

Emily Askew and O. Wesley Allen. *Beyond Heterosexism in the Pulpit*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015. 162 pages. \$19.

When I am looking for books to address preaching both for my personal use and for the classroom, finding ones that are practical and offer sample sermons is a must. When I first saw *Beyond Heterosexism in the Pulpit*, I was intrigued by the title, then by the authors, both of whom I know personally, and next by the practical nature of the structure and flow. This book does not disappoint in the category of practical application for preaching social issues today. Each chapter includes a sample sermon that allows the reader to see the theory and insights of the writings put into practice in a realistic and helpful manner. But the other issue that led me to this text was the seismic shift that has occurred culturally in the movement for equal rights for LGBTQ persons in the U.S. This text is a helpful resource for preachers wanting to address these cultural shifts.

Emily Askew and O. Wesley Allen have written a book that is constructed around the framework of liturgical occasions when preachers might be afforded the opportunity to address heterosexism from the pulpit. These three occasions include: preaching on a weekly basis, preaching in response to a gay rights issue or when an act of bias or prejudice against LGBTQ persons has occurred, and preaching during rites or rituals performed for an LGBTQ person or couple (5). This framework is utilized for the primary chapters in the book. Chapters 1 and 2 deal with the human and church issues related to conversing on the issue of heterosexism. Chapter 3 addresses the ways that preachers might address the topic in light of specific issues that have occurred in their community or in the world related to prejudice. And chapters 4 and 5 specifically address weddings and funerals for LGBTQ persons. This structure relates to the author's assertion that these are opportunities for confronting heterosexism and it is insightful.

Starting from the point of anthropology is helpful. Christians live into the concept of the *Imago Dei*, but have weighted the "rational, spiritual natures (from God) over against our physical natures (from animals)" (17–18). This has led to a dualism that permeates our culture on a number of levels. In conversations about heterosexism, the physical nature of our being has to be honored. However, as the authors help the reader understand, the dualism or body/spirit-mind coupled with the elevation of heterosexism as normative behavior and the discomfort in honoring the sexuality of persons has led to heterosexism.

Askew and Allen then turn to looking at the nature of the church. Living up to the role of being the people of God summoned into a community, "called by God to celebrate, embody, and proclaim the good news" is a vital task (48). However, as people who are sinful and fail to live up to that call, it is clear that the church, the ecclesia, often fails to be who they are called to be (48). The church must live in the tension of being called to be what it often is incapable of living up to. Being attentive to this reality and working for unity that honors diversity is a task that the church should embrace. A church that honors the body and the spirit-mind of their community members moves into a wholeness of honoring all expressions of homosexual persons in their midst, not just tolerating the idea of their presence in the congregation (54–57). The author's discussion of this topic is well done.

Chapter 3 begins the author's three-part framework by addressing the ways preachers can engage the topic of heterosexism by looking at the opportunity to preach in

the midst of or reaction to gay rights events and/or instances of prejudice or discrimination targeted at the LGBTQ community. They begin with a look at the civil rights issues and how those who call for equal rights often do so because of the economic rights, the right to dignity, and family rights. But beyond these issues is how and where the church will be present with and minister to the needs of gay and lesbian persons. These opportunities for ministry include: weddings, church membership, and leadership in communities of faith (84–91). Moving to homiletical strategies next is one of the strengths of this book. Naming both the struggles of the LGBTQ community and the victories in a longitudinal manner will keep the *imago dei* of LGBTQ persons at the forefront of the community on a regular basis (92–93). And providing a sample sermon using these strategies means the reader can see the ways to employ this part of the framework in concrete ways.

Chapters 4 and 5 bring the reader opportunities to address potential issues of heterosexism in wedding, union, and funeral settings. One of the challenges of writing any book is that times change quickly and this book suffers from that to some degree. The chapter about marriage and unions is out of date due to the dramatic decision by the Supreme Court in June of 2015 for marriage equality. However, the advice for preaching is still relevant.

The chapter related to funerals and memorial services explains the potential complications faced by LGBTQ persons with complex family and relationship dynamics in these moments of grief and loss. For all persons, funerals serve three purposes: to care for the deceased, to comfort the bereaved, and to proclaim the good news of Jesus in the midst of death (117–119). Both chapters again conclude with sample sermons that move the reader into a place of more concrete understanding of the subject matter.

The authors also include a glossary of terms so that the reader who might be less familiar with some of the terminology used in the book and around issues of sexuality will be able to become more familiar with the language necessary to confront heterosexism in the pulpit. One part of this is to address the reality that language has great power to either affirm or demean. Words that one person might hear as positive, another might hear as belittling and demeaning. The authors hope for pastors to utilize this section so that they are prepared for conversations around sexual orientation and gender identity in a more constructive manner (137).

I believe that this book is a very helpful resource for preachers who want to educate themselves about the inherent issues related to heterosexism in the pulpit. The authors provide advice to move beyond heterosexism in positive and affirming ways. Any preacher can gain much from reading this book. I highly recommend it.

Karyn L. Wiseman, Lutheran Theological School at Philadelphia, Philadelphia, PA