it is. This gospel is more than a call to trust Jesus as Savior in order to be justified. It is transformative, offensive, hopeful, prophetic, and eschatological (18).

The next five chapters develop the necessity of practicing preaching that exhibits conviction, contextuality, clarity, concreteness, and creativity. Conviction is more than what the preacher believes and teaches; it is a matter of the price he is willing to pay if the gospel message is not popular and a matter of living consistently with the demands of the gospel. To preach contextually means that the preacher will give attention to the world and worldview of both the text and the listener. It means honoring both by being faithful to the gospel and fitting to the local congregation (86). Preaching with clarity demands, first of all, a precise grasp of the preaching text, not to create an academic commentary, but to address a particular congregation. Clear preaching employs language easily grasped through the ear, a main idea effortlessly identified and understood, and words, sentences, and concepts that are short and simple, as opposed to complex. Although preachers will employ both abstraction and concreteness, the concrete sermon must “eventually find its way back down to sea level” (153). Concepts, illustrations, and applications must be presented in terms that make sense where listeners live. They must be able to visualize
how the gospel looks when they go home, to work, to school, or to play. Creative preaching will exhibit “novelty, quality, and relevance” (157). Creativity demands the effort of both the imagination and the rational mind. Creative sermons invite the listener to participate in the experience of the text rather than remain a distant observer.

In a final chapter, Alcántara notes that artists and athletes who attain greatness do so by relentless practice, sometimes going through the motions 10,000 times. If artists and athletes have such dedication to the practice of the basics, why not preachers who are stewards of the gospel?

The Practices of Christian Preaching may prove helpful both as an introductory text for the novice preacher and as a resource for the homiletics professor. The five basic practices are essential for all preachers, while the 394 footnotes and 313 references listed in the bibliography provide plenty of grist for the scholar. Not only is this text well researched, it is clearly organized, exceptionally readable, interestingly illustrated with anecdotes, and brimming with examples, practical applications, and online learning activities. It comes to us with a global perspective representing not only Anglo-European, but also Hispanic, African American, African, and Asia cultures. Diversity is championed, particularly in the collaborator discussions and audio and video links on the book’s website, with women and men professors and preachers from a broad range of seminaries and denominational affiliations.

The slant of this text is more progressive than conservative evangelical and will likely find a more comfortable home among progressive evangelicals and the Academy of Homiletics than it will among conservative evangelicals in the Evangelical Homiletics Society. That said, Alcántara’s emphasis on the importance of practice and the “C’s” of preaching should challenge Christian preachers of every stripe.
“In the quiet recesses of my heart,” Martin Luther King, Jr. often said, “I am fundamentally a clergyman, a Baptist preacher.” Using that statement as a touchstone, Sunggu Yang, professor of Christian Ministries at Portland Seminary (George Fox University), presents a concise and well-argued analysis of King as a preacher-theologian. Specifically, Yang uses King’s sermons, speeches, and writings to analyze his theology of reconciliation in a violent world. The root of that theology was the universal yet personal, loving God. This God works in two ways—reconciling himself and people, and also afflicted people to their violent oppressors. It was the second aspect of that theology that distinguished King from preachers who tried to meet the sword with a bigger sword. King genuinely believed that God’s love can transform even the oppressors. As Yang states, this was King’s “reconciliatory homiletic theology” (38).

I appreciate how this short book progresses with careful argumentation and tight links. Perhaps it started as a doctoral dissertation, but in this version Yang has deliberately avoided jargon and lengthy discussions of academic minutiae (xiv). Intended for seminary students, prophetic pastors, and general readers (xiv), King’s Speech applies three lessons from King to our own preaching ministries in a violent world: we too should “unveil the current cultural ethos of violence” (81), “participate in God’s transforming work in history through everyday situations” (82), and take heart that “preachers can play a significant role” through their pastoral-prophetic preaching (83).
One of the original contributions *King’s Speech* makes to homiletics is a theological-rhetorical analysis of how MLK used the Exodus narrative in his sermons. He did not use that event typologically, as was common in the African American tradition; rather he used it as “other-typology” (68-71). This means that King did not use Egypt as a type of white, racist America—an enemy to be crushed; instead, he used Egypt to illustrate evil as a general, “social illness permeating American soil” (71). For God to defeat this evil, “there must be reconciliation between the oppressed (black people) and the oppressors (white people)” (71). These white people are “ignorant or unfortunate counter-slaves” (71). With this analysis, Yang contributes to the literature on MLK, even disagreeing with Lischer’s magisterial *Preacher King*. (In many other places, Yang acknowledges his agreement with and dependence on Lischer).

I recommend this short book as a good example of how to argue a homiletical thesis. It contributes to our field as well as practical theology, ethics, and reconciliation studies.

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Reviewer: *Ryan Boys, Green Pond Bible Chapel, Rockaway, NJ.*

John Hilber’s commentary on Ezekiel is intended to be a focused commentary for sake of preaching and teaching, and that is precisely what it is. He writes with the busy preacher in mind, aiming to provide essential insights for those with limited time to prepare a sermon each week. Hilber helpfully provides a streamlined introduction to Ezekiel that highlights the central message of the book. He also provides a suggested list of texts for a limited expository preaching series through Ezekiel.

The commentary is divided into textual chunks that Hilber suggests for preaching portions. Each section begins with the main message for that portion and includes sections on key
themes, the context within Ezekiel, interpretive highlights, a theological bridge to application, and a focus for application. The interpretive highlights are limited comments on the text focused on key cultural, linguistic, or contextual features. He does not comment on every verse, which falls in line with the purpose and design of the commentary.

Hilber’s awareness and application of linguistic theories strengthens his interpretive comments and application. In his interpretation he keeps the genre of the text in mind. For example, in his comments on Ezekiel 38:1-39:29 he briefly discusses the nature of apocalyptic visions and addresses the question of a more literal versus figurative meaning (234-36). His treatment of this issue in light of genre awareness provides much needed nuance in making exegetical and homiletic decisions.

In considering application in general, he makes use of relevance theory and concentrates on “contextual relevance” that keeps in mind the prophet’s original audience (7). This protects the preacher from fanciful applications distant from the text itself.

One drawback of this commentary is its limited theological perspective. This is no doubt partially a function of the focused nature of the work. Hilber writes as a dispensational premillennialist and rarely refers to other interpretive approaches. In his comments on whether Ezekiel’s temple in chapters 40-43 is literal or figurative, he makes a passing reference to “replacement theology” (245), but he does not meaningfully engage with it.

Furthermore, while Hilber’s application sections on the whole are helpful, he limits his appreciation of the canonical significance of the book. For example, after his excellent interpretive insights on 40:1-43:12 he applies this section in moral takeaways with no reference to possible fulfillment in Christ in the New Jerusalem. He states, “[T]he effect lies in the moral impact the vision would have on his audience” (251). While he takes a symbolic view of the temple vision, he misses out on application in light of the view that Jesus fulfills this vision and dwells with believing Jews and Gentiles forever. I wonder if his
ethical application would not have had even more impact with consideration of the text’s canonical relevance.

For better or worse, Hilber has written a truly dispensational, premillennial commentary on Ezekiel. For the busy pastor, this work will be an immensely helpful resource providing concise exegetical insight. The format and approach make this a truly preacher-friendly volume. Those looking for application rooted in a more canonical or christocentric reading of Ezekiel will find the takeaways lacking.


Reviewer: Eric Dokken, Grace Community Church, Marblehead, MA.

Yung Suk Kim is a New Testament scholar who teaches at Samuel DeWitt Proctor School of Theology. In the conclusion to Preaching the New Testament Again, Kim clearly states the purpose and outline of this slim volume: “What I have attempted to do in this book is to explore diverse yet divergent concepts of ‘faith,’ ‘freedom,’ and ‘transformation,’ deeply entrenched in the New Testament, and to help give informed readers a choice in their interpretation and preaching” (100). The book consists of five chapters: an introduction, one for each of the three chosen concepts, and a conclusion. In the main chapters, Kim explores New Testament texts related to each concept and concludes with suggestions for preaching on that concept.

Kim challenges the reader to think beyond simplistic definitions of faith, freedom, and transformation, and to consider the diverse ways these concepts are portrayed in Scripture. His chapter on faith is the most helpful, as he demonstrates that faith is not primarily accepting
propositions but an action. He states, “If we had the verb ‘faithize’ in English, we could reduce the unnecessary misunderstanding about pisteuo” (11). Kim reminds us that faith is often referring to God’s faithfulness and Jesus’ active faith in God’s faithfulness.

