

Ahmi Lee. *Preaching God's Grand Drama: A Biblical-Theological Approach*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019. 183 pages. \$22.99.

The world is a stage and we are the players, or so sums William Shakespeare. This iconic metaphor weaves throughout Ahmi Lee's work as she aims to combine facets of *traditional* and *conversational* homiletics into a *theodramatic* model. This third model is needed, Lee contends, as homiletics contains two disparate worlds that manifest the extreme ends of a spectrum. In chapter 1 she begins by offering a broad overview of traditional homiletics, from its inception to John Broadus's *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons* (32). While Lee does not intend to be comprehensive, she does propose key qualities that manifest throughout all but the last 75 years of homiletical history, summarizing that traditional homiletical sermons use propositional and deductive methods that aim to teach the divine truths found in Scripture. She contrasts this with conversational homiletics in chapter 2. After briefly sketching the evolution of the New Homiletic as a turn toward the listener, Lee examines conversational preaching through the work of three homileticians: Lucy Rose's conversational preaching, John McClure's collaborative preaching, and O. Wesley Allen's ecclesiological preaching. She concludes that their work collectively embodies the cultural shift from the universal to the particular, focuses on the primacy of testimony, and decentralizes the pulpit.

In chapter 3, Lee presents a substantial critique of conversational homiletics. She begins by examining influential traits of postmodern philosophy before delving into two primary critiques of conversational homiletics. First, Lee asserts that conversational preaching has adopted postmodernism's disillusionment with language and its deconstruction of social reality, which erodes confidence in scripture and an ability to find meaning therein. Building here, she shows how the community of readers must now generate their own meaning to fill the void, which is problematic as even the best exegetical intentions can be misled. Lee's solution is a critical realistic stance with a primary hermeneutic of faith.

Lee then shifts into her second aim: proposing a mediating option between traditional and conversational homiletics in the construction of a theodramatic homiletical model. She begins with Hans Urs von Balthasar's dramatic approach to theology in chapter 4, adding the voices of N.T. Wright concerning biblical authority and Nicholas Lash on embodiment of the text. Her exploration culminates in Kevin Vanhoozer's dramatic theology, emphasizing scripture's own ontological integrity. The Bible is a "script" to be performed in a unified Christian message. Preachers are tasked as directors interpreting the script to lead the church, a company of players. Lee expands on this idea when building a theodramatic homiletic in chapter 5. In this model God is the leading performer; scripture offers clear, meaningful guidance; and the listener is an improvisational actor within God's larger epic narrative. Preaching aims to reorient listeners to the story of scripture and encourage them to join in with their own fluid movement. Chapter 6 expands on these themes as Lee explores distinctive aspects of the theodramatic model: gospel uniqueness, the preacher/director also as actor, church participation in the epic, and the broad scope of God's past, present, and future dramatic action.

Lee's theodramatic model offers an expanded picture of the preacher as director, who carefully examines God's past actions and future promises in scripture to lead the church into a continuation of the story. New scholars can benefit from her overarching perspective of the homiletical field and scholars interested in the dramatic tones of preaching will find a helpful conversation partner. However, when assessing the success of her stated aims there are significant gaps. In her critique of conversational homiletics, she places Rose, McClure, and

Allen in an antagonistic postmodern position against traditional homiletics. In doing so, she not only inadvertently collapses centuries of homiletics into a modernist perspective, but also disconnects “traditional” homiletics from the conversational model. She creates a simplistic binary rather than seeing these three scholars as contributors to homiletical evolution. Her work also includes very limited interaction with women and African American scholars, a significant omission because both conversational and modern homiletics necessarily engage these perspectives. Because of this, she misses a significant question that conversational preaching asks of our discipline: Where does power reside? Lee only addresses power in terms of authority and then primarily the authority of scripture. She does not engage with the power dynamics of mono-voiced preaching and thus, her theodramatic model fails to address a true concern for conversational homiletics. While the listener/actor is inspired to fluidly move, movement is still in response to the single voice of the preacher/director/actor who holds the power of curating a message.

Lee’s theodramatic homiletic fits in well with the New Homiletic’s turn toward the listener as she provides a powerful image of action within God’s holy epic. Unfortunately, she oversimplifies key voices and ignores others, preventing both traditional and conversational homiletics from true representation in this book.

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