

Cleophus J. LaRue. *Rethinking Celebration: From Rhetoric to Praise in African American Preaching*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2016. 120 pages. \$20.

In *Rethinking Celebration*, Cleophus LaRue critiques the celebration homiletic, as it has developed in the works of Henry Mitchell and Frank Thomas, through a theological lens, providing a sketch of an alternative homiletic of “worshipful praise” (32). The overall result is intended to be, “a clarion call for African American preachers to think more deeply about the aims and ends of their preaching—namely to stop putting so much emphasis on celebratory endings to sermons and focus more on the substantive content *in* our sermons” (ix).

Chapters 1, 2, and 3 of *Rethinking Celebration* are respectively focused on locating, reviewing, and critiquing the celebration homiletic. LaRue’s primary critique is that in theory and practice the celebration homiletic has not been theologically grounded in doxology. In light of this, he suggests that the function of the celebration homiletic has been that of “evocative rhetoric,” which has emphasized the goal of the emotional engagement of the congregation at the expense of the means whereby that emotion should ideally be produced (19).

Building upon this critique, in Chapter 4 LaRue engages sources from a variety of fields including philosophy and sociology to argue that the celebration homiletic is more accurately understood as a joyful cultural festivity than as a religious celebration encompassing “worshipful praise” (32). He argues that in Mitchell and Thomas’s homiletic, the most important dimension of celebration has been its function as a pedagogical tool. Instead, LaRue argues that celebration should be doxology through which the Holy Spirit empowers the listeners to remember the sermon and to take action based upon it. Chapter 5 focuses on nuancing celebration as “worshipful praise” so as to diversify the understanding of the ways that celebration could be manifested at the closing of a sermon.

LaRue engages sources from theology, philosophy, liturgical and sacramental studies, sociology, and ritual theory. His work in Chapter 4 in analyzing concepts of “festival” and “celebration” and interpreting them within the black homiletical context has the potential to be valuable material for those engaging similar concepts in a field other than homiletics. Chapter 5 engages numerous voices from mainstream liturgical and sacramental studies, and LaRue’s doxological framing of preaching provides numerous potential intersections with liturgical study.

While this book primarily speaks to challenges that exist in black preaching and black homiletical theory, it is a significant contribution to an ongoing discourse between leading black homiletical scholars. As such, it is an essential read both for those whose work or practice engages black preaching in any way and for those who desire to be familiar with the current state of homiletical discourse. Furthermore, in this work LaRue casts a doxological vision of preaching that has value for all preachers regardless of ethnicity. Even for those who do not practice or teach a celebrative homiletic, this work has the potential to expand understandings of the potential of preaching to engage the people of God in worshipful praise.

This is both a brief book and written in an accessible manner, which render it possible to quickly and efficiently read. While the total page count is 120 pages, without the Appendix and Bibliography, the work comes in at 72 pages.

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