The other two main chapters were increasingly less helpful. In the chapter on transformation, rather than showing what words are used for transformation in the New Testament and exploring them, Kim details the transformations that were experienced by Jesus. He suggests that Jesus was acknowledging his sin when coming to John for baptism and that he “died to his old self” in baptism (76) and “he becomes the beloved son of God” (91). Jesus also “changed his mind” in his attitude toward Gentiles (77).

Kim’s confused understanding of Jesus is a result of his critical view of Scripture. He attempts to find the “historical Jesus” and does not accept the disputed letters of Paul were written by the apostle. He states that “Paul’s legacy or theology did not continue with them” (56) because they appear to restrict some of the radical changes Paul had attempted to bring to the church in regard to slavery and gender roles in the home and church.

Kim’s suggestions for preaching at the end of each chapter center on social justice themes like racism, immigration, gender roles, and religious inclusivism. The logical connection between these topics and the concept he has described is sometimes unclear. Likewise, his applications do not always have a clear connection to the text. Kim believes “a single passage can be interpreted from many different angles” (72). Since Kim’s exegesis does not prioritize authorial intent, the choice of which angle to choose appears to be up to the interpreter.

Preaching the New Testament Again is much more about theology than homiletics. Kim states in the conclusion, “The New Testament can be a rich resource of faith for preachers and scholars if rightly interpreted” (100). Apparently what Kim means by preaching the New Testament “again” is to
preach it though a critical rather than traditional interpretation. Since evangelicals will disagree with him on how to rightly interpret the New Testament, they will not be able to accept his conclusions.


Reviewer: Eric Price, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, IL.

Carolyn Helsel, associate professor of homiletics at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary, has written a book that addresses an important question: “How can white preachers preach about racism to predominately white congregations?” (10)

Helsel’s model for preachers draws from Paul Ricoeur’s book The Course of Recognition, which “centers on the challenges of recognition in three senses: cognition, identity, gratitude” (10). She applies this framework to her question and develops it as a homiletical model to help white preachers address racism.

The first step, cognition, focuses on different “understandings of the word racism” (10). Helsel notes that the word racism has a variety of connotations. She offers the following definition: “Racism is a system that creates unfair advantages for whites, while disproportionately penalizing persons of color” (20). It is important to help listeners understand the systemic nature of racism, yet preachers should move beyond abstract definitions of racism and help listeners understand concretely the way that race impacts peoples’ experience of society.

The second step, identity, involves helping white listeners see themselves as white. Especially in the post-Civil Rights era, many white Christians do not see themselves as having a racial identity. Preaching about racism necessitates helping white
Christians understand how being classified as white confers social benefit. “If our white congregants are going to challenge racism, they need to see it as impacting their own lives, not just the lives of other people” (44). Drawing upon racial identity theorist Janet Helms, Helsel suggests “it is critical for whites to develop an anti-racist white racial identity” (46).

Gratitude toward God should move us toward action. Helsel encourages preachers to connect anti-racist work with gratitude for what God has done through the gospel. We may preach about racism, and encourage parishioners’ commitment to anti-racism, out of thankfulness for God’s redemptive initiative. This three-fold model is not meant to be a simple, linear process or an organizational outline for a sermon. Rather, it is a template for preachers to approach the long-term task of helping white congregants understand racism.

After discussing the three-fold framework of cognition, identity, and gratitude, Helsel addresses biblical hermeneutics for preaching about racism (chapter 5) and a theological framework for preaching about racism (chapter 6).

In her hermeneutical discussion, Helsel notes a challenge to preaching about racism – race as a construct is an early modern notion which is foreign to the authors of Scripture. Consequently, she suggests that a focus on authorial intent, such as that advocated by Haddon Robinson, mitigates the possibility of addressing contemporary racism (56). This may be true about certain restrictive definitions of authorial intent. However, more nuanced accounts of authorial intent that are grounded in theological hermeneutics – especially those which make recourse to speech-act theory – provide conceptual room for understanding how biblical texts may speak to new phenomena. While it is anachronistic to read early modern concepts of “race” into biblical texts, the Scriptures nonetheless abound with resources to address the social division, economic injustice, and hierarchical anthropology that undergird racist systems and attitudes. Helsel rightly reminds us that, historically, Scripture has been used to propagate injustice. This history calls us to practice interpretive humility and to attune ourselves to ways
our own interpretation may inadvertently overlook or even reinforce present injustice.

In her theological discussion, Helsel offers three metaphors – idolatry, estrangement, and bondage – to help us understand and speak about racism as sin. Idolatry speaks to how whiteness as a construct evaluates the value of non-white persons in terms of their conformity to whiteness. Estrangement speaks to how racism impacts “the structures of society as well as individual interactions,” causing social and interpersonal fractures (76). Finally, racism as bondage speaks to how racism is an “ingrained and inherited tradition” that goes beyond our “rational intention” (79). Implicit bias and instinctive fear of those who are different are examples of this sort of bondage.

The final chapter considers homiletical strategies more specifically. Helsel encourages preachers to “keep in mind the long view” (85), as understanding and recognizing racism takes time. She suggests how the illustrations and sermon forms we use can facilitate effective communication about racism. Finally, she encourages practices of congregational ethnography beyond the pulpit to help shape more contextually-responsive preaching.

Presently the United States is going through a significant moment of national reckoning as it grapples with ongoing social repercussions of racial injustice. Given the healthcare disparities laid bare by COVID-19, the removal of Confederate monuments, and the renewed attention to relations between law enforcement and minority communities, the pernicious national legacy of white supremacy is on public display. There is an urgent need for preachers to help white congregants consider the demands of Christian discipleship in a racialized society. By synthesizing scholarship from a wide disciplinary breadth, Carolyn Helsel has produced an accessible and timely guide to help preachers meet the moment.

Reviewer: Scott M. Gibson, Baylor University’s George W. Truett Theological Seminary, Waco, TX.

This recently published preaching book from our friends at Preaching Today, based on lessons preachers can learn from the book of Hebrews, is intended to answer the question, “what are the principles that we should always seek to follow if we’re going to preach a ‘biblical sermon’” (17). As such, author Jeremy A. McKeen, senior pastor of First Congregational Church of Hamilton, Massachusetts, argues, “I believe Hebrews is an inspired sermon that every sermon should be modeled after. In short, the principles for preaching that we find in Hebrews are meant for preachers today” (17).

McKeen urges, “Consider it [the book, The Model Sermon] a sort of Cliff Notes guide to preaching. Each chapter highlights the basic preaching principle that we find in Hebrews and then gives some practical steps on how to immediately apply that principle in your preaching” (18). Fifteen chapters comprise the “notes” to which McKeen refers. They are: 1) Get Out of the Way; 2) Show Them Jesus; 3) Tell the Story; 4) Argue from Scripture; 5) Take It Seriously; 6) Identify with the People; 7) Know Your Sheep; 8) Lead Them to Maturity; 9) Trust the Holy Spirit; 10) Admonish the Idle; 11) Encourage the Fainthearted; 12) Make an Appeal; 13) Help Their Unbelief; 14) Illustrate Your Points; and, 15) Remember the Risen Jesus. No doubt additional preaching principles can be mined from the rich resource of the book of Hebrews.

Each chapter provides typically three lessons, insights, or features derived from the book of Hebrews, with supplemental biblical material, that undergirds the main principle discussed in
the given chapter. As one can sense from the list of fifteen principles, this is an appreciable catalog that preachers are to keep in mind as they prepare their sermons in light of the Hebrews template. One may be left wondering if all of these principles are to be present in every sermon.

Mixed with study, sage advice, and sanctified opinion, the author offers insight in each chapter on ways in which present-day sermons can benefit from the model of this ancient sermon. Most of the concepts communicated in this volume are not new. What is new is the way the author helpfully connects homiletical principles with the sermon, the book of Hebrews, which is clever and valuable.

Two final comments: 1) the content of chapter five, “Take It Seriously,” does not seem to be as linked to the book of Hebrews as the other chapters; 2) the two sermons in the appendix would have been strengthened by including a commentary or notes as to how the elements of the sermons reflect the principles as they were presented in the chapters of the book. An introduction, guide, or primer to reading the sermons in light of the fifteen principles would have helped this reader.

The Model Sermon is a rich resource for beginning preachers and a fresh reminder for experienced preachers. The book would find a place as a supplemental text in an introductory preaching class and as a textbook in a course on preaching Hebrews.
Pennsylvania, suggests a creative approach to preaching that intentionally aligns the congregation with God's vision. In this small text, Trambley advocates discerning the most pressing needs of the congregation through assessment (using tools such as Natural Church Development Survey, the Congregational Assessment Tool, Vital Signs Report from Holy Cow! Consulting, or RenewalWorks' Spiritual Life Inventory) and prayer. Once a primary growth area is specifically identified, he suggests it be directly addressed through a long-term preaching strategy. Lectionary texts (or the biblical passages selected for the week) are read with this congregational vitality focus in mind.

