

Gregory Heille, Maurice J. Nutt, and Deborah L. Wilhelm, eds. *Preaching Racial Justice*. Orbis, 2023. 240 pages. \$30.

As a concise three-part edited volume, *Preaching Racial Justice* provides communication strategies for preachers to effectively engage with congregations on issues of race as an uneasy topic. Part I, entitled “The Preacher’s Journey,” integrates a wide range of practical theological themes including, expanding popular understandings of sin as more than personal transgressions, institutional racism, misogyny, and structural harms against targeted populations. Part II, entitled “Black Lives Matter,” introduces the concept of a “culture of racism” and its broader implications. Such implications have historically resulted in traumatic experiences like subjection to exclusion, over-policing, and subordination in everyday life based on ascribed characteristics. Throughout the latter years of his academic career, W.E.B. Du Bois expressed doubt in America as willing to address race on an honest level; however, the contributors of this book dare to prove him wrong. The common starting place for contributors entails recognizing the difficulty the preachers face in convincing deniers of the existence and severity of systemic racism. The contents of this book function as a call for preachers to become willing to take risks while in the pulpit by defying the confines of social pressure to evade topics that potentially make congregants uncomfortable. As a unique feature of the book, Part III (“Ancestors and Stories”) draws from sources of wisdom beyond the academy using varied genres. Chapter 13, entitled “Dismantling the Ecclesial Legacy of Colonial Attitudes” by A. Anita Vincent, deserves special attention. Such a chapter focuses on the effects of colonization on one’s thinking and the need to relearn scripture as prerequisite for preaching on themes of racial justice.

Most of the contributors come from the Roman Catholic Church with the remainder representing mainline Protestant traditions. Their writing reflects their background as theologically and ideologically progressive and socially tolerant. As such, the intended audience primarily includes like-minded clergy and seminarians. Conservative evangelical Protestants would less likely find the book appealing due to prolonged polarization in America making it improbable to find common ground in the applicability of the book’s content.

Part of the book’s strength lies in Stewart Clem’s explanation of how antiracist preaching has a strong connection to the Christian gospel. This connection extends beyond the utterance of words, requiring human solidarity while on a collective trajectory of life in Christ. (See Chapter 2: “Sin, Solidarity, and the Human Condition”.) Antiracist preaching draws from a combination of sources including scholars and the real experiences of people. The author of this chapter advises against cliché-filled speech and secular discourse, which tend to nullify the work of the preaching itself. Antiracist preaching equates racism as evil through language and convincing rhetoric. “At a more general level, the language of sin and solidarity can help people more clearly see the relationship between their lives and the problems confronting today’s world” (Clem, 30).

The book’s contributors meet the aim of providing an overview of the theological mandates and challenges that come with preaching the life, spiritual disciplines, and diligence of those who dare to proclaim racial justice beyond surface-level “race talk.” In addition to *Preaching Racial Justice*, preachers and lay speakers would benefit from building their “exegetical tool chest” by becoming diligent observers of the text using as many senses as possible, before engaging in the interpretation process. An additional suggestion includes becoming acquainted with the hegemonic hermeneutic that comes with the historical-critical method as discovered by African American biblical scholars within the last four decades. The

book's contributors discourage occasional preaching on the topic of race but embrace the idea of countering racism as part of one's regular homiletical objective.

Although *Preaching Racial Justice* reflects exemplary scholarship from academics and professionals with a keen understanding of "systemic racism" and expertise in public proclamation, the book does not negate the difficulty in challenging fixed assumptions in a preacher's "working gospel" that sees the world as just and racism as a relic from the past. When a preacher's "working gospel" denies the idea of a wounded world, then such persons become complicit with using ecclesial and pastoral authority to further support an unjust order that causes spiritual and existential harm to marginal groups (see Peter D. Hill in Chapter 5). "Ultimately, preaching to the wounded world is all about preaching hope. Racism steals hope from people" (Hill, 105). After carefully studying this book, the reader will either accept or reject its content. For those who do accept, the book can impact one's hermeneutical grid while stirring individuals from the broadness of over-spiritualizing racism by dealing with the specifics in concrete terms.

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