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*Ajibade, Ezekiel A. Expository Preaching in Africa: Engaging Orality for Effective Proclamation. Plateau State Nigeria: HippoBooks, 2021. 249 pages. ISBN: 978-1-83973-499-1.*

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*Expository Preaching in Africa* is a revision of Dr Ajibade's doctoral thesis, first published through NBTS and eventually submitted in the present form to Langham 'for a fresh publishing' to reach a wider audience (xi). According to the author, expository preaching is not sufficiently entrenched in the church in Africa (2). Ajibade desires to contextualize 'expository preaching through the effective use of orality' (2). The common literary devices of orality in the African context (e.g., stories, proverbs, idioms, drama, poetry, dance, myths, fables, folklore, etc.) become the means for contextualizing historical, grammatical text-based expository preaching. The writer states his purpose as follows: 'The book's position is that understand [sic] and utilizing oral elements from African tradition and culture will enrich expository preaching by making it more meaningful, generating more interest, and impacting more extensively those who listen' (4). The author recognizes his project's dilemma, precisely the problem between expository preaching, based upon a literary text, and the orality of African culture with its absence of texts. Does the author succeed in bridging the gap between the two?

In chapter 1, 'Homiletic Theories and the Concept of Expository Preaching', the author employs Haddon Robinson's support to argue that expository preaching is more of a philosophical approach to the Scripture than a particular approach or method (8). Ajibade holds that the 'text-driven sermons' which arise from the motto 'Textus Rex – "the text is king"' should be the driving philosophy of preaching (13). His working definition of expository preaching is as follows: 'the incarnational communication of the text of God's word considering its historical, grammatical, and literary intention in a form that is faithful to the text and meaningful to the hearers in their sociocultural context, with the ultimate aim of enhancing total transformation into Christ-likeness' (20).

Chapter 2 discusses the form and content of expository preaching. The author recommends that the exclusive content is the Bible. However, the content of expository preaching should be separated from the commonly recommended form that tends to be 'propositional, linear, or didactic' (25). The form of the biblical text should not obligate a particular form of preaching (28). The chapter then explores the deductive and inductive methods of preaching, including the merits and demerits of each, and proposes a bridge

between the two methods. Ajibade concludes that ‘culture should determine the method’ of preaching (46).

In chapter 3, the author explores the history of preaching in Africa. While the story of preaching in Africa is not well represented in the histories of Christian preaching, Ajibade discusses the various eras of the history of preaching in Africa. He concludes with a summary of Aylward Shorter’s work, indicating that the contemporary period of preaching in Africa is characterized by typological hermeneutical methodology, the employment of oral devices, references to current events, monologic preaching, and choric story forms (67-69).

Ajibade examines orality as a phenomenon in communication in chapter 4. He defines orality and employs Walter Ong’s classifications of orality within the African context. *Primary orality* refers to a culture untouched by written literature; *residual orality* describes people who do not ‘derive pleasure from reading’, and *secondary orality* indicates people who replace written materials with various digital devices and thus exhibit traits of oral learners (72). The chapter identifies several characteristics of oral contexts and identifies Africans as principally oral learners in one of the three categories (75ff.). Ajibade argues that orality is a ‘substantive and legitimate means of communicating the gospel’ (93). He underscores that parts of the Bible were written to or read for oral learners. (According to the author, literacy and orality should be understood as complementary.) To further support his argument, he asserts that the mission of the church has effectively reached oral cultures with the gospel through oral means of communicating the gospel. The chapter further introduces readers to hermeneutical tools enabling oral learners to interpret the Scripture (102f.). The writer then broaches the topic of the homiletical dimension of orality as a means of communicating the gospel. There are, according to Ajibade, six implications for expository preaching in Africa: 1) ‘...African orality is not the same as attempts to communicate with a postmodern world’ (116); 2) ‘African orality is not an escape from authority’, but mediation of authority through the communication language and experience of the people (117); 3) expository preaching entails proper audience exegeses (118); 4) ‘...narrative preaching remains the greatest option for African preaching’ (119); 5) there is the need for ‘faithfulness to the genres and subgenres of the Bible’ (121); 6) ‘there are no obstacles to the use of stories because narrative sermons incorporate them’ (123).

Chapter 5 discusses using African orality to contextualize expository preaching. In this chapter, the author distinguishes between the substantive and supporting roles of African oral elements and determines that orality should generally play a supporting role in expository preaching in Africa (133). The writer provides and helpfully discusses oral elements in this chapter, including songs, drama, poetry, proverbs, folklore, and stories.