While the scriptural texts found in the lectionary cover many topics, Trambley asserts the selected growth focus for the church can be frequently extrapolated from them. He likens this process to family trips to Alabama. There are many different routes, with places to explore along the way, but eventually, all roads lead to Alabama. If the selected focus is God’s mission and calling for the church, it will show up clearly and repeatedly in the biblical texts, Trambley maintains.

The last section of the book provides practical suggestions for preachers on the topics of prayer, passion, personality, and physicality. The most profound concept from the book (besides using the lectionary to address church leadership themes) comes from the “physicality” chapter when addressing sermons that bomb. Every preacher has experienced pulpit flops. Quoting a choreographer friend, Trambley notes, “the difference between an amateur and a professional is not seen on the best days, but on the worst ones” (128). Then, applying this directly to the preaching context, Trambley encourages the pastor to pay close and careful attention when a sermon fails to hit the intended target. “What we rarely hear from the congregation on those days... is what did not work and why. Those areas that prevent us from connecting on our worst days are the places we most need, and probably least want, to work on if we are going to improve as preachers” (129).

I have read countless books on church growth and leadership, along with a smattering of texts on lectionary
preaching, but this delightful book is the first I have encountered that merges the two themes together. It is a helpful resource for pastors seeking the courage to lead their congregants forthrightly into the best version of who they are meant to be.


Reviewer: *Terence Waldron, Pioneer Drive Baptist Church, Abilene, TX.*

The publisher and editors of the *ESV Expository Commentary* seek amongst other goals to provide commentaries that are “robustly biblical-theological, broadly reformed, doctrinally conversant, and pastorally useful” (9). The two sections of the ninth volume in this series certainly meet these expectations and should find a warm reception among those seeking such helps. This beautiful, black, large hardbound edition allots 289 pages to Hamilton’s exposition of the Gospel of John and 293 pages to Vickers’ commentary on the Acts of the Apostles. These studies are not as thorough as Carson’s or Bock’s, but they provide more depth than works like those by Kruse and Stott. The two authors teach alongside each other at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, where Hamilton serves simultaneously as a preaching pastor, having himself recently spent nineteen months preaching through John.

Hamilton argues that John is a “biblical theologian” writing “biblical narrative” (21), and it is this understanding of John that shapes Hamilton’s study of the text. He presents a chiastic structure that encapsulates the entire Gospel, as well as multiple chiasms found inside individual pericopes. He often focuses on the appearance of Old Testament symbols as important markers and theological keys, especially the festivals that provide the framework for the Gospel’s narrative and
movement. Finally, it is Hamilton’s conviction that “John’s Gospel and the OT must be read in light of each other, each expositing and informing the other” (22), and he does an excellent job of maintaining this commitment as he continually roots John’s teachings in the apostle’s theology of the Torah, Prophets, and Writings.

Vickers continues in this robust biblical-theological vein, describing Acts as “the capstone and climax of all biblical narrative. It is a story about the fulfillment of the story” (316). Vickers focuses on the text through the lens of fulfillment and how the story of Jesus and the Holy Spirit work through the early church to fulfill the messianic promises of the Old Testament.

Both Hamilton and Vickers do an excellent job of connecting both individual events and teachings and the larger overarching themes of John and Acts back to the Old Testament. They demonstrate repeatedly that it was these texts that initiated and informed Israel’s theology of the symbols and subjects found in John and Acts.

The academically uninitiated will find these commentaries accessible and abundantly informative. The authors are versed in Greek but do not fill their pages with foreign language and linguistic notations. Either section of the commentary provides more than enough background and illumination to solely support preachers who are teaching quickly through one of these biblical books. However, if they are going to labor through John at a pace similar to Hamilton’s, they will find themselves in need of additional resources. Additionally, this volume is a beneficial supplement to the pastor who is doing his or her own devotional readings in John or Acts. While this dual commentary should not find itself being used as a textbook in master’s level exegesis or theology courses, it is well worth the investment for the pastor who has a plan to preach through either New Testament book.

Reviewer: Benjamin C. Crelin, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, UK.

Recently, a host of books have explored the intersection of theology and preaching. Yet the best thoughts are not always new. There are rich, historical gems to mine for robust, theological homiletics. This book is a trove of such homiletical treasures. James P. Eglington, the Meldrum Lecturer in Reformed Theology at the University of Edinburgh, has translated Herman Bavinck’s key texts on homiletics. The collection includes Bavinck’s only published sermon as well as four of his texts on preaching. Eglinton’s purpose is to bridge the “gap between Bavinck the theologian and the preachers who read him” and to consider whether there is “such a thing as a distinctively neo-Calvinist homiletical method” (1-2).

In a concise biography, Eglinton highlights Bavinck’s homiletical pedigree, specifically his formation by other preachers and institutions, such as his theologically modern university, Leiden. The first of Bavinck’s texts is “Eloquence.” The 1889 lecture opines that preaching is not reducible to mere rhetoric. Rather, preaching mandates a careful stewardship of the word of God for the purposes of God. Preaching must holistically engage the mind, the imagination, and the will. The second text, “The Sermon and the Service,” is a prescient diagnosis of church decline today. Bavinck sounds a clarion call for preachers to recapture and teach a “right concept of the public church service” (59). He explains that a theologically astute view of corporate worship entails a high view of preaching and its role in the life of both the individual and the community.
The third text is Bavinck’s sermon, “The World-Conquering Power of Faith.” An exposition of one of his favorite scriptural texts, 1 John 5:4b, this sermon demonstrates Bavinck’s firm scriptural exegesis, broad familiarity with current events, and clear evangelical faith. Of special note is its rich biblical theology seamlessly woven throughout, which places the listener within God’s redemptive-historical story. The penultimate text is “On Preaching in America,” Bavinck’s pithy and disapproving assessment of late 19th century American churches. Bavinck’s criticisms of the “superficiality” of that preaching, which “is not the unfolding and ministering of the word of God; rather it is a speech, and the text is simply a hook” (85), reveals the perennial necessity of calling preachers back to God’s word. The last text, “On Language,” while of interest to those intrigued by Bavinck’s philosophy of language, does not discuss preaching.

Per Eglington’s purpose, the strength of this book is found in the integration of Reformed theology and homiletics. Throughout these texts, the reader will discern the concept of Praedicatio Verbi Dei est Verbum Dei. “Then our speech will be formed by, and indeed will become one with the speech of the Holy Scriptures, which is the speech of … the Holy Spirit” (65). Other theological ideas are the priesthood of all believers (59), the Holy Spirit’s role in salvation (43), and the centrality of Christ (60). Second, Bavinck’s affirmation of the word is valuable for our postmodern age. Contra the New Homiletic, Bavinck emphasizes the word as the authoritative foundation for homiletical formation. This book may also be a comforting reminder for preachers today that many contemporary obstacles are not actually new.

Though a treasure trove in many respects, this collection does not give the practical guidance so often yearned for by the weekly practitioners of preaching. Therefore, for the reader seeking quick tips for next Sunday’s sermon, this book may disappoint. This is not a systematic work on preaching but an assorted collection of historical writings. Nonetheless, the volume takes a couple of steps towards articulating a neo-Calvinist homiletical method. Thus, for the reader interested in
the intersection of Reformed theology and homiletics, this book is worth the read.


Reviewer: Larry Torres, Edinburgh Theological Seminary, Edinburgh, UK.

Robert Chao Romero’s *Brown Church* seeks to tell the story of the “Brown Church,” which he defines as “a prophetic ecclesial community of Latinas/os that has contested racial and social injustice in Latin America and the United States for the past five hundred years” (11).

The purpose of this book is to pushback against two extremes. The first is the belief that social justice issues and concerns are separate from the Christian faith (6). The second is the belief that you cannot be a Christian and care about issues of racial and gender justice since Christianity is said to be the white man’s religion (6).

In the introduction Romero gives three counter-stories which are fictional but realistic. In these stories he tells of three college students and their experiences in higher education as Latinos who came from a Christian faith background. Two of the students faced a faith crisis when they encountered hostility from professors and students who believed that their Christian faith was a relic of colonialism and irrelevant to the plight of Latinos today. The other student, a pastor’s kid, attends an evangelical institution and has to deal with his parents getting deported, while being amongst peers who support Donald Trump’s “build a wall” immigration policy.

