

Sunggu A. Yang. *Arts and Preaching: An Aesthetic Homiletic for the Twenty-First Century*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2021. 210 pages. \$24.49.

Sunggu A. Yang asserts that the “what” and “how” of preaching have dominated introductory preaching courses to the exclusion of the “who” and “why.” “[W]ith few exceptions,” he claims, the result has been “disappointing sermons that are leaden and irrelevant, highly dogmatic, obsessively entertaining, or too performative to give the audience a solid message” (1). Standard preaching education, he argues, can do better in terms of fostering the “*holistic-aesthetic ground of preaching*” (“why”) and the “*spiritual formation of the preacher*” (“who”) (5).

Yang proposes a holistic-aesthetic pedagogical paradigm that dethrones technical intellectual inquiry which can objectify texts. Instead, he lifts up the multidimensional, subjective experience of the living word of God in sermon preparation. His paradigm submerges preachers in “the *mysterium tremendum* of the word, so that they may truly *experience* what the living word says and how it feels” (10). Traditional approaches would have preachers go to the text and “poke around,” Yang suggests, while his makes space for the word of God to come to preachers in a way that addresses their humanity holistically and sensorially (10). Boldly, Yang compels homileticians to foster holistic-aesthetic encounters by postponing standard exegetical work for the first month of an introductory course, using that time to study biblical-theological aesthetics and teach students “creative, artistic, and performative hermeneutical approaches to the biblical text” (12). He urges homileticians to create space for students to participate in God’s logos *as well as* God’s ethos and pathos, thus cultivating the multidimensional spiritual formation of preachers who, with Isaiah, will cry out, “Here am I; send me!” (Isa. 6:8).

The proceeding chapters provide insight into the many forms this holistic-aesthetic pedagogical paradigm shift can take by putting homiletics in conversation with particular artistic disciplines. Chapter 2 proposes a “cubistic homiletic” in which texts are deconstructed and reconstructed in ways that encourage holistic multidimensionality. Cubist sermons do not require singular theses, introductions, conclusions, literary completeness, or a linear flow through time. They affirm open-endedness and use “indirect, invitational, and allusive” language with no attempt to control the listeners’ meaning-making (38).

Chapter 3 offers an “architectural-homiletical” approach specifically for preaching texts that either speak about literal architecture or use architecture in a metaphorical, imaginative manner (45). Yang reveals the power of architecture to communicate “the ultimate values of life” (47) and attributes “salvific power” (56) to architecture. He proposes that preachers organize their sermons according to a text’s spatial units, with the introduction and conclusion functioning as the front and back door.

Chapter 4 presents “fashionista preaching” to help texts “come alive in the fashion-saturated minds of the listeners today” (88). Yang invites preachers to view texts as fashion pieces and find meanings by discerning their colors, textures, and shapes. Sermons can use fashion illustratively (fashion illustrates meaning, e.g., being wrapped in a blanket illustrates comfort), integratively (interweave fashion metaphors with the message), and intradynamically (construct sermons as fine garments).

Chapter 5 contends that preachers preach to “film-saturated” congregations; therefore, preaching should learn from film. Yang recommends a “cinematic homiletic” that employs 1) a hermeneutical lens examining topics like gender, power, money, and violence, 2) a highly visual

and sensorial sermon structure, and 3) five “narrative codes” adopted from film to keep listeners engaged.

Chapter 6 recognizes that many in our pews experience their lives in an episodic, existential way. Yang argues that Paul Tillich’s existential theology resonates well with an episodic person’s identity. He adopts it as a theological grounding for preaching the existential gospel of Christ in an episodic manner and provides a “dramaturgical episodic” sermon form.

Chapter 7 is unique in that Yang does not offer any particular homiletic or form. Instead, he reports on currents in womanist homiletics and an appreciative description of the Beyoncé Mass that he attended. He encourages his readers to make a pilgrimage to the black church to hear black woman preachers and affirms that “*womanism is for all*” (163).

I was left wondering how teachable some of Yang’s more abstract concepts would be for many homileticians, in addition to the practicality of some of these complex approaches making their way into the average overworked preacher’s preparation. More examples for each approach would have been helpful. Occasionally, Yang also appears more focused on providing ways to keep the listeners’ attention through creative preaching than on fostering the “who” and “why,” as he describes in the beginning. Still, his creativity and openness to learning from artistic disciplines will undoubtedly inspire homileticians to lead their students toward a more holistic-aesthetic encounter, which was precisely his aim.

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