

CRITICAL BOOK REVIEWS

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In Other Words: Incarnational Translation for Preaching, by Charles Cosgrove and W. Dow Edgerton. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007. Pp. xii + 232. ISBN 978-0-8028-4037-0. Paper. US\$16.00.

As indicated in the short foreword by Don Wardlaw, this book aims to move beyond traditional homiletical hermeneutics in that it is not only seeking to explain the biblical text but also to ascribe meaning to it. This search for meaning is really a search for relevance. Wardlaw highlights a main tenor of the book by stating that for preachers there is danger of "either worrying a passage into irrelevance or reaching for modernity at the expense of the sense of the passage" (p. ix). The objective of the book is to find the middle road of making a text relevant without destroying its sense. In the brief preface following the foreword, the authors expand on the purpose of the book by saying that it is not about preaching but rather "a way of engaging the biblical text for preaching" (p. xi). Consequently they define their own *Sitz im Leben* as being from a Western male perspective.

Chapter one gives an overview of the current field of homiletics as a background to the proposed way of engaging the biblical text in which the complexity of approaches and methods that are currently used in interpretation and preaching are briefly surveyed. The book is based on the premise that all preaching is a type of interpretation and that interpretation and preaching are interdisciplinary by nature. Historical shifts in homiletics are ascribed to the changing emphasis and roles given to biblical interpretation, theology, and preaching in the last two millennia. The Reformation was basically a questioning of the emphasis between these three elements. The Reformers stated that "theology and philosophy were determining the meaning of the Bible, rather than the other way around" (p. 3). Cosgrove and Edgerton then go on to trace the Enlightenment and the rise of historical-critical exegesis as well as other tendencies in the world of homiletics. They

end their historical overview with a detailed discussion of the tendencies in exegesis and preaching resulting from the shift from modernity to post-modernity. They suggest that exegesis and preaching is moving away from reasoned argument to constructive imagination and from an understanding of meaning as grasping a proposition to experience as a means of making meaning. In other words, the preaching that this book exposes is not so much an interpretation of a text to another text (such as a sermon) but rather the biblical text is to be viewed as an interpretation of life. Preaching moves from instruction or cognition to a preaching that addresses the imagination. Some of the features of this type of preaching include a movement away from commenting on what the text says to preaching that seeks to do what the text does. This preaching is not viewed as an independent rhetorical genre but rather is shaped by the forms of the biblical texts. It becomes part of the liturgy by moving away from the dynamics of writing and reading to preaching that is governed by the dynamics of speaking and hearing.

After underlining the importance of the mode of communicating the message of the Bible, chapter two introduces the concept of *incarnational translation*. Cosgrove and Edgerton point out that forms of preaching which involve reciting and commenting on the biblical text are not a new invention but can be traced back to Jewish practice. Their proposed model of incarnational preaching draws on these two features. "Like recital, it is a performance of Scripture in translation, a contemporizing translation. This contemporizing aspect aligns incarnational translation with the purpose of homiletical commentary, the effort to connect the ancient text with a contemporary time and place" (p. 37). Incarnational preaching also draws on the science of translation theory, particularly in the areas of genre and medium. The authors point out that all translations are/were interpretations. The act of bringing the ancient languages into modern languages is a much more involved process than simply translating word for word. Culture, history, and worldviews are interwoven with language and all of this must be made accessible to the reader in order for the translation to be understood. The trend to more translations has been accelerated by the widespread use of the internet and is no longer the exclusive domain of a few professionals. The authors see incarnational translation as the logical continuation of the translation process. They comment that "the more one shapes the translation to speak to one's own time and place, the further one is moving in the direction of incarnational translation" (p. 38). Incarnational translation continues the traditions of translation by "imagining what the text might have looked like if it had been produced in our own culture, time and place" (p. 40). The new slant that this perspective promises is that it does not only look at contemporizing the biblical text but also attempts to do so in the form or genre of the original biblical text.

The next three chapters deal with incarnational translation in a variety of biblical genres. For Cosgrove and Edgerton the key to incarnational translation is a knowledge and identification of biblical genres. At the beginning of chapter three which deals with the Psalms, Hymns, and Oracles, the authors explain that genre carries "theological, hermeneutical, and homiletical significance" (p. 63). This general genre of poetic speech seems to work well for incarnational translation. Extensive examples from the Psalms are used covering the forms of complaint, thanksgiving, praise, wisdom, and lament psalms, as well as New Testament hymns. In an intriguing interlude on pp. 90–91, the musical aspect of psalms and other biblical songs is briefly introduced leading to some observations on music as a medium of Scripture. The rest of the chapter deals with prophetic oracles. The genre is introduced and briefly explained together with its chief markers. Of particular importance are the four implied standpoints: "Those of God, prophet, insiders, and outsiders" (p. 96) in the interpretation of this genre. Judgment oracles together with the example of the "woes" of Matthew 23 are then treated in some detail.

Perhaps most important of all the genres is narration, particularly considering the concept of a meta-narrative. Chapter four deals with narrative or story. The authors provide a concise introduction to narrative theory, introducing the concepts (and roles) of narrator, story, audience, setting, characterization, and plot. They then set about comparing the story of creation and the story of Gideon. This is followed by the modernizing of the healing at the pool story in which similarities and differences between modern and ancient novelistic styles are explored. This illustrative survey of incarnational translation of narrative concludes with an examination of parables using several of the most well-known parables as examples.