The history laid out in *Brown Church* is written to show there have been faithful Christians who fought for social justice and equality in Latin America for the past five hundred years.
Their views on and struggles for justice were rooted in their Christian faith, thus countering both beliefs cited above.

In his first chapter Romero lays out the theological foundations of the Brown Church as “El Plan Spiritual de Galilee” (The Spiritual Plan of Galilee). He draws the analogy between Galilee, as it was a borderland with cultural mixtures and a marginalized community, with the experiences of Latinos as a mestizo (a term for an ethnic mix between Spaniard and Native or Indian, but generally meaning “mixed”) people group. The Latino Christian experience can be described as a Galilean journey, as one that does not fit in with the secular activists or with the Christians who are not concerned with justice issues.

The rest of the book unfolds chronologically, highlighting different figures of the Brown Church. It is filled with rich history and stories that most likely are unknown to many people, including Latinos like myself.

Chapter two focuses on the birth of the Brown Church, which Romero views as being inaugurated with a sermon! Antonio de Montesinos preached a sermon in 1511 that condemned the Spaniards’ treatment of Natives. Romero considers Bartolome de las Casas, a contemporary of Montesinos, the father of the Brown Church as he advocated for the Natives to the Spanish Crown and fought against their mistreatment. Chapter three turns to mestizo Peruvian figures and their contribution denouncing the atrocities of Spanish conquest. Chapter four moves to the Mexican American War and Padre Antonio Jose Martinez and his struggles against the American Catholic Church. Chapter five focuses on Cesar Chavez and the overlooked spiritual foundations of his labor movement. Chapter six deals with the history of Latin American liberation theology and its evangelical form, misión integral (integral mission). Chapter seven discusses the ministry and preaching of Archbishop Oscar Romero (no relation to the author), a preacher who spoke against the killings and injustices happening in his country, El Salvador, and was ultimately assassinated for it. Chapter eight looks at recent developments in Latino theology and those who have contributed to the field. Romero concludes
with a summary of the key themes of the Brown Church and returns to the students in the counter-stories and affirms their belonging.

This book is written for Latino Christians, particularly those who do not feel a sense of belonging between the two extremes. This should not deter non-Latinos from reading it, however, because the book is informative and tells stories of church history that will be new for many readers. This is the book’s greatest contribution.

*Brown Church* is a timely book, as our nation, world, and churches are dealing with racial tensions that have been recently inflamed. Even though the book is focused on Latino church history and related issues, it discusses the history of Latino Christians of the past and how their faith informed their struggles against injustice and how it can inform ours today. Romero does an excellent job navigating the struggles of the past and how they relate to the present in each chapter. This book is a helpful resource for us preachers who seek to preach God’s word and minister faithfully in volatile times like our own, reflecting on how those in the Brown Church have done likewise. I highly recommend this volume.

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Reviewer: Daniel Gregory, Baylor University’s Truett Theological Seminary, Waco, TX.

John D. Harvey, a Th.D. graduate of Wycliff College at the University of Toronto, serves as Dean and Professor of New Testament at Columbia International University Seminary and School of Ministry in Columbia, SC. His recent work, *A Commentary on Romans*, is an excellent resource for expositors. It engages the biblical text thoroughly, though it is not a critical
commentary in terms of the depth of its analysis. Harvey offers no new thoughts or novel exegetical insights on the text of Romans, nor is that his purpose. Rather, the work aims to address the features in the biblical text necessary for understanding its meaning and then to suggest ways that preachers or teachers may discern the significance of the text for their hearers (52-53).

Every section examines issues of “text and translation,” “context and structure,” “basic message and exegetical outline,” “explanation of the text,” and “theology and appropriation” (53-54).

The commentary’s introduction provides an example of how Harvey’s analysis of Romans 1:8-12 may be utilized in service to Haddon Robinson’s approach to big idea preaching (54). In this way Harvey gives preachers an example of how each section of his commentary may be adapted for the task of preaching using Robinson’s philosophy.

Harvey divides his exposition of the letter into four sections, noting how each section develops part of Paul’s thesis in 1:16-17 (79). Each section of the commentary is relatively brief. Harvey summarizes various positions on a topic and selects the one he thinks is most compelling, from what seems to be a reformed, evangelical perspective.

The real strength of his commentary is the attention it pays to the significance of the biblical text for the contemporary situation. Each discussion of the text concludes with a section addressing its “theology and appropriation.” This part of the discussion considers biblical and systematic theology and suggests ways the text may be contextualized for 21st century congregations (54). In his “appropriation” sections Harvey offers ideas on how the text might be applied, while not offering too much detail (which might pigeonhole preachers’ thinking as they attempt to apply the text). Each appropriation section explores several concepts which help preachers draw out the text’s significance for their hearers (although not all of the following concepts are addressed in every passage).

First, each “appropriation” section states the apostle’s primary purpose in writing. While Harvey does not mention this
benefit, consideration of the author’s purpose will give preachers insight into how each pericope functions and suggest ideas for the sermon’s function and goal.

Second, the commentary identifies the needs that contemporary listeners share with Paul’s audience. These shared needs are identified as overlap in the existential situations between the Christians at Rome and contemporary listeners.

Third, it describes concepts which may offer a point of connection with contemporary audiences. For instance, in the section on Romans 8:1-17, Harvey notes the accessibility of the concept of “adoption” to both ancient and modern audiences, as evinced in the present by well-known stories of “families...traveling to another country and culture to adopt a child” (209). Such examples suggest ways preachers could seek to draw out the significance of the text for their hearers.

Fourth, the “appropriation” sections explore how the biblical text may “correct wrong beliefs or attitudes and commend positive beliefs and actions” (54). Finally, each section concludes by recommending “an objective for communicating the message of the passage to others” (54). As an example of this, in the section for Romans 15:1-6, Harvey writes, “The objective in communicating this passage should be to help others understand the importance of promoting corporate unity so that they will give priority to actions that edify and encourage fellow believers” (347).

I am hard pressed to find anything to criticize in this work. Any concerns I have are minor and pertain only to issues of style. This commentary is an excellent resource for preachers which addresses both the meaning of the biblical text and its significance for contemporary congregations. I plan to use it when preaching on Romans in the future, in conjunction with some critical commentaries.

Reviewer: Matthew Love, Baylor University’s Truett Theological Seminary, Waco, TX.

This commentary is part of the Big Greek Idea Series edited by Herbert W. Bateman IV. The series seeks to take the Big Idea homiletical method popularized by Haddon Robinson and apply it to the New Testament text. As the subtitle suggests, the focus of the work is on the exegesis of the text, as opposed to its application to the present.

The introductions (one to the series and one to this particular work) are keys that explain the approach and layout of the work that follows. For those who are less familiar with the Big Idea method or with grammatical terminology, this introductory material is crucial for unlocking the text that follows.

The commentary breaks the book of Philippians into 18 pericopes. Each of these 18 sections begins with Moore’s suggested big idea for that pericope followed by a structural overview, an outline, and the Greek text with an English interlinear translation. The text is helpfully arranged on the page to show how Paul’s train of thought runs, from the clauses of his writing that are dominant (justified left on the page) to those that are subordinate (indented right to varying degrees). The commentary on the verses that follows focuses mostly on grammatical, syntactical, and semantic notes. Sown throughout this commentary are “nuggets” that offer (for example) lexical, text-critical, and theological insights. A few appendices come after the body of the work, including the entire interpretive translation of Philippians and a collection of the figures of speech Paul uses in this letter.
The work is well written, clearly organized, and offers thoughtful reflections on the text throughout. Its biggest contribution to the library of the student, teacher, or minister is how it brings together Big Idea methodology, the Greek text, and the clausal mapping of the letter. This work might be a sort of bridge in one’s library between commentaries on one side that analyze every dot and iota of the text and commentaries on the other side that summarize the general intention of each passage in order to make application of it. Often, what is between those extremes gets left out, namely, the grammar, syntax, and semantics of the text, not to mention the big idea that all of those facets come together to communicate. The benefit of either working through this book cover to cover or using it as an occasional resource is in its helping readers to get their thinking clear on not only what Paul is saying but also on how he says it and why he says it that way.

At times, I found the verse-by-verse commentary difficult to wade through, particularly due to the abundance of technical grammatical terminology. Those who are only moderately familiar with the Greek language may find themselves reading and rereading this commentary in order to grasp it or referring back to the introductions to clarify terms. At the same time, those who love grammar and are very analytical will find this to be a special strength of the work. Reading this work as a preacher, I found myself wishing the author had been able to make some brief comments on the text concerning ways Paul’s writing is relevant to the church’s situation today or how preachers and teachers might communicate these truths to their listeners. Clearly, this book (and likely the rest of the series, too, for that matter) does not attempt to fill this niche, and it leaves it to other commentaries to make application of the text. This fact notwithstanding, I felt that the technical and erudite sharp edges of the work might have been rounded off a little by these sorts of comments to preachers and teachers today.

