

Leah D. Schade. *Preaching in the Purple Zone: Ministry in the Red-Blue Divide*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishing, 2019. 241 pages. \$25.

Leah D. Schade's new book, *Preaching in the Purple Zone*, joins other recent homiletical publications that address the challenges preachers face amid social division and polarization. Schade's desire is to offer preachers encouragement and tools to take on controversial issues in potentially charged contexts, such as in so-called "purple" churches split along red vs. blue political lines. Her "Purple Zone" approach reiterates the importance of Christians speaking together about difficult issues, and offers ways do so.

Schade begins with research into how preachers approach prophetic preaching, especially during "this divisive time in our nation's history" (14). In a 2017 survey she conducted, Schade found that nearly a quarter of Protestant clergy rarely or never preach on controversial justice issues or had trepidation about doing so (20), not least because preachers fear their hearers' responses. But many also feel a call to preach "prophetically" despite their fears, and Schade closes chapter 1 with a call to the church to reclaim its prophetic voice through the community. In chapter 2, Schade assesses the relationship between politics and church life and argues for a revised understanding of politics as "a process by which to understand who we are and how we will treat each other" (38). Reflecting on Jesus's engagement with issues of public concern, Schade reiterates the biblical basis for faithfully addressing justice issues through dialogue. In chapter 3, Schade provides an overview of prophetic preaching and movements in homiletic theory toward conversational preaching (within which she places Purple Zone preaching). She then outlines five "paths" of prophetic preaching in the Purple Zone (chapter 4), including rooting the sermon in biblical principles of justice and dialogical ethics, raising awareness of justice issues important to faith, naming concrete action steps, and sustaining conversation over time. Schade also suggests a "dialogical lens" for biblical exegesis in order to focus on how conversation takes place within scripture itself. Chapter 5 prepares the preacher for the sermon-dialogue-sermon process and suggests how to select appropriate topics. The next chapters describe the sermon-dialogue-sermon method, beginning with a Prophetic Invitation to Dialogue sermon (chapter 6) in which the preacher advocates for dialogue about difficult issues and invites the congregation to participate in dialogue on a particular topic, which the sermon also introduces. The "dialogue" portion of the method (chapter 7) takes place separate from and after the initial sermon, and is a chance for congregational participants to engage in the "deliberate dialogue" process together. The deliberate dialogue experience, which is centered on the topic introduced in the initial sermon, then informs, shapes, and inspires the follow-up sermon, the Communal Prophetic Proclamation (chapter 8). Chapters 9 and 10 are case studies on the sermon-dialogue-sermon method, and chapter 11 offers insights for future thinking and research.

A major strength of Schade's book is its qualitative research, from an in-depth survey of preachers' experiences with controversial sermons through multiple real-life examples and case studies of her method. Schade does not shy away from the complexities of what she proposes, and offers honest assessments of the pitfalls and possibilities. She also boldly takes on the challenge of interweaving prophetic preaching's emphasis on justice with efforts to build bridges among people who disagree. As Schade writes, "In our severely divided political climate, simply issuing the invitation to dialogue is itself a prophetic act" (86). Her argument for the importance of conversational preaching and deliberate dialogue in the specific moments when congregations are most divided helps reimagine what constitutes the "prophetic" in situations of polarization.

This impulse is a critical addition to larger discussions of prophetic preaching and its intersection with conversational or collaborative models, but it is also the source of some amount of confusion in Schade’s text. It is unclear, for instance, how the results of the deliberative dialogue become a “communal prophetic proclamation” if participants remain divided as to what constitutes justice. Is a sermon prophetic because it reflects multiple perspectives in dialogue, or does being prophetic require movement together toward particular expressions of justice? Likewise, while the Bible does include diverse voices in dialogue, many scriptures are strongly polemical and do not lend themselves to “seeing both sides.” How might a “dialogical lens” help assess which voices in scripture should be lifted up? Or is awareness that there are multiple voices what is most important? Throughout Schade’s book, such tensions remain somewhat unresolved and at times paradoxical—but all of this demonstrates the complexity of the task of prophetic preaching in divisive times. Schade is asking critically important questions, and her method offers a useful, hands-on approach for pastors struggling to respond to conflict-averse and “purple” congregations.

Aimee C. Moiso, Vanderbilt University, Nashville TN