

throughout the book.

Of course, a book like this is fraught with dangers: you can leave important figures out, as Wilson himself readily admits (p.155). Perhaps more dangerously, you can caricature nuanced positions in the necessarily brief evaluations on offer. In my own case, Wilson gives a very brief review of one of my works, *Preaching Job*, and worries that my focus on Job's pain as an indicator of ways his story might be preached may exclude preaching "in relationship to its (the book's) ending" (p.44). Does he mean by the "ending" Job 42:7-17, or does he mean the speeches of YHWH? In either case, I spent a good part of my discussion urging preachers precisely to take full account of the ending before they begin an approach to preaching Job. Thus, in my small case, Wilson is less than illuminating about what I was trying to do. In a book summarizing and evaluating scores of authors and their work, how many of them would like a chance to engage Wilson concerning his evaluations of them?

Nevertheless, this book is nothing less than gift to all of us who teach homiletics. I, for one, plan to use it in my classes. It provides the clearest and most comprehensive panoramic view of our field to date, and all of us ought to be very grateful for the vast learning and labor that went into its production.

—John C Holbert

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Chris Altmock. *Preaching to Pluralists: How to Proclaim Christ in a Postmodern Age*. St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2004.

Several recent books have struggled with what it means to preach week in and week out to more recent generations, to an increasingly pluralistic and multicultural audience, and to so-called postmoderns. Chris Altmock, preaching minister at Highland Street Church of Christ in Memphis, Tennessee, is specifically concerned with how preachers can preach an evangelistic message, that, as he puts it, will help to "harvest" postmodern people who are "lost."

According to Altmock, today's evangelistic preachers miss their "target" because they do not have "an adequate understanding of the non-Christians we long to reach through our preaching." Making use of the findings of the Barna Research Group and his own experience as a preacher Altmock identifies seven "faces" of postmoderns: 1) they are *uninformed* about the basics of Christianity, 2) they are *interested in spiritual matters*, 3) they are *anti-institutional* (but pro-Jesus), 4) they are *pluralistic*, that is, "they do not believe in the existence of one absolute truth that applies to all people at all times" (and this, according to Altmock is the most dangerous feature of postmoderns), 5) they are *pragmatic* or interested in "life before death," 6) they are *relational*, desiring "communities of people who support and encourage one another," and 7) they are *experiential*, they "trust what can be experienced over what is simply reasonable or logical."

Within each of these categories, Altmock identifies a handful of useful homiletical responses. Because postmoderns are *uninformed*, preachers must 1) "use vocabulary, illustrations and images which do not assume prior knowledge of the biblical story," and 2) "preach messages designed to tutor them in the basics of the gospel and the biblical story." Because postmoderns are *interested in spirituality*, preachers should preach: 1) "in ways designed to facilitate an encounter between the lost postmodern and the saving God" and 2) in ways "designed to equip lost listeners to daily experience the presence of God." Because postmoderns are *anti-institutional*, preachers should 1) preach "messages designed to reveal the benefits of belonging to a faith community" and 2) "partner with efforts that will allow them to experience those benefits first hand." In order to address their listener's *pluralism*, preachers should first of all accentuate the broadly inclusive nature of the gospel, and accentuate at least limited forms of tolerance (legal and social),

while denying intellectual tolerance (the idea that all religions are on equal footing). Next the preacher should explore the uniqueness of the gospel and Jesus "and thus the basis for their exclusivity." Then, the preacher should spend time highlighting the inaccuracies and inadequacies of pluralism. In order to address their listeners' *pragmatism*, preachers must 1) "show how the gospel 'works' in dealing with practical issues of daily life," and 2) "reveal how the gospel brings a better life before death and not just after death." In order to address the *relational* qualities of postmoderns preachers must 1) preach "messages which reveal the community which is available in church," and 2) preach "messages which reveal the help the gospel brings to practical matters in relationships." This should be done while partnering with "efforts to help the listeners connect in meaningful relationships with Christians." Finally, evangelistic preaching must become *experiential* 1) "by leading the listener to experience the gospel through inductive and narrative preaching," 2) "through testimonies," 3) "through worship which engages multiple senses," and 4) by "enabling them to observe the gospel lived in community outside the worship service."