In sum, this work is an extremely valuable resource for those who would study this letter seriously and communicate it authentically. Moore offers a superbly written and unique
commentary on this letter of Paul’s. This guide through Philippians will prove valuable to readers of various sorts, such as preachers who prepare to preach through this text; teachers of preaching, Greek, or New Testament who work with this text in their classes; and all persons who consider themselves students of God’s word, who are eager to understand not only the words of this biblical book, but how those words come together grammatically, syntactically, and semantically to communicate Paul’s inspired big ideas.


Reviewer: Gregory K. Hollifield, Memphis College of Urban and Theological Studies, Memphis, TN.

Bishop William Quayle insisted nearly a century ago that preaching is not so much about preparing a sermon and delivering it as preparing a preacher and delivering him. Rick Reed has done all preachers a great service by picking things up from there and illuminating some of the particular ways a preacher prepares his or her heart to proclaim the word.

Reed writes as a longtime practitioner and instructor of the craft. After graduating from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, he pastored churches in California and Ontario. In addition to his current duties as president of Heritage College and Seminary in Cambridge, Ontario, where he teaches homiletics, Reed travels as a master coach for the Global Proclamation Academy headquartered in Dallas, Texas.

His book The Heart of the Preacher divides into two parts. In part one, he diagnoses fifteen tests a preacher may face while going about the weekly chore of preparing and delivering sermons. Not meant to be exhaustive or universal, Reed writes from his personal experience, describing each test and presenting what he believes the Bible says about it. These trials of the heart
include ambition, comparison, boasting, insignificance, laziness, stagnating, speaking one language (grace or truth), fear, retreating, criticism, disengaged listeners, blue Mondays, failure, pain, and quitting.

If part one be viewed as a reactionary guide, part two takes an unmistakable proactive turn. Here Reed presents ten steps to help the preacher prepare for the tests that will inevitably come. These range from the expected—caring for one’s soul, devoting oneself to prayer and the word, staying in love with Jesus, and minding one’s health—to the more insightful—maintaining an expository preaching ministry, right-sizing one’s expectations, and doing the work of an evangelist. In addition, Reed urges the preacher to develop internal security, listen to his/her spouse’s critiques, and make the most of Saturday nights.

No longer a full-time pastor myself, I was repeatedly taken back to my early years in pastoral ministry and reminded of the tests I faced then as I read Reed’s intensely personal account. Reed’s book clearly comes from his heart and speaks poignantly to the reader’s heart. It is the kind of book every preacher, especially pastors, should ingest fully.

Those who are new to the pulpit and its weekly grind will profit most from part two of Reed’s work. As much as they might benefit from part one, they will not truly appreciate its great value or respect its wisdom as much as the more seasoned preacher will. As a member of that latter group, I would put The Heart of the Preacher in the same category as D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones’s classic Preaching and Preachers, if for only two reasons. First, both books will mean more to readers the longer they remain engaged in the discipline of preaching on a regular basis. Second, both books can be read again and again to great personal profit.

Reviewer: Greg Kilgore, First Baptist Church, Oakhurst, CA.

Gerald Bray is Research Professor of Divinity at Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham, Alabama. Bray is best known for his work in church history and biblical interpretation. His book *Preaching the Word with John Chrysostom* is part of the *Lived Theology* series which “traces the way that biblical concepts and ideas are lived in the lives of Christians, some well-known, some relatively unknown” (xi).

Bray’s introduction to Chrysostom is a relatively short read with only five chapters. The first chapter provides a brief overview of his life with insight into his intellectual background and hermeneutical principles. The rest of the book provides a succinct glimpse into Chrysostom’s approach to interpreting and applying texts from Genesis, Matthew, John, and Romans. Bray writes of his purpose, “What I propose to do is to work my way through each of these four texts, outlining how John read them himself, how he expounded them to his hearers, and how he applied them to the Christian life” (10). He goes on to write how this will benefit those with an interest in reading Chrysostom. “Once beginners have mastered these principles, they will be ready and able to tackle the rest of John’s legacy, secure in the knowledge that they understand where he is coming from and able to interpret what he says in a way that is faithful to his intentions” (10).

According to Bray, two guiding characteristics of Chrysostom’s interpretive principles are accommodation and *theoria*. These principles are likely unfamiliar to contemporary preachers who have not studied the history of interpretation. Bray explains his view of accommodation: “Accommodation is a teaching technique made necessary by the fundamental divide between the infinite Creator and the finite creation... But God has created human beings in his own image and likeness, making it possible for the gap between us to be bridged in some way—not by us, but by him” (16). Bray explains *theoria* as “something more like ‘insight’ or even ‘typology.’ [Chrysostom] did not attempt to
explain away the literal sense of the biblical text but interpreted it as having a deeper meaning alongside what it said on the surface…” (22-23). This theoria set Chrysostom apart from other preachers of his day who employed an allegorical interpretation of the biblical text.

While so many of Chrysostom’s commentaries and homilies have been passed down through the centuries, there is little work on his actual life and doctrine. With so few books written about the man himself, this book is a welcome contribution. Bray’s work in this short book is a unique blend of biography and the hermeneutical principles employed by Chrysostom. Those interested in the history of preaching and interpretation from the patristic period will benefit from this book.


Reviewer: Abraham Kuruvilla, Dallas Theological Seminary, Dallas, TX.

Vanhoozer is always a provocative and stimulating read, and *Hearers and Doers* is no exception. Here are the three emphases of the work: pastors countering the effects of contemporary culture with biblical truth; theological (i.e., doctrinal) reading of Scripture; and comparing physical fitness (a cultural value) and spiritual fitness (an ecclesial value) (xiv–xv).

I loved the title: hearing God’s word and doing it is what drives preaching. So, I dove into the book hoping there would be a substantial portion devoted to preaching. After all, it was *A Pastor’s Guide*. But, alas, the systematic theologian that he is, Vanhoozer focuses almost exclusively upon his discipline: he is into “teaching disciples to read the Scriptures … theologically” (xi), because “doctrine is a primary form of the teaching of
Theology” (241). Preaching systematic theology, Sunday after Sunday, disciples doth not make. Theology, of both the systematic and biblical species, is simply not specific enough for a given pericope and does not do justice to what that particular text is doing. Methinks there needs to be another species of theology, an understanding of what an author is doing in a particular pericope, and deriving application passage by passage, sermon by sermon, as individual texts are privileged.

Vanhoozer reminds us of the dangers of worldly metaphors and stories that drive humans, the “social imaginary,” “that nest of background assumptions, often implicit, ... that shapes a person’s perception of the world, undergirds one’s worldview, and funds one’s plausibility structure” (8–9). These stories must be examined “in light of the biblical images and stories by which they ought to live;” what is needed is “an imagination nurtured ... by the Bible” (10, 104; emphasis added). Good stuff, especially this: “If I had to sum up in one sentence what Paul is trying to do in most of his letters, I would say that he is setting forth a new imaginary grounded in the new reality inaugurated in Jesus Christ, then asking church members to live in accordance with this reality” (13). But that did raise a question: What specifically is being imagined in each pericope of Paul’s letters (or in each pericope of any book of Scripture)? It appears that what is sought by our author is some tidbit of systematic theology. I would argue instead that each pericope portrays a segment of God’s ideal world in front of the text, directing readers to specific ways they may live out that pericopal theology, thus instantiating and actualizing the Kingdom of God on earth by becoming its true citizens living by its demands, growing in Christlikeness.

When I read that “chief” among the biblical images and stories (that ought to supplant the world’s images and stories) was “the story of Jesus Christ, the climax of the story begun in the Old Testament” (10), I began to suspect a strong christocentric thrust to what Vanhoozer was after. I was right; he calls for a “Christocentric social imaginary” (99). He is therefore appreciative of Luther who “views Christ as the literal sense of
the Old Testament. How? By viewing the promised Messiah as the intended referent of the divine author expressed in the words of the human authors of the Law, Prophets, and Writings. Pastors today should go and do likewise” (226). I would, pace Vanhoozer, beseech readers of this Journal to refrain from doing likewise, for such a christocentric hermeneutic is unsustainable for most of Scripture. How would one bring Christ into, say, the story of Rachel and Leah battling for reproductive supremacy (Genesis 29–30)? Or where would Christ be in the verse that warns against consuming too much honey lest one vomit (Prov 29:15)? Redemptive-historical interpretation renders the specificity of any particular pericope void, subsumed into nonexistence within the canonical christocentric story. We preachers, instead, need to be asking: How, specifically, is my life (and that of my listeners) intended to change as a result of a pericopal imaginary, rather than a generic biblical (pertaining to biblical theology) or canonical (pertaining to systematic theology) imaginary? Otherwise, I doubt we have understood Scripture for application.

