

Lis Valle-Ruiz and Andrew Wymer, ed. *Unmasking White Preaching: Racial Hegemony, Resistance, and Possibilities in Homiletics*. Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2022. 246 pages. \$81.44.

In *Unmasking White Preaching: Racial Hegemony, Resistance, and Possibilities in Homiletics*, a diverse group of homileticians answer the clarion call to name, analyze, and propose solutions to the issue of whiteness and white supremacy in the field of homiletics. Taking seriously the way that whiteness dominates the homiletical guilds, each contributor “seeks both to unmask and destabilize white colonial hegemony that continues to shape the field of homiletics today and to explore alternative, non-dominant homiletical pathways toward a more just future for the church and the world” (5). Through this critical exploration of the way that whiteness overshadows the homiletical “practice, pedagogy and theory,” (2) this book brilliantly destabilizes white colonial hegemony and sets forth pathways for sustained resistance to this white racialized norm and articulates possibilities for an anti-racist homiletical future.

The book skillfully portrays a dynamic group of homileticians that “represent(s) polyvocal efforts to identify and decenter the homogenizing impact of white racialization in homiletics and to subsequently contribute diverse critical homiletical approaches emerging in conversation with racially minoritized scholarship and racially subjugated knowledge and practice” (5). Born out of concerns first addressed at the Academy of Homiletics annual gathering, the book represents a sustained effort to address and practically examine the dominance of white preaching.

The first section, “Racial Hegemony in Homiletics,” maps differing viewpoints and perspectives on the issues of whiteness in homiletics. Section one’s multi-point entry addressing the problem of whiteness in homiletics offers the reader varied ways of seeing clearly the mask of white supremacy within the field and how the impact of the mask is legion. Gennifer Benjamin Brooks illuminates the “missionary connection in the advancement of the hegemonic culture of white supremacy” (20) that offers a historical view and deep-rooted understanding of the problem. Debra J. Mumford analyzes the whiteness found in a sermon with a keen eye toward the worldviews, social, and cultural location of Jerry Falwell Sr. Peace Pyunghwa Lee and David Start deconstruct the white supremacist legacy of Duke Chapel in “The Towering Sermon” making the connection of how the chapel and other monuments that uphold and embody white domination impact our preaching today. As they caution, “Ignoring the gods and goals of white supremacy etched in glass and stone is as foolish and as deadly as ignoring the corpse at a funeral” (50). Gerald C. Lui asserts, “Asian American preaching is traumatized by white preaching” (55) and argues that “whiteness embeds itself in Asian American homiletics” (64). In evaluating the data from her survey and study of Protestant clergy who address racism in their sermons, Leah D. Schade makes the case that pastors need more “education, training, support, and accountability within theological and denominational structures if white Protestant Christianity in the United States is to make serious progress with unmasking and deconstructing homiletical whiteness” (71). In chapter six, Andrew Thompson Scales confronts the limitations of civility for confronting racism and critiques the “phenomenon of purple churches” (85). In “Resisting White Fragility,” Sarah Travis “proposes that sermons may challenge fragility as it occurs in both preacher and listener primarily through a decolonized process of capacity-building” (98). In “Through a Glass Dimly,” Christopher M. Baker explores the epistemologies of ignorance, asserting that “white preachers must unlearn so much of what they have always thought they have known” (118).

In section 2, the book turns toward possibilities and opportunities to remove the mask of white preaching. “Resistance and Possibilities in Homiletics,” is the task of decentering whiteness within preaching and is offered as an ongoing multi-dimensional task and as hard but necessary work. HyeRan Kim-Cragg starts the section by proposing the necessity for a postcolonial reading optic through “a contrapuntal reading of the biblical text” (129). Richard W. Voelz argues that to “unmask White preaching, the homiletics classroom must also come under scrutiny” (142). In “Of Handmaids, Mediatrices, and Mothers,” Jerusha Matsen Neal offers some crucial reflections for white women preachers. Andrew Wymer draws our attention to the ongoing work of unmasking white preaching that this collection centers and pushes the argument into “abolition of the brutal systems of whiteness and white preaching” (172). Suzanne Wenonah Duchesne offers the need for conscientization. Lis Valle-Ruiz describes the work of decentering white preaching as an exorcism through the burlesque performance of Sophia Divinatrix. Chelsea Brooke Yarborough articulates the danger of the single story of the powerful pulpit decentering its “power” through a call and demonstration of centering the preaching witness of Black Women. The book ends with the hopeful note that although this work could not fully unmask white preaching, it still “is more of an ellipsis than a period” (231) toward the endeavor.

The book’s goal in and of itself is powerful. To bring attention to the mask of white preaching and to inflict multiple splinters, cracks, and dents in the mask is notable work. The book’s critical engagement with the historical aspects of whiteness in homiletics and the hopeful turn toward the future is commendable. The effort is done in a communal framework, lifting up a myriad of diverse voices, united in its anti-racist splendor. As HyeRan Kim-Cragg exhorts, “Whiteness in homiletics breathes deeply in the cultural norm of whiteness in academia and preaching practice as examined above. It is, thus, a time for whiteness to come out” (136). Let us head this prophetic rebuke in all the ways the Holy Spirit leads!

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