

*Preaching at the Crossroads: How the World—and Our Preaching—Is Changing*, by David J. Lose. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013. 112 pp. \$19.00. ISBN 978-0-8006-9973-4.

“Why don’t my children and grandchildren go to church?” In workshops with laity as well as clergy, David Lose contends this question is the most poignant of all the ones asked (p. 97). And it is not just a personal question but one for the age in which we live. Why do people stay home from church?

Lose’s analysis focuses on preaching as he examines three factors: postmodernism, secularism, and pluralism. For many ministers these are topics they either read about in seminary or have heard discussed since graduating, but which often seem irrelevant in the weekly struggles of sermon preparation. What a shame! Lose’s work draws upon his own ministry of teaching and leading workshops, and what he has to say could very well change the landscape of preaching.

He rehearses the common complaints about preaching in recent decades, along with the typical solutions: 1) preaching is dull so we should use compelling narrative forms; 2) people are suspicious of the authority of preachers and sermons so we ought to move out of the pulpit; 3) sermons are laden with too much information so we should strive for an experience; 4) preachers can’t compete with Letterman so we should become more conversational; and 5) preaching is dated in a time of images so we should show more movie clips (p. 3). As he rightly reminds us, none of these solutions are inherently wrong. But perhaps the bigger issue is that the world has changed and we did not keep up (pp. 97-98).

The first of these societal changes is postmodernism, what he calls an “unrelenting skepticism” (p. 17), especially when the Church and her preachers make claims of “self-evident truths” (p. 19). Such a move by preachers is a “power play, as it gives one voice all the power in the conversation and greatly restricts the freedom of anyone else to even question the assertion” (p. 19). In this postmodern age Lose suggests we tell the Christian story as the metanarrative by which we live and confess our faith. Even doctrine becomes a way of making sense of our world (p. 27). He also believes that a modified version of *Sachkritik* (content criticism) has much to offer preachers whereby we look to the central theological witness of Scripture as a whole without diminishing minority views throughout (p. 31). In other words, as preachers we would read with both a hermeneutics of restoration and suspicion, as Ricoeur suggested (p. 38).

The second area, secularism, conveys a “pervasive lack of hope” by many persons today (p. 49) and the mistaken notion that humans can flourish apart from God (p. 50). Any preacher reading those words recognizes the symptoms of our times. Fundamentalists survive by tightening their grip on the “truth,” while agnostics surrender altogether. But even mainline progressives have surrendered to secularism by making theological claims with less certainty, a tentative voice whispering the gospel. Lose’s suggestion? At a time when God is no longer a “central character” (Brueggemann, p. 51), preachers must avoid the trap of apologetics, thinking that people can be arm-wrestled into the faith (pp. 59-60). As Lose has suggested in previous works, Christianity is a faith stance, not one of certitude. His practical suggestions along these lines include speaking to the “middle zone.” In contrast to so much preaching that focuses on the “congregational” and “global,” preachers need to remember where people live Monday through Friday (p. 75).

Pluralism, or more precisely, digital pluralism, is Lose’s third area of concern, an age “saturated by grand stories” (p. 84), whether on the Internet or the myriad of cable TV channels. But rather than wring our hands, preachers might embrace the 2.0 technology of our day in which people interact with technology. What if sermons were more interactive, participatory? His seven suggestions are fascinating, including the idea of visiting parishioners where they work and inviting them into the conversation during the sermon (scariest of them all).

If taken seriously, Lose’s book is a game-changer. Better yet, a world-changer.

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