

Matthew D. Kim and Paul A. Hoffman. *Preaching to a Divided Nation: A Seven-Step Model for Promoting Reconciliation and Unity*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2022. 208 pages. \$17.93.

In *Preaching to a Divided Nation*, Matthew D. Kim and Paul A. Hoffman share their concerns about the rapidly increasing polarization in our politics, economy, and society, which often promotes prejudices and violence. Kim and Hoffman bemoan that this social dysfunction seems to have spread to many pulpits, exacerbating the division among Christians rather than uniting them in God's peace. As they remain hopeful that preachers, the heralds of the good news of Christ are called to "promote reconciliation and unity" (3), they explore seven steps through which preaching can effectively address divisive topics.

In the first chapter, "The Theological Step," the authors argue that gospel preaching must begin with theology, the narrative about God. Kim and Hoffman suggest that preachers interpret the Bible "through a missional meta-narrative" (8), which describes how God has reconciled the sinful creature to Godself through Christ. As a redeemed body of Christ, Christian communities, then, are called not only to proclaim but also to embody the "gospel of reconciliation" (20).

The second chapter, "The Contextual Step," emphasizes the importance of understanding the context of the listeners, who are part of a broader network of local and national history and culture. Kim and Hoffman argue that for preachers to listen to and understand their congregation more empathically, they need to nurture all cultural, emotional, and historical intelligence.

In the third chapter, "The Personal Step," the authors suggest that preaching for healing and reconciliation requires preachers to reflect critically upon themselves and to acknowledge their sins and biases confessionally. While preachers often bear wounds and brokenness, these stories can facilitate homiletical renewal through a tripartite model of devotion, introspection, and connection. Preachers gaze upward towards God by worshipping, praying, and reading the Bible. They gaze inward to check on their heart. Finally, they gaze outward to the community to serve and foster a sense of belonging.

The fourth chapter, "The Positional Step," describes how preachers can be vessels of the Holy Spirit, who, as the chief reconciler, effects changes in people's hearts and minds. *Unction*, the gracious act of God moving through preachers, can happen especially when they faithfully preach from the Holy Scripture, as it is inspired by the Holy Spirit; love their congregation deeply; and pay attention to the level of training, theologies, and polity of their churches and denominations.

In the fifth chapter, "The Methodological Step," Kim and Hoffman discuss a homiletical method of reconciliation and unity. They encourage preachers to identify "centered sets" that are the "core, shared foundations of the faith" of the congregation, such as shared doctrines, a shared identity as God's people, a shared mission, and shared experiences (79). After recognizing their listeners' common ground, preachers can move toward "bounded sets," which divide people. Preachers are to condemn that which disrupts Christian unity and preach about humility, kindness, and charity.

The sixth chapter, "The Practical Step," guides preachers regarding what to ask and determine pre-sermon, mid-sermon, and post-sermon. The authors emphasize the importance of defining the purpose of a sermon. Is the preacher preaching about controversial topics to improve the congregation's understanding or help wounded people heal? While analyzing the topics and congregation prayerfully, preachers are to actively pursue unity and reconciliation.

The final chapter, "The Categorical Step," recounts the "reconciling narrative" introduced in the first chapter and presents biblical texts that could be used to address topics of classism,

ethnocentrism, political division, and sexism. The appendices provide useful practical tools along with six sermons, including sermons prepared by the book's authors.

In our deeply wounded and divided society, Kim and Hoffman's work attempts to center pulpits and churches on God's identity as the ultimate reconciler who continues to call God's people to unite in God's love, justice, and mission. However, some readers might question the inconsistency in the authors' theological views of women. While Kim and Hoffman condemn sexism as an "idolatrous form of social sin" (17), they later categorize the ordination of women and their roles in ministry as "nonessential doctrines of differences in ministry philosophy" (146). Therefore, one might question how sexism, which is a sin against God, is nonessential with God who created both men and women equally in God's image (121).

Nevertheless, readers may appreciate that Kim and Hoffman boldly encourage their fellow Christian preachers, teachers, and communicators to repent of their individual and social sins. These sins include not only participating in ethnocentrism, classism, sexism, and political division, but also instigating their congregations to be divided over *isms*. While the healing process often involves tears, repentance, and forgiveness, all preachers are commissioned to preach the word of God so that people can be united in God's love, generosity, and reconciliation.

Songbok Bob Jon, Aldersgate United Methodist Church, Chelmsford, MA