

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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