

Joni S. Sancken. *Stumbling Over the Cross: Preaching the Cross and Resurrection Today*. Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2016. 234 pages. \$28.

In *Stumbling Over the Cross*, Joni S. Sancken, an assistant professor of homiletics at United Theological Seminary in Dayton, OH, offers her fascinating theological perspective on how to preach the cross and resurrection of Jesus as the core belief of Christianity. Along the way she engages with the complexities of the 21st century congregational situation, such as the growing pluralistic challenge and ever-present reality of existential suffering. The author contends that our “cross-less” pulpits (which bypasses non-negotiable truth) must proclaim God’s redemptive action in the fullness of Christ with unalienable theological confidence, even in the midst of the ontological tension between God’s hope grounded in scripture and the persistent shadow of the cross.

The author begins by unfolding the reasons why a preacher struggles to address Christ’s crucifixion at Calvary with the congregational ‘Good Friday’—akin to an existential brokenness, and why the church loses its confident voice that the gospel of the agony of the cross and the promise of resurrection has the potential to (eschatologically) nullify the powers and principalities and to inaugurate God’s restorative grace amid our brokenness. Chapter two provides diverse insights of Christological perspectives inherent in preaching on the cross and resurrection; for instance, God’s solidarity with humanity in Jesus, God’s unlimited grace and forgiveness, God’s in-breaking reign, and God’s liberation and healing powers as well. Following the author’s survey of Christology for preaching, in Chapter three, she encourages the preacher not only to strengthen Christian-cruciform identity but also to cultivate interfaith sensitivity and awareness of the fellow Abrahamic traditions (Judaism and Islam) by unveiling signs and hallmarks of religious pluralism. Put differently, the author emboldens the preacher to engage respectfully with other religions since, from her viewpoint, such dialogue imparts opportunities to preclude Christianity’s past misunderstandings of other religions, such as anti-Semitism and the Holocaust, to practice a cruciform-sense of openness and to deepen the theological integrity of Christianity’s core beliefs.

In Chapter four, the author argues that preaching on the cross and resurrection that highlights Jesus’ peculiarity and its distinctive narrative plays an indispensable role in forming counter-cultural discipleship. Said another way, preaching the cross can bring about a transformative reorientation of the congregation: namely, they liberate the church from a consumer-driven culture and its unfaithful practices *toward* participation in “God’s work of eradicating the powers and principalities from every corner of our world” (123). This aim is also achieved by witnessing to the God-driven eschatological reality in the world. In Chapter five, this publication concludes with the author’s practical wisdom for how to proclaim the crucified and risen Jesus Christ as Christianity’s cornerstone by suggesting a variety of concrete methods and occasions.

This volume holds value for preaching teachers and preachers who need Christological grounds and theological depth for preaching that is relevant to the congregation’s existential reality between the shadows of darkness and God’s in-breaking rule in terms of an already-not-yet eschatology. Along with that, three strengths of this volume might also be the author’s brilliant insight on 1) how to present a balanced and fair interreligious dialogue by keeping theological integrity, honesty, and radical hospitality; 2) a cross and resurrection-focused homiletic through the practice of interfaith dialogue; and 3) the author’s homiletical proposal for the three key rhetorical virtues of vulnerability, compassion, and bearing witness for preaching

toward even people of other religions. Her astonishing homiletical approach, I think, deserves attention and warrants further discussion, especially regarding the current issue of Christian preaching in times of religious pluralism. This volume, finally, will help not only preachers but also all lay Christians who stumble over the cross and the resurrection of Christ in congregational ministry.

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