

Richard Voelz. *Preaching To Teach: Inspire People to Think and Act*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2019. 103 pages. \$13.61.

This is the fifth book in the Artistry of Preaching Series, which is designed to address some of the neglected sides of preaching. In this volume, Richard Voelz offers a renewed understanding of the role of teaching in the sermon. Voelz reframes the traditional understanding of teaching to define teaching as “enacting radical democratic practice in the search to alleviate oppression and domination” (xviii).

He opposes the sharp distinction that some have made between teaching and preaching, beginning with C. H. Dodd, and more recently by Paul Scott Wilson. As he looks at the trajectory that preaching has followed through the centuries, he shows how many earlier theologians and preachers like Augustine, Alan of Lille, Calvin, and Alexander Campbell prioritized teaching over preaching, or as Voelz says, preaching as teaching.

Voelz takes his theoretical framework from the field of education and specifically the theory of “critical pedagogy” based on the work of Paulo Freire and Henry Giroux. Throughout the book, he maintains that the preacher-as-teacher “can undergird all aspects of preaching” (xxvii). It is not siloed for special occasions.

The book contains five chapters. Chapter 1 addresses the preacher as a “transformational intellectual, someone who contributes to the formation of public life beyond the walls of the church” (xxix). Preaching is described as intervention: “Preaching makes regular interventions into the lives of listeners to help them think in ways that empower them for transformative living” (9). This kind of critical pedagogical preaching focuses on “places where suffering and oppression occur, looking to enact emancipatory practice, democratic change, and exercising civic courage” (9).

Chapter 2 explores how critical pedagogy calls preachers to teach “toward a vision of the public sphere” (xxix). Currently much preaching addresses only the needs of the individual and the faith community. However, Voelz maintains that “. . .preaching is a communicative event that seeks to construct a vision for the public sphere *beyond* ecclesial gatherings” (23).

Chapter 3 describes the contrast between the traditional teaching sermon and the sermon that engages critical pedagogy. Traditional teaching is reproductive teaching, simply reinforcing the values of the dominant culture. It prepares recipients primarily for the work force, for developing technical skills, and for getting a good job. Critical pedagogy offers both a critique of the contemporary society and hope, or radical imagination, for the future (37). It imagines “the world otherwise.” Critical pedagogical preaching envisions the world through the lenses of the kingdom of God.

Chapter 4 analyzes the relationship between preacher as teacher, congregation, and authority. The teaching sermon is conversational, not meaning a style of delivery but “a kind of embodiment of authority” (55). The authority of the preacher is grounded in relational and experiential authority, “where meaning and authority remain continually under negotiation” (56). It is more collaborative. At the end of chapter 4, Voelz offers an example of the kind of form such a sermon can take while acknowledging that many different forms will serve the critical pedagogy paradigm.

Finally, chapter 5 contains three sermon examples that exemplify the preacher as teacher. These include sermons by Casey Thornburgh Sigmon, Brian Blount, and the author himself. I am wondering if the two sermons by Blount and Sigmon in the final chapter were intentionally prepared with the critical pedagogy paradigm in mind or whether they naturally embodied it, and

Voelz identifies this pedagogical paradigm already, at least in part, practiced by some preachers. As I read other sermons by individuals like Ellen Davis, Fleming Rutledge, and Alyce McKenzie, it seems they are practicing a kind of preacher-as-teacher model. Voelz's work provides a clearer theoretical foundation for this practice, unpacking the details of critical pedagogy, applying it to the practice of preaching, enabling others to see its value, and equipping homileticians and preachers to more intentionally integrate it into their work.

Voelz has taken the discipline of teaching that has laid dormant since the early 1970s and infused it with new life for the task of preaching. His paradigm will enable preachers to naturally embed teaching into the narratives of their sermons. It will also assist preachers in regularly addressing the injustices marginalized communities face and make it a natural part of their preaching responsibilities.

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