

John S. McClure. *Speaking Together and with God: Liturgy and Communicative Ethics*. Lanham, MD: Fortress Academic, 2018. 252 pages. \$95.

John S. McClure's new book, *Speaking Together and with God* is a fascinating, revolutionary work. Not only does he revisit his previous works but also expands their scope by engaging what he understands as two distinct but inextricably related areas, liturgy and communicative ethics, for his trajectory of *liturgical public theology*. This project is based on several assumptions which can be summarized as follows: liturgical practice in the religious sphere in its broadest sense is a form of social interaction which openly and freely *cross-migrates* to/from discursive practice in the public sphere because there is no firm wall in-between, and can thus "enrich difficult conversations about moral issues within the public sphere" (xv). McClure argues for liturgical practices to support genuinely *communicative* (understanding-oriented), rather than strategic (success-oriented) or instrumental (ends-oriented) forms of reason and action. Therefore this book explores how these liturgical practices contribute to shaping sincere, multiperspectival, empathic, and truth-seeking *conversations* regarding moral norms that are communicative in nature. While retaining the author's emphasis on Emmanuel Levinas's *interhuman* ethics of care in the religious sphere explicated in *Other-wise Preaching* (2001), the current volume shifts its focus to Jürgen Habermas's *intersubjective*, discursive ethic based on communicative reason/action to achieve *justice* by addressing the needs and concerns of "many concrete others" in the public sphere, or what Habermas calls the *lifeworld* (xvii).

In chapter 1, McClure begins his discussion on the migration of practices. He first identifies its key elements in the lifeworld as a framework of his book: these include Habermas's concept of the ideal speech situation and its four validity claims (truthfulness, moral rightness, truth, and aesthetics). He then adds the key elements in the religious sphere (imagination, singularity, ambiguity, and so forth) as texture added to the framework (1-5). He also argues that it is necessary to study the liturgical practices not only to correct/enhance Habermas's four validity claims, but also to imagine how they will function in the public sphere as redemptive ciphers (signs) of liberation and justice. In the following chapters, the author deals extensively with each practice—confession, intercession, and preaching—respectively. McClure unearths each one's various forms in the religious sphere and its strategically interpreted and migrated forms in the public sphere, and then identifies the communicative ciphers of redemption through relevant case studies.

For the *truthful* validity claim of sincerity, chapter 2 engages with various *confessional* practices for the sake of participants. Such practices involve exclusion to secure the safety and protection of all participants, epistemic humility to overcome any self-deception, and lamentation or testimony to further restore and nurture participants so that they can grow into human subjects capable of contributing to "deeper, more universal forms of relationship and communicative action" in and beyond the community (54).

Chapter 3 explicates the *morally right* validity claim of identity, which requires one's ability to transcend one's own context to achieve mutual understanding. In other words, the author asserts that *intercessory* practices invite all participants to take another person's perspective (e.g. mutual role-taking of empathy, care, compassion, and petition), and advocate for the inclusion of any missing, relevant voices for the conversation (63-64). McClure argues for intercessory practices as unifying, co-orienting with, and petitioning for the Other (divine and human), to be employed in ways of advocating persistently, pursuing normative rightness of society, and turning enemies into mere adversaries.

The last chapter addresses the *aesthetic* validity claim of intersubjective authenticity and the *true* validity claim of rational justification. McClure asserts that they are central to *homiletical* practices (and artifacts) of creative, moral insight/consensus-seeking processes to answer the question of what *rings true* in the public sphere and *why* it does. McClure avers that the practices create biblical dissensus, disrupting a previous moral consensus in the lifeworld, and authenticate a new emerging moral insight with various modes of homiletical elucidation illuminating human experience. Moreover, they provide forms of ideological, theological framing that can justify and translate moral insights/norms into the language and categories of our worldviews and invent messages to apply them to complex situations.

This book is groundbreaking in many ways, but three unique contributions are to be named specifically. First, for our context where religious communities do not have much to contribute to the public sphere because it is increasingly dominated by pluralism and relativism, McClure explores the possibility of achieving consensus around moral issues with the migration of liturgical practices into the public sphere. Second, the term migration paired with Habermasian notions of communicative action and intersubjectivity disrupts/deconstructs the sharp divide between the intra-/inter-ecclesial realm and the extra-ecclesial realm, inviting many homileticians to rethink their role in the changing context. Indeed, McClure sets an excellent example of how we can broaden our scope and engage in a multilayered dialogue with other disciplines in and beyond the religious sphere by focusing specifically on liturgical practices. Third, while the book may be dense and challenging, it offers the prospect of a fruitful reading. The solid structure offered by Habermas's four validity claims, the detailed explanation of many difficult concepts, and the book's glossary enable readers to fully understand its core arguments and to participate in further conversation.

There are also a couple of issues to be noted. First, while McClure's differentiation of the personal/interhuman (of the religious sphere) and the intersubjective (of the public sphere) is helpful for this project, it could sound too schematic and/or unrealistic to make chapters 2 and 3 so sharply distinct. In reality, the differentiation in itself is always made differently and changeable according to each subject's socially-constructed makeup and intersubjective engagement of the moment. Second, as Habermas's procedural, constructivist stance still provides the dominant framing for McClure's work, some homileticians may wonder if McClure's fascinating vision is broad enough to include the genuinely contingent and indeterminate elements in both spheres.

Despite these minor issues, I highly recommend this book not only to homileticians and scholars but also to pastors and religious leaders who desire to connect in meaningful ways to the moral issues in the public sphere. McClure's book will be a very useful guide on how they can contribute to the binding and bonding of democratic society.

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