

Karoline M. Lewis. *Preaching the Word: Contemporary Approaches to the Bible for the Pulpit*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2023. 178 pages. \$28.

Here is the theme song of Karoline Lewis's splendid new book on biblical hermeneutics for preaching: "The Bible. How do I interpret thee? Let me count the ways." Lewis, persuaded that most preachers lack both rigor and versatility in biblical engagement, has produced an expansive manual describing nine different avenues preachers may travel as they approach the Bible: literary/narrative, postcolonial, feminist, African American, Latinx and Asian, queer, ecological, disability, and trauma theory. She devotes a chapter to each of these angles of interpretation, and every chapter crisply describes the approach, summarizes how it is performed, and then illustrates it with an interpretation of a sample text from the Gospel of John. Rounding out each chapter is a short essay in which Lewis names the practical difference such an approach can make for preaching.

Preaching the Word calls to mind other guides to biblical interpretation, in particular *Biblical Exegesis: A Beginner's Handbook* by John Hayes and Carl Holladay (3rd edition, 2007), which takes a similar carousel approach and includes a number of the same perspectives as does Lewis (e.g., feminist, postcolonial, queer, African American). Lewis's book, however, stands apart in several ways. First, unlike the more general approach of Hayes and Holladay, Lewis's book is distinctively about the Bible and the *pulpit*, maintaining a steady focus on the sermon as the *telos* of biblical interpretation.

Second, while Hayes and Holladay treat the more contemporary perspectives as supplements to traditional historical critical approaches (including textual, grammatical, and form criticism), Lewis runs in the opposite direction. She is persuaded that historical criticism is so firmly ingrained in homiletical practice that it needs little elaboration. Hayes and Holladay devote three-quarters of their volume to grammatical, historical, and redactional aspects of texts, but Lewis says almost nothing about these more traditional exegetical methods. On the other hand, Hayes and Holladay give fewer than a dozen pages total to the newer cultural and ethnic perspectives (what they call "exegesis with a special focus"), but Lewis gives virtually her whole book over to such approaches. While Lewis doesn't devalue historical criticism, she believes that preachers should immerse themselves in multiple interpretive viewpoints and methods in order to shake loose from "unconscious contextualization," a phrase Lewis borrows from Justo González and which points to the tendency to assume that some vantage point (such as a historical rendering of a text) is a universal when it is actually only one perspective among many. Lewis's choice of interpretive vantage points also discloses that she is relatively less interested in what biblical texts are in themselves and more interested in how they are *read* by constituencies.

A less visible departure of Lewis's book, perhaps, is her challenge that interpreting the Bible from multiple vantage points involves much more than simply learning different methods; it also demands repentance and the making of new commitments on the part of the interpreter. For example, engaging in queer interpretation means, among other things, repenting of the implied heteronormativity smuggled into "ordinary" language, and assuming the vantage point of African American interpretation means (for white preachers) naming the sin of white supremacy and publicly acknowledging the many ways the Bible itself has been used as a tool of racial oppression. For Lewis, interpreting the Bible is not only a matter of technical achievement but also a series of moral acts.

This book will be useful to seminary students and provocative for pastors. I found myself often nodding enthusiastically to what is present here. At times I missed what is not here. For

example, I wish Lewis had not so quickly assumed our familiarity with historical approaches. I would love to have seen her fresh take on them. I missed a chapter on the theological interpretation of texts, which to my mind is often neglected in preaching. I would also have liked a concluding chapter about how to put all of this together, how to allow a single sermon to emerge from these many sometimes overlapping, sometimes competing perspectives. Lewis leaves us with nine powerful horses harnessed to one wagon, each pulling in a somewhat different direction. Even so, Lewis deserves our gratitude. Nine chargers rearing up and ready for action is far more exciting for preaching than the old gray mare plodding wearisomely down the ruts of traditional exegesis.

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