

***He is Not Silent: Preaching in a Postmodern World.* By Al Mohler. Chicago: Moody, 2008.**

Review by Steven W. Smith

One would expect that a seminary president, saddled with wrangling theological and academic administration, could hardly be prolific outside of his discipline. Al Mohler assuages this fear with his insightful and pastoral examination of preaching in *He is not Silent*.

Mohler's initial critique of the state of preaching is poignant, not biting. When pressing the need to preach Scripture in light of its overarching themes, he offers that "Taken out of its context, and without clear attention to biblical theology, preaching becomes a series of disconnected talks on the disconnected texts. This falls short of the glory of true biblical preaching." (19)

Chapter one, "Preaching as Worship", assigns preaching as "essentially an act of worship" (24), and further that "True worship always proclaims the gospel, the good news of what God has done in Jesus Christ". (35) Ultimately this leads him to conclude that "The heart of Christian worship is the authentic preaching of the Word of God." (37) This of course is counter intuitive to the contemporary designation of music alone as Christian worship, to which Mohler responds that "The anemia of evangelical worship – all the music and energy aside – is directly attributable to the absence of genuine expository preaching". (38) Moving in progression of thought, chapter two, "The Ground of Preaching" establishes preaching in the grace of God, rooted in a Trinitarian theology. Affirming Luther Mohler writes that "...the Father had willed that the Spirit should work uniquely through the Word and not independent of it".(46)

Chapter three, "Preaching is Expository" provides a theological ground for preaching and affirms that preaching is always exposition. For this reviewer, this is perhaps the best chapter of the book. Mohler manipulates his theological prowess on the preacher's task with deft simplicity, "In the end, our calling as preachers is really very simple. We study, we stand before our people we read the text, and we

explain it. We reprove, rebuke, exhort, encourage, and teach – and then we do it all again and again and again.” (64) One could only want from this chapter more theological engagement; and engagement that is beyond the bounds of this short prophetic treatment. However, in Chapter Four, “Expository Preaching” he does offer an explanation of what he understands exposition to be. (65)

Chapter five, “Steward of the Mysteries” examines the authority of the preacher, and Chapter Six, “Did not our Hearts Burn within Us?” deals with preaching the big story of the Bible. This is a wonderful summation of that to which others, such as Graeme Goldsworthy and Brian Chapel, have been arguing in monographs urging preachers to place texts in their place in salvation history and understand the message of the Gospel as the hermeneutical tool by which we handle the text of Scripture. He argues,

We must read and explain accurately to our people what that text means and how it applies to their lives. Yet we have another task as well, for we must take that particular text and place it within the larger story of the Scripture. One of the reasons I encourage pastors to preach through entire books of the Bible is because that practice will force us to preach texts we otherwise would never preach. (96)

To put a finer point on it he asserts, “If our people think of the gospel as a small story in which they get to befriend Jesus and walk alone with him in the garden, if they don’t understand what a massive thing their salvation from sin really is, then we are robbing them of the Gospel.” Homiletic professors who are trying to communicate the holistic nature of God’s revelation of Himself can only affirm Mohler here.

Chapter seven, “The Pastor as Theologian” provides a very helpful metaphor for the preacher’s initial task in a church, “theological triage”: in the same way that an ER doctor must quickly assess the priority of incoming patients, “...the pastor must learn to discern different levels of theological importance.”

(109)

Chapter seven is followed with a chapter on preaching to postmodern culture, and two chapters to exhort and encourage the pastor respectively. The book concludes with a brief introduction to Spurgeon as an exemplar of biblical exposition and personal conviction.

In terms of critique one could only want more of the same from this book, such as an entire theological treatise on preaching, or more practical insights for the pastor; it is in these discussions that Mohler is at his best. However, limiting the breadth of the book allows it to be an accessible tool to put in the hand of seminary students and pastors. This work should be included in introductory classes as a supplemental text to the many preaching manuals as a much needed answer to the “why” question, which should precede the “how” question. This especially since many who do exposition do not clearly execute an argument for why they do it, leaving subsequent generations with a homiletic template, but not a divine mandate. This work serves as a concise corrective to that reality.