Chapter five deals with the arguably more difficult genres of law and wisdom literature in the Bible. It begins with an outline of the evolution of the law and wisdom genre presuming that they were originally "forms of familial and tribal ethos" (p. 151) meant to be practical instruction and "even more importantly, to be embodied" (p. 152). Laws are divided into different kinds: "They can be absolute or, in varying degrees, presumptive or relative" (p. 155). Figuring out what a particular law is can be tricky as the genre does not always indicate what kind the law is meant to be and so "incarnational translations of biblical law require prior theological judgments about the scope of the law in question" (p. 156). From pp. 156–63 working examples are then given for an incarnational translation of some of the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount. The rest of the chapter (pp. 164–84) explores wisdom literature and finds its beginning and end in experience (p. 164). Sections on Ecclesiastes and Job follow, further demonstrating the notion of incarnational translations.

In most volumes a theoretical framework and justification is given in the first chapter. This book takes a more inductive approach, relegating the theoretical discussion to the last chapter. The authors felt that more informed readers would then be better able to assimilate the theoretical part of the work. The chapter begins with a discussion of the relationships between incarnational translation and other hermeneutical models. This is followed by a question answer section in which the authors address hermeneutical questions that readers may raise in connection with the incarnational translation. The authors are largely dependant on the work of Paul Ricoeur for their theoretical framework. The final chapter ends somewhat abruptly, followed by a selected bibliography conveniently divided into biblical genres, hermeneutics and homiletics and translation theory. A brief scripture index is also included.

Cosgrove and Edgerton must be commended for encouraging preachers to "walk the talk" or to be what they preach. This volume makes the point that historically as well as in modern or postmodern environments the search for the meaning of the biblical text makes the most sense not as a theory but as a way of life. From a linguistic point of view this fulfills a basic need of communication, namely, relevance. It is particularly refreshing to see the integration of related theoretical fields. However, this book does not entirely answer the question of what we are to be or what we are to preach or better yet how we are to interact with the biblical text in order to find out what we should be and what we should preach. While the authors acknowledge that our theological traditions play an important role in incarnational translation there is no further exploration of exactly what that role is. Incarnational translation does not seem to offer any critical tool for uncovering and evaluating the presuppositions with which we approach the biblical text. Although we are encouraged to listen to the text and to other interpretations by those of other traditions, the methodology seems to underline the philosophy that there is no real or absolute meaning in the biblical text but that many interpretations are probable and acceptable (p. 215). Arguably the critical issue with incarnational translation is the heavy dependence on Ricoeur's work in the formation of methodology. Although Ricoeur has made valuable contributions to the distinctions between written text and speech as well as the independence of text from authorial intention, taken to its extreme his methodology cuts the author off from the audience and leaves the audience completely free to listen to the echoes of itself in the text. Incarnational translation does try to anchor the process of translation in some sort of context by emphasizing the role of the genres as being a type of authors' intention which can be heard and worked with. This genre determined context for interpretation seems to work well for certain biblical genres, such as the poetic forms and parables. However, it works less well in the pro-

phetic/apocalyptic genre as can be seen in the very brief three page (pp. 110–12) discussion of this relatively large biblical genre. Even what would seem to be the very compatible genre of narration proves challenging and perplexing by the vast array of equally valid possible interpretations, as demonstrated in the authors' discussion of (what they term) the "Priestly Creation Story" (pp. 117–24). In this case "scientific and technological ways of thinking" (p. 122) seem to be categorizing the text as myth in order to open the text to symbolic or metaphoric interpretation. When the authors ask: "Do we hear them the same way they were heard in ancient Israel and the early Church?" (p. 135), the question seems to be more of a question of the impact on the audience rather than a question of content and meaning. The authors strive to recreate the sense and form of a passage but this does not seem to have much to do with its original meaning. Interaction with more modern theories of linguistics such as Wilson and Sperber's *Relevance Theory* and its impact on translation theory in Gutt's work would have been useful in the formulation of a methodology for incarnational translation. A more balanced methodological framework would go a long way toward making user-friendly incarnational translation also authoritative. As we move away from the older hermeneutical methods we will need a well-thought out faith-based twenty-first century hermeneutic in order to avoid the chaotic, spiritually dark days of the judges in which "everyone did as he saw fit" (Jdg 21:25).

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The Colossian Hymn in Context: An Exegesis in Light of Jewish and Greco-Roman Hymnic and Epistolary Conventions, by Matthew E. Gordley. WUNT [2. Reihe] 228. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007. Pp. ix + 295. ISBN 978-3-16-149255-6. Paper. €59.00.

There is a growing interest in the study of Col 1:15–20, evidenced by the extensive literature reviewed in this volume (pp. 3–26). The scale of investigation that Gordley undertakes in this volume has never been attempted before. This book is a revised version of his doctoral dissertation done at the University of Notre Dame under the supervision of David Aune (with James VanderKam, Gregory Sterling, and Jerome Neyrey as committee members). The author combines comparative, form-critical, and rhetorical analytical methods in this study (p. 26) and divides the volume into five chapters. The main thrust of this monograph is an investigation of the cultural, religious, literary, and epistolary contexts of the hymn of Col 1:15–20. It therefore takes into account the Greco-Roman and Jewish backgrounds