

Olive Elaine Hinnant. *God Comes Out: A Queer Homiletic*. Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2007. 210 pages. \$24.00

Olive Elaine Hinnant places *God Comes Out* in the company of homiletical theories of the past thirty years that explore the preaching theory and practice of various marginalized groups—African-Americans, women, the disabled, and so on. Hinnant’s volume fills a gap in this literature by developing a homiletic from the perspective of sexual minority groups—gay, lesbian, transgendered, and bisexual people, to whom she refers in the book either with the acronym LGBT, or simply as “queer.” In developing a “queer homiletic,” Hinnant seeks not only to defend the place of LGBT preachers in Christian churches, and to decry the destructive effects of heterosexism in the church’s life, but also to demonstrate that LGBT preaching is alive and well, that it has its own distinctive scriptural and theological emphases, and that it is a gift to the church. She makes this argument by exploring preaching using the metaphor of coming out. Coming out, the self-identification of a person as LGBT, is akin to preaching most basically in that both are speech events. Unlike many marginalized groups, LGBT people are not visibly identified as LGBT. They only take on this identity publically through speaking; until they do this, they can “pass” as members of the dominant culture. Thus coming out is a powerful metaphor for preaching in that both are speaking events in which the speaker reveals something about God as well as something about herself, and transforms her own life in so speaking.

Drawing on this fundamental similarity between preaching and coming out, Hinnant structures the book as an exploration of various ways that the components of preaching can “come out,” can be theorized and practiced as liberating for LGBT people. She argues that the Bible comes out when it is used to advocate justice for LGBT people and all marginalized groups, using the Book of Esther to show how coming out can be a helpful lens through which to read scripture. Theology comes out when Christian doctrines are developed in a way that celebrates queer sexuality. Hinnant suggests that the doctrines of creation, incarnation, and resurrection are particularly promising areas for LGBT theological exploration, since in these doctrines the body is central, and for LGBT people, defined by their bodily desires and/or gender identity, the body is a central topic of reflection. Particularly strong is Hinnant’s argument that preaching comes out when the preacher integrates the fullness of her identity, including her sexuality, into her preaching, not as the focus of the sermon *per se*, but as a necessary dimension of it, through which the good news of God is refracted. Hinnant maintains that Phillips Brooks’s description of preaching as “truth through personality” is particularly apt for LGBT preachers, since their personhood is inevitably part of how they are heard and received; their presence in the pulpit preaches even before they say a word. Finally, in some of the most adventurous writing in the book, Hinnant suggests that in LGBT preaching God comes out as queer. God is queer in the sense of being different, other, odd; in the sense of fully understanding and sharing in the experiences of LGBT people; and in the sense that some of God’s attributes—joy, color, play, hospitality—are revealed in LGBT culture and preaching. Hinnant supports her argument by offering sample sermons from LGBT preachers and their heterosexual allies throughout the book. These sermons, many of them excellent, illustrate vividly what sermons that “come out” look like, as well as demonstrating the vitality and richness of LGBT preaching.

The sheer amount of ground Hinnant covers in this project is both its greatest strength and its greatest drawback. Many themes are sketched only briefly, and I would have appreciated greater development of several points that are only made in passing. For instance, how exactly can doctrines such as creation, incarnation, and resurrection be reconceived to support LGBT

liberation? How is the term “queer” different from “LGBT,” and why might the LGBT community want to claim it as a liberating descriptor? How does human sexual intimacy relate to God’s being, and to our relationship with God? Since, as Hinnant wisely notes, the current disputes about the role of LGBT leaders in the church are fundamentally rooted in Christian ambivalence about sexuality in general, how might LGBT preachers offer a gift to the church in helping all Christians to come to terms with their sexuality as God-given? These questions point to the fecundity of Hinnant’s project, and the need for further work in the development of a queer homiletic, work that Hinnant has done us a great service in initiating in this volume.

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