

Trygve David Johnson. *The Preacher as Liturgical Artist: Metaphor, Identity, and the Vicarious Humanity of Christ*. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2014. 220 pages. \$22.50.

Have you recently felt outdated in your preaching content and style at the 21st century pulpit? Have you felt the need to refresh your preaching practice in the era of image, sound, art, and creativity, not to mention the jaw-dropping dawn of iphones, tablet computers, android, internet, multi-cineplex, and GoPro? Have you been looking for fine theological resources and homiletic-communicative lessons for that changed and still changing cultural environment? Then, here is a wonderful resource from Trygve David Johnson that any considerate preacher today might want to have on their sermon preparation desk. Johnson's writing demonstrates its superbness in the theological thickness, cultural relevance, communicative tips, and homiletic application of most of those important arguments.

Johnson proposes *liturgical artist* as the preacher's fundamental metaphoric identity for a new era, which he argues synthesizes as well as moves beyond the conventional identities of Teacher and Herald. He finds the teacher identity as the Enlightenment-rationalistic product of the church based on St. Augustine's rhetorical approach to preaching, while the herald as the Barthian-revelatory approach to the Word of God and preaching ministry. Johnson apparently realizes significant drawbacks of these two traditional approaches to preaching for today's pulpit; the lack of imagination and creativity in the former and the lack of concern for the ever-changing human situation and experience in the latter. Also, for him, the absence of a communal sense of preaching and the preacher—that is, the preacher as the one who seeks truthful claims for the broken world *along with his or her fellow Christians*—is a grave problem for the multi-pluralistic society today. Thus, here comes the alternative identity of the preacher as liturgical artist as one possible solution for the current situation.

Jesus Christ himself as a model preacher, Johnson argues, is a vicarious liturgical artist found in the Bible. First and foremost, as a vicar or priest of God, Jesus not only brings the Word of God to humanity, but also offers human situations and experiences to God as a prayerful action. Also, as a liturgist, Jesus forms his message in the community, for the real sake of his people, and also among his hearers (e.g., by active mutual dialogues, esp., the act of questioning and answering). This dialogical act of Jesus well reflects the meaning of the ancient Greek word *leitourgia* for liturgy, that is, the work by the people or the community. Finally, Jesus is a homiletic artist per excellence when he creatively uses earthly raw materials for his aesthetic and prophetic utterances (e.g., seeds, birds, rocks, camel, needle, sheep, coin, wedding, vineyard, and many more).

With the above argument in hand Johnson now invites preachers into the homiletical aesthetic praxis. This will be *praxis*, not simply practice. For without a deeper theological and methodological understanding of the preacher's identity and preaching practice, what happens with his proposal will be mere oratorical entertainment at the pulpit. The very thing Johnson hopes to happen is nothing but the preacher transformed via the new homiletic identity as liturgical artist, who for the best effectiveness of preaching ministry will make the dexterous use of earthly materials emerging from the postmodern artistry-saturated culture. It sounds hard,

of course, yet will be very much worth trying for the sake of the gospel message today.

Johnson's Neo-orthodox theological orientation limits his readership, for sure. Further, his largely Word/word-oriented approach to preaching alienates his argument from a broader performative or theatrical approach to preaching. Yet still, his ideas are highly valuable in the recovery of the artistic nature of preaching and its relevance to the Word of God, the preacher, the audience, culture, and God the Trinity Itself. Indeed, this strength of the writing has a good potential to broaden his readership.

From the beginning, Johnson sets up his goal not as providing practical "dos" and "don'ts" for the artistic practice of preaching, but as proposing a critical homiletic identity of the preacher as liturgical artist. Each preacher deeply embedded with the renewed identity is to find his or her own local practices of the homiletic artistry in accordance with each different situation. At the end, I find his goal achieved satisfactorily thanks to his acute theological, biblical, liturgical, church-historical, and homiletic construction of the multivalent identity of the artistic preacher. His hard work definitely makes his writing one of the must-reads in this research area.

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