Vanhoozer concludes: “At the end of the day, what is most important in learning Christ is not having bits of information but rather the big picture” (216). Unfortunately, this “big picture” is a view from the International Space Station, miles above terra firma. The need of the hour is theology that is specific for the pericope, a view from up close, if we preachers are to be effective in the business of making doers out of hearers.


Reviewer: Jesse L. Nelson, Macedonia Missionary Baptist Church. Panama City, FL.

Leah D. Schade, an assistant professor of preaching and worship at Lexington Theological Seminary, is an ordained minister in the
Evangelical Lutheran Church of America. She possesses twenty years of experience ministering in suburban (white middle class), urban (black working class), and rural (white working class) settings. In *Preaching in the Purple Zone*, Schade challenges preachers to address controversial justice issues by preaching in the Purple Zone instead of preaching from the red-blue divide of the political dichotomy in America. Schade hopes the reader will emerge with new insights for civic and public discourse and healthier relationships within the church, community, and country as a whole.

Purple Zone preaching is primarily about working with one’s congregation through preaching and dialogue to answer God’s call to be a prophetic witness. The author believes clergy are in the Purple Zone as they minister, preach, and teach to congregations who live in a red-blue divide. Although the book is written for preachers, laity and those beyond the church may use it as a resource as well. This reviewer proposes the book be divided into four parts for analysis—part one, chapters one to four; part two, chapters five to eight; part three, chapters nine and ten; and part four, chapter eleven.

In part one, Schade discusses the need for Purple Zone preaching and the distinctive aspects of this approach. In chapter one, Schade presents survey results showing why some preachers avoid controversial justice issues and others do not. According to the survey, preachers avoid justice issues primarily to decrease creating conflict within the congregation. On the other hand, some preachers feel a mandate to address these matters because Jesus himself spoke about justice issues. In chapter two, Schade attempts to reframe the reader’s understanding of politics and preaching by utilizing H. Richard Neibuhr’s principles of Christ and culture and discussing the separation of church and state versus the “Two Kingdoms” doctrine. Schade concludes the chapter with ten tips for preparing the congregation for Purple Zone preaching. Chapter three discusses prophetic preaching within homiletics literature and concludes that prophetic preaching addresses the structural, social, or systemic issues affecting individuals, communities, or
society at large. In chapter four, the author describes “Five Paths of Prophetic Preaching” which provide preachers with numerous entry points for the prophetic sermon. For Purple Zone preaching, the preacher should develop a dialogical lens for interpreting Scripture which must be informed by a public theology for preaching.

In part two, Schade explains the sermon-dialogue-sermon process. She discusses how the preacher and congregation prepare for the sermon-dialogue-sermon process in chapter five and includes guidelines for choosing a topic and measuring a congregation’s tolerance temperature for conflict. Chapter six introduces the sermon-dialogue-sermon process by explaining how to preach a sermon introducing a controversial justice issue for congregational dialogue. In chapter seven, Schade presents a format for deliberative dialogue with the congregation that occurs after the sermon. The purpose of the dialogue, she explains, is to generate common values that are the basis for additional dialogue or action steps for the congregation. In chapter eight, Schade explains the follow-up sermon after the deliberative dialogue. This sermon highlights the common values from the dialogue and possible next steps. The preacher’s prophetic witness arises from the dialogue versus his or her own position on the issue.

In part three, Schade presents case studies of the sermon-dialogue-sermon process. Chapter nine shows how four different preachers approached the topic of immigration. Chapter ten’s case studies include health care, end-of-life issues, climate change, and food insecurity. Finally, in chapter eleven, Schade summarizes the insights gained from the sermon-dialogue-sermon process and discusses what to do when the method fails.

Schade’s research is robust, including numerous primary and secondary sources. These include surveys, interviews, personal observations, and interaction with various homiletical texts. The structure of the content is linear, progressing from an idea to a definitive homiletical paradigm described as Purple Zone preaching. Schade vividly defines Purple Zone preaching and illustrates this concept through numerous examples in an
attempt to demonstrate its uniqueness as a preaching style or form.

Purple Zone preaching may be considered a hybrid preaching style—a combination of prophetic preaching and dialogical preaching. Though the sermon-dialogical-sermon process initially resembles the sermon-based small group format, it is different. Unlike the latter, the congregational dialogue that occurs after the sermon in the sermon-dialogical-sermon process is a facilitated dialogue designed to discover values from the conversation versus disseminating values through conversation.

Schade’s book accomplishes her goal of providing an answer for how preachers might approach the homiletical task of addressing justice issues in a fractured sociopolitical culture and how they can engage the red-blue divide within congregations and communities to find and navigate the Purple Zone. *Preaching in the Purple Zone* is an excellent work designed to engage clergy and congregations in conversations to address controversial justice issues from a biblical perspective versus a political or cultural viewpoint. Considering the current political and cultural tensions in our nation, this text is timely for pastors and homileticians searching for a prophetic and practical preaching methodology that hopes to transform the congregation, community, and culture through Jesus Christ.

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Reviewer: Kerwin Rodriguez, Moody Bible Institute, Chicago, IL.

*Let the Text Talk* presents itself as an update to Jeff Ray’s *Expository Preaching* and attempts to serve two purposes: 1) to honor Ray’s legacy for the tradition of expository preaching in Southern Baptist churches and 2) to provide an introductory text for “text-driven preaching.” I am not a part of the Southern
Baptist tradition, nor was I familiar with Ray. According to Walker, even Southern Baptists might not know of Ray’s work or his contribution to the history of expository preaching in Southern Baptist churches. Ray was the first homiletics professor at Southwestern Baptist Seminary and the first Southern Baptist to publish a work advocating for expository preaching. He did so when the practice was not widespread among Southern Baptists. While noting some differences between Ray’s philosophy of expository preaching and the methodology of text-driven preaching at Southwestern today, Walker argues that the school “now stands upon the homiletical foundation Ray built” (6).

The book is divided in two parts: “The Practice of Text-driven Preaching” and “The History of Text-driven Preaching.” The preface indicates that the “intent and purpose of Ray’s *Expository Preaching* will be retained… [and that the] original layout and structure will be followed but reorganized” (7). Given my lack of familiarity with Ray’s book, it was not always easy to distinguish between Ray’s and Walker’s emphases. Whereas Ray articulated a philosophy of expository preaching, Walker argues *Let the Text Talk* goes a step further to articulate a text-driven preaching method that aligns better with a philosophy of expository preaching. Walker writes, “The flaws of Ray’s version of expository preaching stem primarily from the fact that he did not account for the meaning of a Scriptural text contained at the level of genre and semantic structure” (172). In Walker’s judgment, Ray’s prescribed methodology may not have been ideal for expository preaching, but he “assisted in changing the status of expository preaching among Southern Baptists as he instructed those in his classroom and wrote for those outside his classroom.” (173).

The practice proposed in the first section is a “text-driven” philosophy and methodology. At times the author asserts that the terms “expository preaching” and “text-driven preaching” are synonymous. At others, he argues for the term “text-driven” preaching “because it distinguishes true expository preaching from what is often mislabeled as ‘expository preaching’” (30). It
is not exactly clear what this pseudo-expository preaching practice looks like, but Walker argues that text-driven preaching holds both expository preaching philosophy and practice together. Walker defines text-driven preaching as “preaching that treats (interpretation and communication) a text (natural thought unit of Scripture) on its own terms (substance, structure, and spirit)” (30-31). According to this philosophy “the meaning of a text is the combination of the words the author selected, the literary design the author constructed, and the emotive feel the author intended” (33). The preacher interprets the text in order to “re-present” what the text says and how it says it. The author writes, “[T]he biblical author utilized a specific (and inspired!) semantic structure to communicate his message. This specific, structural development contributes to the meaning of the text and therefore must be retained to the greatest degree possible” (70). One wonders whether the form of the text is more important than its purpose.

The second part of the book provides a history of preaching that narrows its focus to the Southern Baptist tradition. Walker demonstrates that Ray wrote his textbook during a time when expository preaching was not prevalent and suggests that Ray’s classroom teaching influenced many within the denomination to gradually accept a more faithful expository preaching philosophy and practice. Today, Walker argues, Southwestern Seminary is indebted to Ray for laying the necessary groundwork for a philosophy and practice of text-driven preaching.