This book will speak loudest to evangelicals who feel comfortable with the kind of evangelism and missional theology that is best represented by Paul Hiebert, Charles Kraft, and Donald McGavran, for whom evangelism is largely a matter of finding dynamic analogies through which one can translate the timeless language and message of scripture into an alien and lost culture. This book could well be titled: *Preaching a Premodern Message in a Postmodern Age*. The gospel message receives little update if any, and does not require the culture in order to be the gospel. Culture is presented as largely a problem that must be solved or overcome, rather than an opportunity or a framework in which new aspects of the gospel might be uncovered or understood, such as occurred during the civil rights and women's rights movements. In Altrock's own words, "He (God) relies upon us to take his unchanging message of the Cross and preach it in a contextualized way that fits our culture and audience." (46)

Altrock's treatment of pluralism is less than adequate. To begin with, Altrock assumes that there is only one biblical worldview, centered in legal-forensic theology and a satisfaction-substitutionary view of the atonement. The plurality of models for salvation in the Bible and the deep pluralism within the Church's long history about the meaning of the gospel and the nature of redemption are not allowed in Altrock's view. When he treats postmodern pluralism, Altrock seems to have confused pluralism with relativism and is not at all conversant with pluralism, especially religious and ethical pluralism, as it is represented in more recent literature (cf. M. Heim, J. Hick, D. Eck, W. Farley). Pluralism becomes a straw man at the end of his chapter "Preaching Evangelistically to Pluralists." None of his arguments about the inadequacies of pluralism would hold muster with a better university educated listener, or a true postmodern. By the end of this chapter, it becomes very clear that a true postmodern listener, especially the postmodern who has done his or her intellectual work, or who has participated in meaningful interfaith dialogue, could never be the "target" for Altrock's form of preaching. It is most likely that Altrock's form of preaching will appeal to those who, deep down, for a variety of personal, social, or political reasons, desire the kind of absolute authority and truth that he assigns to the preached messages he prefers. It could be argued that a true postmodern does not need this kind of truth, and, indeed, would believe that it is precisely this kind of authority that Christ sought to dismantle, as many have argued (G. Vattimo, W. Farley, M. Suchocki, J. Caputo).

The book is very well organized, sensibly and clearly written, and represents both the wealth of personal experience and a good deal of sociological research on the part of the author. In the last analysis, although this is a sharp little book for those who want a glimpse into some of the current evangelical research on recent generations of non-believ-

ers, the book remains decidedly premodern in its theology and in its homiletical methods.  
—John S. McClure

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Fleming Rutledge, *The Seven Last Words from the Cross*, William B. Eerdmans 2005.

It has long been customary in many churches to reflect on the seven last words that Jesus spoke from the cross on Good Friday. In this tradition, Rutledge's book presents seven meditations that she has preached at special three-hour services on Good Friday at two Episcopal churches. This collection of meditations follows the traditional order of the seven last words of Jesus: 1) "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:32-34), 2), "Verily, I say unto thee, today thou shalt be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:32-33, 39-43), 3) "Woman, behold thy son! . . . Behold thy mother" (John 19:25-27), 4) "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Mark 15:33-39), 5) "I thirst" (John 19:28-29), 6) "It is finished" (John 19:29-30), and 7) "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit" (Luke 23:44-46).

Each word from the cross is interpreted in coherence with the traditional understanding of atonement, which explains how the suffering and death of Jesus Christ can be redemptive for all humanity. All seven sermons are concerned with human sinfulness and God's grace granted to sinners through the vicarious sacrifice of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins. The historical information about the shame and cruelty of the execution on the cross in the first-century Greco-Roman world, frequent quotations from other biblical texts—particularly, the Psalms, the Pauline letters, and other Gospel narratives—and the link to contemporary issues in American society including the Iraq war, child abuse, racial discrimination, etc. lead readers to reflect on the deeper meaning of the traditional understanding of Christian soteriology.

Considering that the term "sin" is not favored by contemporary Christians and that contemporary preachers are reluctant to relate it to their listeners who are, so called, "good citizens," Rutledge's seven sermons focusing on sin and forgiveness are a challenging message for contemporary Christians. Through the seven meditations, the author guides the reader to reflect at a deeper level on the mirror of human sinfulness and to recognize that "the evil that lodges in the human heart is greater than we know."<sup>11</sup> Only when we seriously recognize our sinfulness can the seven redemptive words of Jesus on the cross be fulfilled within us.

Rutledge's sermons also make a valuable contribution to issues of style with regard to preaching. By incorporating an appropriate hymn text and singing it at the end of each sermon, Rutledge designs the moment of preaching as a time for both personal and congregational meditation in a liturgical context. This meditative style creates space for the preacher to nurture the spirituality of the congregation through the proclaimed words.

My critical concern with these seven sermons is that they maintain the traditional concept of atonement without critique. Although we should not abandon traditional language and theories of atonement, I believe that one of the preacher's roles is to transform them into a new theological paradigm by reflecting a changing context rather than maintaining the status quo. Some women theologians and preachers claim that the traditional theories of atonement or the concepts of suffering servanthood are no longer a viable paradigm for the Christian vocation, for they are insufficient when trying to meaningfully address the oppressed, the powerless, and the victimized.<sup>1</sup> To meet the demands of a new theological paradigm for interpreting the seven last words of Jesus, the preacher may need to utilize

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<sup>1</sup>See L. Susan Bond, *Trouble with Jesus Woman, Christology, and Preaching*, (St Louis Chalice Press, 1999), pp. 31; Rita Nakashima Brock, *Journeys by Heart A Christology of Erotic Power*, (NewYork: Crossroad, 1995), 55