

Sarah Travis. *Metamorphosis: Preaching after Christendom*. Eugene: Cascade Books, 2019. 134 pages. \$19.

The Western church is failing. Church membership, worship attendance, and the financial resources of the church are in decline. With the end of Christendom in North America, the institutional church, especially the mainline Protestant church, is in limbo, particularly its practices, structures, purpose, mission, and fundamentally, identity. In this new context, Sarah Travis argues, “What is required is metamorphosis—a change in the form of the church itself—from Christendom to something new” (11). Travis is keenly aware of the reciprocal relationship between preaching practice and the ecclesial identity formation. In her homiletic response to the current situation, she has searched for and constructed a post-Christendom ecclesial identity. Postcolonial theory provides a new and critical lens for her work.

In chapter 1, Travis takes a brief detour into the history of the establishment and disestablishment of Christendom in the Western world. After the Constantinian Turn, the relationship between church and state had radically changed and Christianity was established as the dominant religion in the Roman Empire. “The church of Christendom mimicked the Roman Empire” and became captive to an imperial framework for its identity and purpose (34). With the end of Christendom, the church had not only been disestablished in society, but it also struggled to understand its ecclesial identity and purpose in a post-Christendom context.

In chapter 2, the author articulates a post-Christendom ecclesiology based on an alternative narrative frame to Christendom’s stories of triumph and superiority. A social trinitarian theology, theology of incarnation, and baptismal theology provide the foundation of a new framing story that helps the church disentangle itself from the power of Empire or states and faithfully reflect the life of the Triune God. A post-Christendom ecclesial identity (or identities) is a diverse, plural, porous, fluid identity (50). Preaching is a central practice that can deconstruct Christendom ecclesial identity and nurture an alternative identity and purpose to the church.

In chapter 3, the author constructs a theology of gospel, which functions as a hermeneutical lens for interpreting the Bible for preaching practice. Through historical examination of colonial history, she reveals and deconstructs the binary construction of the gospel of Christendom and demonstrates the complexity of the gospel, arguing “Gospel is about both life and death” (69). Along with the question of “What is good news?” the question of “For whom is this good news?” become a crucial point to consider for the interpretation of gospel. Finding good news requires listening to the perspectives of others, especially that of the marginalized and vulnerable. In this non-binary understanding of gospel, the current disestablishment of the church, though it may seem like bad news, can be good news that leads the church to new life through metamorphosis.

In chapter 4, Travis proposes what she calls metamorphosis preaching, a homiletical guide, that helps preachers lead churches into new liberating and life-giving narratives of the church. Three key movements of metamorphosis preaching are “metanoia: change of mind and heart,” “exodus: change of position,” and “kenosis: change of identity” (88–98). The first movement of metamorphosis preaching is metanoia, which includes a rejection of Christendom’s narrative of superiority and triumphalism, and repentance of damage done to others by and within the church (90). Exodus refers to an intentional change of position “from captivity to freedom, from the center to the margins, and from home to diaspora” (94). The last movement of metamorphosis preaching is the change of identity by making space within us through self-emptying and making ourselves vulnerable. The identity of the church is not fixed and

permanent but fluid and porous, and thus metamorphosis preaching seeks to challenge listeners' conventional and comfortable positions and invites them to open themselves to others for transformation.

In the final chapter, Travis offers examples of what metamorphosis preaching looks like. Four sermons demonstrate how preaching can lead churches to a journey of metamorphosis moving toward a post-Christendom narrative.

Many preachers in North America feel that we are entering into uncharted territory. Preachers are desperate to find tools to navigate this strange new reality. Sarah Travis offers an excellent map for this new reality of the church to search for and construct a new ecclesial identity and purpose in a post-Christendom world. Instead of holding onto an old paradigm of Christendom, she invites readers to have the courage to be a new church—one that is vulnerable and radically open to others for transformation through death and resurrection. Sarah Travis is thoroughly theological and practical in this book. I highly recommend this reading for all preachers who want to lead their congregations into a journey of metamorphosis.

Yohan Go, Boston University School of Theology, Boston, MA