Preachers who identify themselves as part of the Southern Baptist expository preaching tradition will appreciate Walker’s historical survey and may be inspired to pick up Ray’s original work. As an introductory text, the work cannot replace other seminal introductory texts. For most evangelicals, Haddon Robinson’s *Biblical Preaching* should be preferred. For those who resonate with the term “text-based preaching,” works quoted throughout this book will likely remain more popular such as Steven W. Smith’s *Dying to Preach* and the edited work *A Pastor’s Guide to Text-Driven Preaching*. 
God’s Word and Our Words: Preaching from the Prophets to the Present and Beyond. Edited by W. Hulitt Gloer and Shawn E. Boyd. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2019. 978-1-5326-4609-6, 290 pp., $35.00.

Reviewer: Arica Heald Demme, Messiah Anglican Church, Philadelphia, PA.

God’s Word and Our Words is a curated survey of the history of preaching from the time of the Old Testament to the modern day. The volume consists of lectures given in September 2017 as part of a symposium sponsored by Baylor University’s George W. Truett Theological Seminary. Each presentation was given by one of sixteen scholars who span the theological and homiletical spectrum, including such big names as Brueggemann, Lowry, and Witherington and such familiar names to EHS members as Gibson, Neely, and Phelps. Each essay ends with a bibliography. Also included are two sermons, one by William Willimon and the other by Jared Alcántara. Both are interesting to examine for homiletical technique, but some evangelicals will likely be uncomfortable with Willimon’s tone and statements within the sermon castigating the current United States president. The contrast between the two sermons certainly reflects the divergent directions that evangelical and non-evangelical homiletics have taken.

It is worth noting while this tension of evangelical versus non-evangelical is noticeable throughout the book, I found myself wishing to have been a fly on the wall at this symposium just to listen to the cross-pollination of ideas over coffee. This book is a valuable reminder that we can graciously engage outside of our tribe and echo chambers and that we can learn from one another.

Carolyn Knight’s presentation on women preachers exemplifies the aforementioned tension, especially for women
committed to evangelical theology while following a call to preach. Knight shares her own story, which highlights the common experience of so many of us being actively discouraged from preaching when we were girls and young women. She identifies the biggest challenge for new female preachers is that some in the church consider the authority to preach to be inherently linked to maleness. She unfortunately does not acknowledge the deeper complexities of the issue, especially the hermeneutics underlying the complex exegetical and theological bases for the various positions regarding the role of women in lay and ordained ministry within various Christian traditions. Indeed, Knight largely describes the upward trajectory and perspective of female leaders in modern mainline denominations and educational institutions, which are not reflective, of course, of most women preachers down through church history. For example, Knight discusses how female preachers are not identical but then offers only two worldviews for female preachers: either feminist or womanist.

Overall, this book is an interesting read, and even a seasoned preacher is likely to learn something new. The voice of each presenter is retained as is their humor, leading to some moments of laughter while reading. This book would serve well in the homiletics classroom as a supplemental text in order to introduce the history and scope of the calling and craft, and individual essays could be included in course reading packets. For any preacher, however, it is an encouraging reminder that God’s word has been preached and will continue to be preached until the age to come.

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Reviewer: John C. Malek, Sharpe Road Baptist Church, Greensboro, NC.
Johnny Teague, who pastors the Church at the Cross in Houston, Texas, opens *Preaching Your Way Out of a Mess* with a personal story from his six and a half years of service at a rural church. Despite small skirmishes along the way, he continued to serve. But then he made a seemingly small change and told his members about it at a church conference, prompting one deacon to declare that he did not have the power to do anything! No one defended Teague and that, he says, was his breaking point; he resigned the following Sunday. Out of such scenarios the author writes his book. “The purpose of [this] book is to let you know that, in any trial, hope exists. The reason for this optimism is that the Word of God has given this Word as an incredible instrument for one to handle through the gift of preaching to bring help and healing” (12). Teague’s intent is to encourage the pastor as he faces crises within the church and to provide a framework for proclaiming God’s word in the midst of those crises.

According to Teague, crises affect every preacher, and adversity comes from three main sources: Satan, other people, and even the pastor himself. Teague urges the pastor to remember God’s call on his life and to rely on the power found in the Bible and in the strength of the Holy Spirit. He then details a variety of crises a pastor may face ranging from the pastor’s own struggles and errors, to power struggles, to dying churches, and many in between. For each particular crisis, he offers his own insights, gives an example of how another pastor handled the crisis, shares a sample sermon from that pastor as he led from the pulpit, and identifies the lessons to be learned. For instance, in the chapter on a pastor’s errors, Teague recounts how he once had to apologize to a church member for insinuating that depression was a sin and then apologized to the congregation the following Sunday. Afterwards, he gives another example from W.A. Criswell’s life. Criswell had been a supporter of segregation and had a reputation for preaching in support of segregation until the Holy Spirit convicted him of his sin. Criswell apologized to the deacons and then preached a sermon on the wrong of
racism and segregation. The sermon is given in its entirety in the book.

Through use of his personal experiences and those of other preachers and their sermons, Teague does indeed give hope to pastors facing crises. While he does not provide extensive references to Scripture when describing a crisis or in the “lessons learned” portions of his book, he does (as far as this reviewer can tell) offer examples of pastors preaching expository sermons that address each crisis. His book is not overly technical because he wishes to encourage pastors to continue on in the ministry and to stay focused on Jesus and his word. “Some days, you are going to feel like quitting,” Teague writes. “Days will come when people will want you to quit. But you cannot quit” (211). Instead, he says, the pastor should study God’s word for encouragement and to preach his way out of that crisis.

Teague’s book serves as an encouragement to every pastor because every pastor faces challenges. He astutely identifies many challenges and covers most, if not all, of them in such a way as to make the book a worthwhile addition to the pastor’s library.

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Reviewer: Kevin Maples, First Baptist Church, Madisonville, KY.

_The Sermon: Its Homiletical Construction_ was originally published by Baker Book House in 1927 and then reprinted by the same company in 1968. The edition being reviewed here is a 2018 reprint published by Wipf and Stock. Lenski (1864–1936) was a Lutheran pastor and scholar who taught homiletics for twenty-five years at Capital Seminary. He wrote _The Sermon_ towards the end of his life, and his maturity of thought and depth of experience in both preaching and training preachers is evident
throughout the book. The reprint history of the book testifies to the enduring value of his writing. While not all old books are classics, the wide usage of this book for nearly a century now has surely earned it this accolade.

True to its title, the entire book remains focused on the task of constructing a sermon. Lenski divided his work into four parts, each with its own chapters: The Text, The Division, The Theme, and The Elaboration. Although neither the term “expository preaching” nor the more recently coined term “text-driven preaching” is used by Lenski, his method is consistent with these preaching traditions. In part one, he advocates for the selection of a single text for the sermon which the preacher should master through prayer and study in preparation to construct a sermon. In part two, Lenski argues for a clear logical structure to undergird the sermon and offers three types of outlines that may be used. Part three discusses how to select and develop a theme (or proposition) in the sermon. The final section of the book explores how to fill out the outline of the sermon with applications, illustrations, and supporting material.

This book remains an excellent tool for training preachers. While we are often blind to our own cultural prejudices, one of the advantages of using a textbook from another era is the cultural prejudices of the author are often foreign enough to the modern reader to be evident even to the novice student, which can challenge the student to carefully consider how much of their own preaching practice is influenced by culture and tradition and how much is dictated by sound theology. For example, in the context of comparing the art of preaching with the beauty of music in worship Lenski declares: “We have the great pipe organ, because there is no better instrument for worship” (64). This dogmatic tone of a very opinionated author permeates the book and is perhaps its greatest weakness. Lenski’s absolute certainty about both homiletical and hermeneutical issues that most scholars today would consider anything but certain will be unappealing to a generation of scholars trained to exhibit more caution in their assertions.
Lenski contrasts writing essays for literary excellence and writing manuscripts for public speaking, carefully explaining how the preacher should write for the ear and not for eye. The Sermon, which most preachers will find delightful in its style, reads as though it was written for the ear. Whether it was Lenski’s intention or just the preacher in him coming out, the book itself is an excellent example of how to communicate powerfully to an audience. The vast array illustrations in the book are so well crafted and presented, they alone make the book worth reading.

Although conversations in the field of homiletics have advanced well beyond Lenski’s conclusions in more than one area, this reprinted classic offers an excellent example of early twentieth-century scholarship and can be used to broaden a student’s perspective beyond their own experience and context. Despite some of the weaknesses mentioned above, I highly recommend this work, especially to be used in conjunction with recent textbooks.


