

Rodney Wallace Kennedy. *Dancing with Metaphors in the Pulpit*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2024. 224 pages. \$29.

*Dancing with Metaphors in the Pulpit* invites readers to embrace, or re-embrace, rhetoric, persuasiveness, and boldness in preaching. Rodney Kennedy envisions the book as a “prequel to preaching” (14) designed to shape the preacher’s ethos. The book is not concerned so much with how to preach as it offers suggestions for shaping ethos for convincing and inventive preaching. Kennedy’s work identifies four major categories for this development: rhetoric, philosophy, writing, and poetry. Drawing inspiration from Paul, and the first few centuries of the church, he argues for a rhetorical and scholarly quality of the early church’s preaching. Kennedy sees rhetoric as the paradigm of preaching and as the lens through which other disciplines can inform persuasive preaching.

The first chapter begins with a call for preachers to be truth-tellers about the world, life, and the human condition. Kennedy invites preachers to be avid readers and to learn from the insights and methods of great novelists. Preachers can become better wordsmiths and utilize the imagination more effectively by reading novelists. In addition, reading novelists provides quality material to incorporate into preaching. Chapter two turns to poets and poetry. It draws from metaphor theory to discuss the creative potential of metaphors in general and to learn from the psalms in particular. Kennedy writes, “Metaphor possesses epistemic power to produce a new reality in the face of an oppressive old reality” (77). This seeks to establish the centrality of metaphor to preaching.

Chapter three discusses philosophy and the philosophers, drawing from Plato, Aristotle, Charles Taylor, and James K. A. Smith. Kennedy wants preachers to respond to secularism with deeper sophistication than pop-psychology and pop-philosophy, even as he holds onto the great importance of sermonic theological depth. As elsewhere throughout the book, Kennedy develops his arguments in agreement and conversation with Stanley Hauerwas, often critiquing evangelicalism and liberalism. Chapter four opens with a central focus on rhetoric by saying, “Homiletics belongs in the family of rhetoric” (125). Kennedy recognizes that rhetoric has fallen in influence within homiletics, which he seeks to change. He offers a few recognizable definitions of rhetoric before saying, “In my understanding, rhetoric is argument,” (126) which he connects with understanding reality paradigmatically. Sermons are arguments which must offer convincing and just ways of orienting within the world. Here, Kennedy takes an approach to preaching as a “human act” (152) rooted in rhetorical and metaphorical ways of understanding and orienting within the world. The conclusion draws this into the realm of ethos to name that “Faithful preaching turns out not to be a technique but a rhetorical attitude” (183). Kennedy is concerned with shaping this ethos as an essential aspect of the preaching life. The book concretizes this with specific references to topics like racial justice and ecology.

*Dancing with Metaphors in the Pulpit* has a sustained focus on shaping the ethos of the preacher to be rhetorically sophisticated and metaphorically inventive. The book is a welcome contribution to the field of homiletics. Kennedy invites preachers to deepen and expand their preaching through everyday learning. The work synthesizes insights and topics from theological and non-theological sources. Preachers looking for inspiration regarding ongoing study and the recognition of the importance of preaching will find it in these pages. Kennedy names preachers as the intended audience of the book and this intention aligned with my reading of the work. Still, preachers looking for guidance on how to preach or a homiletical method would find

clearer resources elsewhere. The high number of allusions in the book can also be distracting at times.

Kennedy's tone in the book is argumentative, which he believes aligns with his intentions for preachers "to drop the infernal niceness of being a preacher and fight back with stronger arguments, more scholarly debate, and better discernment" (2). While he does not envision the preacher in opposition to the congregation as much as in opposition to general secularism, this tone and approach differs from the more recent collaborative approach in much of the literature of homiletics. At times, I found Kennedy's tone unhelpful. Yet, I found many of Kennedy's points worthwhile even if the rhetorical style was not always to my liking. Kennedy leaves much of the application of his work on ethos up to the reader. Those with an existing homiletical method and who are further along in ministry may find it easier to incorporate the work's insights.

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