

Zack Eswine. *Preaching to a Post-Everything World: Crafting Biblical Sermons That Connect with Our Culture*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2008. 288 pages. \$17.99.

There is a lot of good, serviceable information in this book. There is an overall movement in the book from general, even metaphysical, principles, including definitions of reality (“God and everything else” [25]), to preaching on perennially difficult topics such as hell, idols, Satan and more. The question that prompts the book is based on the author’s personal epiphany, “Could I now preach to who I once was?” Or have we become so entrenched in our current way of thinking and valuing that we become strangers to our former, pre-conversion selves? If so, preaching will be largely solipsistic.

The book is divided into three parts: (1) “reorienting the biblical sermon for a post-everything world;” (19) (2) examining three biblical models for preaching: prophet, priest, and sage; and (3) beginning the task of “cultural engagement and contextualization by letting the sage, priest, and prophet mentor us.” Each part contains an array of principles, propositions, admonitions, and exhortations. These are made somewhat challenging to keep in hand because of the frequent use of neologisms and redefinitions. For example, in part 1, a foundational building block in Eswine’s homiletic is the COR or Context of Reality, which is connected to the FCF or Fallen Condition Focus, which he borrows from Bryan Chapell’s work. Among many other micro-concepts, there is the “Challenger Deep,” “the deeper regions of reality and redemption that preachers must navigate from the biblical text” (29). There are several “expository bans:” expository censoring, muting, equivocations, evictions, and cynicism. Again, each part contains all sorts of schemes, taxonomies, and checklists. I read the book within a week’s time which was not the ideal way to approach this material. It was too much too absorb in this short span of time. I found myself being fatigued by all the major and minor concepts. One chapter a month might be more manageable. Even so, the threads intended to hold the book together seem to disappear from time to time. The result was that the pace of the book felt a bit hurried or frenetic, moving from one scheme, exhortation or admonition to the next. It might have been more helpful overall to have fewer categories defined by more familiar terms with more examples.

In part 2, the focus is a little narrower. Here Eswine employs three biblical models of preaching and re-deploys them as instructive to preaching in a post-everything world. He also proposes the use of four stories that should prompt or inhabit each sermon which are then transduced into four questions: “(1) What does this text teach us about God? (2) What does this text teach us about people (the religious and the irreligious)? (3) What does this text teach us about place (creation and cultures)? (4) What does this text expose about our personal response to these?” (125). These are good, heuristic questions that any preacher, novice or veteran, would do well to consider.

In part 3, Eswine turns from looking at the preaching and the preacher in parts 1 and 2 to the culture in which the preacher resides. He encourages the reader to look in biblical passages for both resonance and dissonance with the culture in which the text will be proclaimed. It is in this section that Eswine addresses particular challenging topics that may call for a preaching. It is hard to know if these are topics that are vital to a post-everything assembly, however. Some yes and some no.

Again, there is much solid information here; perhaps too much. If the reader were to take the material at a slow, deliberate pace, the material would likely be more easily digested. A little more thorough description of this world would also provide a better foundation for the content.

Appendix 1 and 2 are helpful schematics for applying the material in the book. It could possibly come earlier as a preview of what would follow.

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