

Ronald J. Allen, ed. *Preaching the Manifold Grace of God, Volume 1: Theologies of Preaching in Historical Theological Families*. Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2022. 360 pages. \$41.00; and Ronald J. Allen, ed. *Preaching the Manifold Grace of God, Volume 2: Theologies of Preaching in the Early Twenty-First Century*. Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2022. 350 pages. \$43.00.

In his edited two-volume series, *Preaching the Manifold Grace of God*, homiletician Ronald J. Allen provides a comprehensive and important work not only for homiletical scholars and students, but for any preacher seeking to deepen their understanding of their own theological identity in the pulpit. Allen's first goal for this endeavor is to provide "a reference work on the theology of preaching in historical and contemporary manifestations" (Allen, Vol. 1, x). He achieves this by bringing diverse voices to the project in the hopes that readers will discover their own voices within the array. In so doing, they can bring a critical analysis to the theological influences that impact their preaching.

The reader will find Allen's first goal readily visible in the twelve essays found in Volume 1 from the Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed, Anabaptist, Anglican/Episcopalian, Wesleyan, Baptist, African American, Stone-Campbell, Friends, and Pentecostal traditions. Deftly organized, these essays delve into the theological depths of each tradition. The authors provide historical context while identifying unique characteristics for each tradition and how they manifest themselves in the practice of preaching. They present both influential historical figures and contemporary voices. The essays conclude with future trajectories for preaching within each tradition, a critical analysis outlining the strengths and limitations of each, and bibliographies for further study.

While it may seem curious that he includes the African American theological tradition alongside the more predictable denominational categories, Allen explains that he includes this perspective as a separate essay because "African American preaching does have a particular history that transcends the boundaries of the other theological families" (Vol. 1, x). He rightly notes that "Eurocentric scholars of preaching have tended to give short shrift to African American preaching" (Vol. 1, xi). Therefore, he "invites readers to honor African American preaching in its own right while paying attention to how it plays out in specific theological families" (Ibid). In Volume 2, additional voices expand on that tradition.

Despite the eighteen essays in Volume 2 that present even more diverse voices, Allen himself acknowledges that there are perspectives yet to be presented and movements to be explored. This volume presents the Evangelical, Liberal, Neo-Orthodox, Postliberal, Existentialist, Radical Orthodox, Deconstruction & Weak Theology, Black Liberation, Feminist, Womanist, Latinx Liberation, Mujerista, Asian American, Asian American Feminist, Queer (LGBTQ2SIA+), Indigenous, Postcolonial, and Process Theological families. The second volume is enhanced with the addition of sermons to further exemplify the traditions in praxis.

Within the two volumes of *Preaching the Manifold Grace of God*, readers encounter articles from homileticians as well as scholars from other disciplines. Contributors range from venerated academic elders to emerging voices, all of whom offer valuable wisdom and challenging insights. Each section provides views from different theological traditions both within and outside of denominational categories. The scholars vary not only in their disciplines but in other important intersections of identity such as race, age, ability, sexuality, gender, and nationality. While no book can cover all the various nuances of each tradition, this two-part

series does provide a starting point for preachers to explore their own identity and better understand theological traditions besides their own.

Allen makes it easy for readers to compare and contrast the different traditions by keeping the sections consistent. He also outlines a process of analysis in Appendix A using “Mutual Critical Correlation” that helps preachers consider the influences of these traditions on their worldview. This process points to one of the values of these books for the classroom. For those who teach preaching, both volumes are a welcome resource for guiding students from across the theological spectrum to understand more deeply their own traditions – as well as those with which they are not as familiar.

Seasoned preachers will also find these volumes useful. The annotated sermons in Volume 2, with the explanation of their development and highlighted sections that correlate to the particular tradition, provide a resource that unites the theoretical and practical which is so important to the study and practice of homiletics. Additionally, the suggestions for further reading at the end of each chapter provide direction for continued study. Ministeriums might explore the reading lists together to learn more about the traditions represented in their communities and bring new respect and appreciation for the ecumenical diversity among them. While the cost of this two-volume set may be prohibitive for an individual pastor to purchase, theological libraries would do well to invest in these for their students and local pastors who frequent their stacks or eBook holdings.

Regardless of the uses, it is important to remember that the specific worldviews represented in each theological perspective and movement are derived from subjective experiences which may or may not be in alignment with the reader’s experiences of the various traditions. As Allen explains, “These [theological] differences are not arcane matters of interest only to scholars. Differences in theologies of preaching have practical outcomes for preachers and congregations in the respective ways in which they prepare sermons and listen to sermons” (Vol. 1, ix). Allen further states, “As a preacher I need to be as fully conscious as I can about the perspectives that I bring to the sermon so that I can work with their strengths and respond critically to their limitations” (Ibid).

Preaching the Manifold Grace of God holds the potential to help preachers begin to tease out the theological influences on their identities – which may stretch across several traditions. The various perspectives in these books could help a preacher to identify their own unique voice born from the theological origins that have formed their worldview. At the same time, this collection celebrates the unique theological voices formed over centuries and in pulpits across the world: God-given and Spirit-led, in all their beautiful diversity.

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