

Casey T. Sigmon. *Engaging the Gadfly: Reflective Online, Hybrid, and In-Person Preaching in a Digital Age*. Cascade Books, 2025. 151 pages. \$26.00.

In the wake of pandemic-accelerated shifts to streaming and hybrid worship, Casey T. Sigmon reframes preaching for a networked environment often labeled Web 3.0. Drawing on process philosopher Alfred North Whitehead, she employs the “gadfly” metaphor to describe technological change itself—the persistent buzz of new media challenging established proclamation patterns. New ideas, Whitehead observed, are “a danger to the existing order” (xxi), and Sigmon sees the rapid shifts in how people communicate—through social media, algorithms, and blurred physical-virtual spaces—as just such a gadfly for the church. Her thesis is concise: because Christian proclamation has always adapted to major media revolutions, the church's response today should be incarnational—not a retreat from digital technoculture, but a faithful entry into it—reshaping sermons as participatory conversations rather than one-way addresses. Pastors, worship planners, and homiletics faculty are the intended readers.

The early chapters rehearse how communication revolutions have repeatedly reshaped homiletic form—from house church gatherings to imperial basilicas, from print to broadcast to Web 3.0’s networked platforms. This historical pattern reveals that preaching adapts faithfully, not by chasing technological trends, but by holding fast to its unchanging purpose while allowing the “how” to evolve. Sigmon locates this purpose in incarnation theology: if the Word became flesh to meet people in their context, then preachers today must carry the gospel toward people as they actually communicate—on timelines, in comment threads, and through screens—through what Sigmon names “touch,” the “theological posture for preaching in the digital age” (99).

At the heart is a dialogical homiletic unfolding in three explicit steps: media change → incarnational response → dialogical/participatory preaching. This triad grounds the book theologically while inviting practical experimentation. The shift reframes the preacher’s role: rather than protecting a monologue inherited from print and broadcast norms, Sigmon casts the preacher as a discerning facilitator who centers Scripture while convening congregational wisdom in interpretation and proclamation. She introduces the neologism “homilecclesiology”—a blending of homiletics and ecclesiology that refuses to separate the sermon from the community it shapes. Preaching is an “entanglement” where preacher, people, Scripture, Spirit, tradition, and context interact dynamically rather than as one-way transmission (14–15). The Holy Spirit works through multiple voices to build up the Body without dissolving the preacher’s vocation, as preachers become “co-conspirators with God” (88–89).

Later chapters translate theory into practice: designing sermons that invite response, building feedback loops, and experimenting with formats that distribute agency beyond the pulpit. Participation begins with accessible practices, including prompts, listener input, interactive polling, and social media conversations. Sigmon equips pastors with immediately applicable tools: sermon series developed through congregational input, midweek sermon clips, and lay moderator roles in hybrid services. Asynchronous channels welcome homebound, time-constrained, or younger listeners without requiring live participation. The book also addresses emerging technology like AI, insisting they require pastoral discernment rather than uncritical adoption. In the academy, this work bridges disciplines by treating technology as integral to ecclesiology.

A critique concerns cultural translation. Writing from North American Protestant settings, Sigmon inadequately addresses contexts shaped by different traditions. In many Asian contexts—including Korean, Chinese, and Taiwanese churches in North America—Confucian-

influenced patterns privilege lecture-based learning where pastoral authority is deeply respected. Open dialogue may feel uncomfortable, not only because congregants hesitate to challenge clerical authority, but because conversational formats are unfamiliar. Unlike Western contexts cultivating debate from childhood, many Asian congregants experienced lecture-based education where open discussion itself—not merely theological conversation—feels culturally uncomfortable. Introverted participants also risk marginalization if confident voices dominate—a concern Sigmon acknowledges but could explore more deeply. Dialogical formats risk message fragmentation when diverse interpretations disperse attention from Scripture’s core claims. While Sigmon offers small-scale pilots, lay facilitator training, anonymous polling, and Scripture-centered prompts, readers need more culturally attuned strategies and guidance on maintaining theological coherence. These observations suggest fruitful directions for contextual adaptation.

Overall, *Engaging the Gadfly* succeeds on its own terms. It tells plainly what the book says and for whom: pastors and homiletics educators seeking a theologically grounded, pastorally realistic path for preaching in online, hybrid, and in-person spaces. It situates the argument within wider conversations about media change and ecclesial identity, showing how an incarnational posture can animate concrete practices without surrendering the preacher’s vocation. For churches navigating post-pandemic hybrid realities, this work offers timely pastoral wisdom and theological conviction. Sigmon writes: “Jesus would not hunker down and ignore the shifts, nor should we” (83). I recommend it warmly for homiletics classrooms and clergy study groups seeking to move from reaction to reflective preaching in a networked age.

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