‘Antecedents from Korean, African-American, and Ghanaian Experience’ is the title of chapter 6. The Korean context provides an example of contextualization of preaching. African-American and Ghanaian preaching provide examples of preaching in oral contexts.

In chapter 7, the author provides two examples of expository sermons for the African context. The first, he labels a ‘Village Oral Expository Sermon’, in which he retells the biblical story and draws out lessons, principles, and applications in the conclusion of the sermon (171). It avoids ‘the linear-logical method’ of expository sermons preached in other contexts. The second example is the ‘African Oral Expository Sermon’ (178), patterned after the segmented narrative sermon; it employs an episodic narrative form, weaving biblical backgrounds,

explanations, illustrations, and applications into the narrative. Both sermons provide examples of the application of the type of sermons the author wants his readers to emulate.

After lauding the need and importance of contextualization, the writer warns about the 'Dangers of Contextualization', the title of a concise chapter 8. On the one hand, there is the danger of obscurantism, which holds certain trappings of a given culture as sacrosanct. The other threat is syncretism: mixing the Christian faith with other things to the point that the gospel is compromised. In addressing the two dangers, the writer indicates that his thinking navigates between the two dangers in this memorable quote: 'Orality is the medium, and biblical proclamation is the message' (191).

The conclusion provides a solid summary of Ajibade's work. He distinguishes between content and form. The content of expository sermons in Africa must be biblical; the form can be adapted according to the context. Orality, the dominant African worldview, should become the tool for African expository preaching. The author concludes his work by commending his thesis to both educational institutions and preachers. The appendices include an African homiletical drama, some assessments used in evaluating presentations (two of them sermon evaluations as indicated in chapter 7), a sample of Yoruba poetry, a new Ghanaian sermon, a bibliography, and endnotes. Discussion questions at the end of each chapter enhance the book's usability.

Ajibade presents a compelling argument for employing orality to communicate the biblical message. However, the present reviewer has a few misgivings. The writer has made abundantly clear that the wholesale adoption of western expository preaching forms is not commendable for expository preaching and oral learners in Africa. He wants to avoid the linear-logical method touted by western homileticians. Instead, he proposes an adaptation of the new homiletic and particularly the narrative sermon for African contexts. However, the author fails to show how adapting the new homiletic that he proposes avoids imbibing the new hermeneutic with its rejection of biblical authority.

Ajibade highly recommends the narrative sermon to his readers with no alternative examples. He presents only two narrative sermons, both from narrative passages of Scripture. *Expository Preaching in Africa* overemphasizes the genre of narratives in Scripture and the role of the narrative sermon in preaching. In the reviewer's opinion, it would be better to commend the 'one-point sermon'; it becomes an expository sermon when the 'one-point' exposes the text. Furthermore, it allows for the narrative sermon without committing exclusively to it; other alternate forms could be proposed to avoid the linear-logical method touted by Western homileticians.

Regarding the two narrative sermons, it would have been more instructive for the author to develop an African expository sermon from a non-narrative passage for the readers to grasp how to develop sermons from such passages. The book does not provide adequate guidance on the steps toward an expository sermon. Perhaps the writer would retort that expository preaching is a philosophy rather than a procedure or form, and no guidance is needed. However, preachers must inculcate this philosophy, and the book presupposes that the readers have already imbibed this philosophy. Ajibade's work, originally his doctoral thesis, should be adapted if it is to serve effectively as a textbook on expository preaching in Africa; for example, an extra chapter is required to engrain the importance of biblical preaching into the readers' minds. More guidance is needed for students to apply the ideas to preach expository sermons in the African context.

Readers are not given clear directions on what constitutes an expository sermon and how to assess whether or not the preacher achieves the goal of an expository sermon. While the author provides some good examples of the content of orality and the end product of the two oral sermons, he offers little guidance on developing the form of sermons that communicates effectively to oral learners. More material from the literature on teaching oral learners would benefit preachers wanting to preach biblically.

While Ajibade mentions Eugene Lowry's work, he does not use the homiletical plot as a model for preaching narrative sermons. The present reviewer is convinced that the stages of the homiletical plot apply not just to Western sitcoms, as Lowry indicates, but also to African stories. Additional material on the subject would enhance the concerns expressed above.

While the book purports to be pan-African, it concentrates on preaching in west Africa with examples from Ghana and Nigeria, omitting important contributions from various parts of Africa. Other writers address preaching in Africa and should be included to ensure a comprehensive literature review.

Despite some of the concerns expressed above, the book advocates forcefully for biblical preaching and challenges preachers in the African continent to meld orality as the medium and biblical preaching as the message. The book is a welcome addition to the literature on expository preaching and is a good read for African preachers wanting to preach biblically.