Reviewer: R. Larry Overstreet, retired, Corban University School of Ministry.

Christensen specifically targets pastors in this volume, but its principles are also valuable resources for homiletics professors. Writing from thirty years of pastoral experience in Maine and simultaneous decades of experience in a Bible college as professor and academic dean, he brings both a pastoral and professorial approach to his subject. He readily admits that churches “market themselves,” and cautions that “[t]here is nothing inherently wrong with such advertisement unless we
become manipulative or deceptive” (xi). Those observations set the tone for this book. Christensen deals at length with “the tension which exists between ethical and effective pastoral influence” (xii). He has no hesitation advocating that persuasion should be integral to the preacher’s ministry of God’s word. However, he strives to balance that with a biblical foundation which does not permit mere pragmatism to dominate a preaching ministry.

This book is divided into ten chapters. Chapter one, “Pulpit Power,” demonstrates how powerful preaching persuasively changes lives, but that power must be on “God’s leash” (11). Chapter two, “For the Love of Rhetoric,” evaluates the development of rhetoric from ancient Greek times into the present, explaining how it is consistent with biblical exposition. Chapter three focuses on “Sophistry and the Cross,” demonstrating how an unethical use of rhetorical methods affected ancient rhetoric and can affect contemporary preaching. The question “Informers or Persuaders?” is answered in chapter four, establishing that biblical preaching aims for transformational change in listeners. In chapter five, “Influence’s Arsenal,” Christensen explains how many “psychological laws” may be used to persuade and evaluates the fitting use of such approaches from a biblical perspective. While ethos and pathos are considered as crucial in this book, the author devotes chapter six to “Logos: The Central Route,” detailing how biblical preaching must be word centered, which is how the Spirit works in the lives of hearers. Recognizing that many pastors may deviate from a thoroughly biblical approach to obtain visible results, Christensen devotes chapter seven to “Shortcuts: Peripheral Routes,” in which he considers various human means that may obtain “results” but which have serious biblical shortcomings, such as, propaganda, branding, authority, fear, guilt, etc. Chapters eight, “Ethical Controls: Process,” and nine, “Ethical Controls: Decision,” focus entirely on maintaining a biblically ethical approach in preaching. Finally, chapter ten, provides a helpful and challenging ending discussion of persuasive preaching by examining “Paul and Philemon: A Case
Study in Pastoral Influence.” The book concludes with an appendix which provides a test which pastors and churches can use to evaluate “Pastoral Influence Health Index.”

This volume is well organized and so readable that it immediately becomes likeable. Christensen has numerous illustrations scattered throughout the book which demonstrate, both positively and negatively, the principles which he stresses. He consistently bases his arguments on the Scriptures and applies his contentions to pastors in the actual day-to-day ministry of God’s word.

Three weaknesses are in the book: (1) he uses too many illustrations and, at times, they tend to distract the reader from the main emphases of the sections in which they occur; (2) no Scripture index is in the book, and this would aid readers in finding key texts which are discussed; and (3) no subject index is included, which would also assist readers to locate key subjects considered.

The Persuasive Preacher is an effective tool for a pastor’s ministry and as a supplemental volume for a college or seminary homiletics class. I highly recommend it and consider it an excellent companion to my volume, Persuasive Preaching: A Biblical and Practical Guide to the Effective Use of Persuasion.
The Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society

History:

The Evangelical Homiletics Society (EHS) convened its inaugural meeting in October of 1997, at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, South Hamilton, MA, at the initiative of Drs. Scott M. Gibson of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and Keith Willhite of Dallas Theological Seminary. Professors Gibson and Willhite desired an academic society for the exchange of ideas related to instruction of biblical preaching.

Specifically, the EHS was formed to advance the cause of Biblical Preaching through:

- promotion of a biblical-theological approach to preaching
- increased competence for teachers of preaching
- integration of the fields of communication, biblical studies, and theology
- scholarly contributions to the field of homiletics

The EHS membership consists primarily of homiletics professors from North American seminaries and Bible Colleges who hold to evangelical theology, and thus treat preaching as the preaching of God’s inspired Word. The EHS doctrinal statement is that of the National Association of Evangelicals.

Purpose:

The Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society is designed to engage readers with articles dealing with the best research and expertise in preaching. Readers will be introduced to literature in the field of homiletics or related fields with book reviews. Since the target audience of the journal is scholars/practitioners, a sermon will appear in each edition which underscores the commitment of the journal to the practice of preaching.

Vision:

The vision of the Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society is to provide academics and practitioners with a journal that informs and equips readers to become competent teachers of preaching and excellent preachers.
General Editor:

The General Editor has oversight of the journal. The General Editor selects suitable articles for publication and may solicit article suggestions from the Editorial Board for consideration for publication. The General Editor works cooperatively with the Book Review Editor and the Managing Editor to ensure the timely publication of the journal.

Book Review Editor:

The Book Review Editor is responsible for the Book Review section of the journal. The Book Review Editor contacts publishers for books to review and receives the books from publishers. The Book Review Editor sends books to members of the Society who serve as book reviewers. The reviewers then forward their written reviews to the Book Review Editor in a timely manner. The Book Review Editor works in coordination with the General Editor for the prompt publication of the journal.

Managing Editor:

The Managing Editor has oversight of the business matters of the journal. The Managing Editor solicits advertising, coordinates the subscription list and mailing of the journal, and works with the General Editor and Book Review Editor to ensure a timely publication of the journal.

Editorial Board:

The Editorial Board serves in advising the General Editor in the publication of articles for the journal. The Editorial Board serves as a jury for articles considered for publication. The Editorial Board consists of no more than five members. Board members are approved at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Homiletics Society and hold a two-year appointment.

Frequency of Publication:

The Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society is published twice a year: March and September.

Jury Policy:

Articles submitted to the Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society are blind juried by members of the Editorial Board. In addition, the General Editor may ask a scholar who is a specialist to jury particular articles.
The General Editor may seek articles for publication from qualified scholars. The General Editor makes the final publication decisions. It is always the General Editor’s prerogative to edit and shorten said material, if necessary.

Submission Guidelines

1. Manuscripts should be submitted in electronic form. All four margins should be at least one inch, and each should be consistent throughout. Please indicate the program in which the article is formatted, preferably, Microsoft Word (IBM or MAC).

2. Manuscripts should be double-spaced. This includes the text, indented (block) quotations, notes, and bibliography. This form makes for easier editing.

3. Neither the text, nor selected sentences, nor subheads should be typed all-caps.

4. Notes should be placed at the end of the manuscript, not at the foot of the page. Notes should be reasonably close to the style advocated in the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers 3rd edition (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1988) by Joseph Gibaldi and Walter S. Achtert. That style is basically as follows for research papers:

   a. From a book:


   b. From a periodical:


   c. Avoid the use of op. cit.

   Dewey 111.

5. Those who have material of whatever kind accepted for publication must recognize it is always the editor’s prerogative to edit and shorten said material, if necessary.
6. Manuscripts will be between 1,500 and 3,000 words, unless otherwise determined by the editor.

Abbreviations

Please do not use abbreviations in the text. Only use them for parenthetical references. This includes the names of books of the Bible and common abbreviations such as “e.g.” (the full reference, “for example” is preferred in the text). Citations of books, articles, websites are expected. Please do not use “p./pp.” for “page(s),” or “f./ff.” for “following.” Precise page numbers or verse numbers are expected, not “f./ff.”

Capitalization

Capitalize personal, possessive, objective, and reflexive pronouns (but not relative pronouns) when referring to God: “My, Me, Mine, You, He, His, Him, Himself,” but “who, whose, whom.”

Direct Quotes

Quotations three or more lines long should be in an indented block. Shorter quotes will be part of the paragraph and placed in quotation marks.

Scripture quotations should be taken from the NIV. If the quotation is from a different version, abbreviate the name in capital letters following the reference. Place the abbreviation in parentheses: (Luke 1:1-5, NASB).

Headings

First-level Heading
These indicate large sections. They are to be flush left in upper case, and separate from the paragraph that follows.

Second-level Heading
These headings are within the First-level section and are to be flush left, in italic in upper and lower case, and also separate from the paragraph that follows.
Notes

All notes should be endnotes, the same size as the main text with a hard return between each one.

Submission and Correspondence

Manuscripts should be sent to the attention of the General Editor. Send an email with attached Word document to: scott_gibson@baylor.edu

Address correspondence to Scott M. Gibson, General Editor, Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society, Baylor University’s Truett Seminary, One Bear Place #97126, Waco, TX 76798-7126

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