

Peter Jonker. *Preaching in Pictures: Using Images for Sermons That Connect*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2015. 150 pages. \$15.

Preaching in Pictures by Peter Jonker is the third volume of The Artistry of Preaching Series, edited by Paul Scott Wilson. As Wilson commends, Jonker proposes a creative way to add affective spark and theological imagination to preaching “by effective use of a dominant or controlling image” (x). Jonker unabashedly admits that he began his research on this topic because of his discontent with conventional homiletics’ largely rationalistic and reductionistic approach to sermon preparation and composition. Agreeing with Wilson, he feels a strong urgency to (re)discover the artistic or holistic-aesthetic dimension of preaching practice, namely image-driven rhetoric, for the audiovisual hearers in the pews today.

He specifically argues that along with the two conventional driving forces of the sermon—focus (theme) and function (goal), including a controlling image should become the third force in both sermon preparation and composition. He defines “a controlling image” as “an evocative picture or scene that shows up repeatedly in a sermon and communicates either the trouble or the grace of the sermon theme, thereby helping to accomplish the sermon’s goal” (4). Accordingly, the controlling image is not a simple illustration for the sermon, but a key literary foundation of the sermon or even the implicit or explicit conveyer of the sermon’s message itself. This artistic controlling image of the sermon will greatly enhance the logos, ethos, and pathos of any given sermon, and especially its pathos, Jonker promises.

Overall, Jonker’s argument is innovative and easily applied by any aspiring preacher. Yet his approach is not really new, as he admits. Already, many exemplar preachers have used controlling images in their sermons even though they might not have known or applied Jonker’s specific methodology. In Chapter Two, Jonker first provides fine case examples in order to help the reader understand his approach, and then gives practical tips on where and how preachers can find the controlling image for the sermon. Chapters Three and Four in particular help preachers learn from poets, marketers, and visual artists the basics of formulating the controlling image that can aesthetically magnify the targeted sermon message.

I have a quibble regarding the mention of “hard chair” and “soft chair” in the introductory chapter. Borrowing Fred Craddock’s terminology, Jonker designates the historical-critical exegetical process as the first “hard chair” task of sermon preparation and artistic concerns of preaching activity as the “soft chair.” In so doing, the author seems to suggest that the first task is more academic, disciplined, and critical, thus “harder,” than the second. The “soft chair” is presented as something “secondary” that follows the first, and not vice versa. Yet, most artists and artistic preachers would agree that creating artistic work can be as painful, intellectual, critical, disciplined, and thus “hard” as any academic work. Is it possible that we can reverse the first and the second tasks in our exegetical and sermon composition process? Or how about inventing a combination of the two, something like a creative-aesthetical exegesis, rather than doing first one, then the other? These follow-up inquiries deserve further consideration from serious readers interested in the artistry of preaching.

The last chapter will surely draw the critical attention of preachers who are accustomed to presenting their sermon using screen technology in some way. Here the author goes beyond only verbalizing the controlling image throughout the sermon, and discusses how to show it effectively to the audience as an integral part of the sermon. This discussion is important because in the sometimes reckless pursuit of novelty, many churches for the past decades have installed screens on their church’s walls without properly pondering a “theology of the screen.” How might the screen image deepen or alter the conception of incarnation?

What spiritual difference do we see between the preacher's real-time sermon voice and the virtual sound/sight from the screen? Is the screen image compatible with the religious icon (by the Orthodox Church)? Jonker propels us toward sound theological reasoning over these and more issues.

In the challenging time when interdisciplinary and theopoetical interests are increasing in homiletics and preaching practice, this sort of book is extremely welcome. Jonker's expert knowledge of and sophisticated dealing with poetry and the visual arts add much value to this volume. Any preaching instructor wanting to include a theopoetic aspect of preaching in the classroom will not regret introducing students to Jonker's idea.

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