

Kenyatta R. Gilbert, *Exodus Preaching: Crafting Sermons about Justice and Hope*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2018. 135 pages. \$14.79.

This is a remarkable book. It aims to equip prophetic preachers in profound and practical ways with deep theological reflection and concrete practical strategies. Kenyatta Gilbert, professor of homiletics at Howard Divinity School, skillfully integrates key aspects of prophetic preaching within African American preaching traditions, and presents, in the process, a unified vision of its humanizing, contextual-theological task in what he calls the four prophetic characteristics of unmasking, hope, naming, and beauty. Gilbert succeeds in helping prophetic preachers embrace the prophetic task in a way that is theologically faithful and ethically engaged.

The introduction does more than name the book's purview; it serves as a summons to the many voices and many places where Exodus preaching is happening, and precisely as a practice that is "rooted in and emanating from God." This summons is an indication of the book's breadth in Exodus preaching practice; sermons and sermon excerpts from many established and up-and-coming preachers are woven into the work along with a clear theological claim about God's central role. As the book begins to unfold its argument, the very sequencing of chapters helps to serve the aforementioned integrating purpose. Chapter 1 both defines Exodus preaching and sets out the four-fold criteria by which it can be assessed in practice: unmasking evil, remaining hopeful amidst communal despair, connecting the sermon to just acts through naming reality, and maintaining an impulse for beauty in language. These criteria become important both for developing and reflecting on strategies, as well as analyzing actual sermons. In this sense chapter 1 is actually programmatic. Chapters 2-5 then follow by focusing on each of the criteria: chapter 2 deals with unmasking evil, chapter 3 with communal despair, chapter 4 with naming reality, and chapter 5 with inventive speech. Along the way, each chapter articulates concrete strategies, proposes potential roadblocks or issues of concern (shaded and identified as "thorns and thistles"), and offers exercises at the end for further reflection and action. Chapter 6 concludes by then carrying Gilbert's Exodus vision forward into his thinking about preaching Jesus Christ, who is both savior and teacher. Theologically, it is important to note that Jesus is integrally related with Exodus preaching, which Gilbert links explicitly to the important narrative in Luke 4. We cannot preach such justice and hope without Jesus—and Gilbert sets out a four-fold process, built on his earlier writing in *The Journey and Promise of African American Preaching*, and shows how it plays out comprehensively in an analysis of one of his own compelling sermons.

Naturally, I found myself disagreeing at a couple of points on matters of theology and strategy. That is only to be expected. At the same time, I found myself marveling all the more at Gilbert's ability to hold homiletical practice and theology together in this ground-breaking book. In other words, what is most compelling and most original about Gilbert's book on Exodus preaching is not just the subject matter, but the careful and engaged homiletical integration all the way through. There is the strangeness and otherness of God and God's purposes, yes! There is furthermore the prophetic commitment to placing ethical engagement at the heart of the task of such preaching, of course! At the same time, there is a willingness to probe and think out strategies, craft, and the very art and beauty of preaching at the service of the same. Gilbert's book is no doubt rich for the practitioner. The sermon examples from Walton, Warnock, Wesley are powerful. This book is, perhaps, even richer for the classroom. Teachers and students will find Gilbert's book a uniquely suitable text, especially in these times of rampant and blatant

injustice, to work together in hearing what Exodus preaching might sound like today. In its theology, crafting, and art they will likewise discern far more than just another preaching text: they will hear a summons to go and do likewise.

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