

David Schnasa Jacobsen, ed. *Homiletical Theology in Action: The Unfinished Theological Task of Preaching*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015. 202 pages. \$25.

In this collection of essays from the second consultation for the *Homiletical Theology Project*, editor David Schnasa Jacobsen and six contributing authors demonstrate “how various dimensions of homiletical theology, whether made explicit or operating more implicitly, shape the work that preachers do” (1). If the task of the first volume from the *Homiletical Theology Project* was to define what homiletical theology is, this volume explores what homiletical theology may look like in practice.

An introductory article by Jacobsen groups the essays into methodological categories—descriptive, confessional, and analytical—that speak to their primary emphases, aims, and working assumptions. The first set of essays engages in the task of homiletical theology from a “descriptive” mode that engages “in the most self-conscious methodological and inductive way” (3). In chapter one, Sally A. Brown demonstrates homiletical theology is something the preacher does on a weekly basis by navigating various “theological horizons” on her way from text to sermon. In doing so, Brown makes a case for homiletical theology’s paying close attention to the “concreteness, diversity, and complexity of religious practices” prior to any theorizing (39). In chapter two Adam Hearlson uses the story of the Canaanite woman’s encounter with Jesus in Matthew 15 to develop the metaphor of homiletical theology as “street art”—theology that is “public, permanent, and provisional” (47). Through this metaphor Hearlson describes homiletical theology as never complete, but waiting on the next “artist” to paint the world with the Gospel. Understanding homiletical theology as “the theological discernments that take place during the preparation of any given sermon” (62), in chapter three Teresa Lockhart (Stricklen) Eisenlohr draws on the theological method of Edward Farley to describe the sermon process as a series of movements—portraiture, ecclesial universals, judgment, and rhetorical shaping—that requires the preacher’s discernment.

The second part of the book consists of essays from those authors operating from a “confessional mode” in which “a more strongly held sense of ‘gospel’ becomes itself the starting point of homiletical-theological reflection” (4). In chapter four, Luke Powery emphasizes the role of the Spirit and human bodies to question the assumption of Scripture as the starting point for theological method. In doing so, Powery makes a powerful argument for the priority of the Spirit that results in his giving the Holy Spirit a primary and central role in homiletical theology. In chapter five Jacobsen considers the problem that eschatology, as traditionally conceived, poses for the white mainline pulpit. Jacobsen reframes questions of eschatology in light of theologies of promise that enable a reformulated eschatology to face context and conversation with other traditions.

The final set of essays operates within an “analytical mode” that “point to a larger theological task of providing a kind of theological prolegomena for homiletical theology, that is, analytically exploring its premises or the validity of its first theological judgments in the hope of refining and clarifying its process of reflection” (5). Given the assumed “unfinished” and “provisional” quality of homiletical theology, in chapter six O. Wesley Allen inquires as to the limits of the field as it relates to scriptural authority. Allen encourages those who do homiletical theology to be clearer on how they relate to the sources and norms of Christian theological reflection. In the final chapter, Rein Bos uses the doctrine of divine judgment to challenge forms of homiletical theology that minimize the authority of Scripture and Tradition. Bos’ essay reveals

the need for theological judgment in how we relate the various contexts and theological loci in our homiletical projects.

It is impossible in this brief review to fairly or adequately evaluate each contribution. Yet one of the real strengths of this book is what it does collectively. By exploring homiletical theology in a descriptive, confessional, and analytical mode the authors bring needed conceptual clarity and examples to a developing field. While these modes certainly overlap in practice, each essay speaks to what homiletical theology looks like when operating from different locations. There is no single way to do homiletical theology. But different approaches begin with distinct aims, assumptions, and goals, and the degree to which we can be clear about this facilitates the conversations that will give the field a future, rather than merely engaging in parallel play. These essays are an excellent example of homiletical theology in their own right, but they will also help those in the field who work from different theological locations and assumptions better understand one another.

Mason Lee, Princeton Theological Seminary, Princeton, NJ