

One New Book for the Preacher

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Tyshawn Gardner, *Sacred Anthropology: Prophetic Radicalism for Pulpit and Pew* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2022)

*"And immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's bonds were unfastened."
Acts 16:26*

Tyshawn Gardner is a pastor, preacher, and prophet who now works in the Academy as a restorer of the hopefulness of the Gospel in a time when cynicism and disorientation appear to rule the day. In this book, *Sacred Anthropology: Prophetic Radicalism for Pulpit and Pew*, Tyshawn moves gracefully across the disciplines of sociology, theology, and homiletics in a way that is accessible for, as the title suggests, clergy and laity. It is a necessary addition to the library of anyone who is seriously curious about discerning what God is up to in this season.

Our country is more polarized than ever, and while this statement may be uncomfortable for some, or too pointed for others, very few can deny its validity. While some blame social media and its influences on culture, and others point to conspiracy theories, foreign "bad actors," and our divisive political climate, Tyshawn Gardner deftly navigates the issue of blame, while situating our polarization at the intersection of human invention...white supremacy, sexism, capitalism, racism, etc., and evil...principalities and powers. This situatedness positions readers to orient themselves by reestablishing a firm root in the Gospel. Gardner offers *Sacred Anthropology: Prophetic Radicalism for Pulpit and Pew* as a corrective and unifying force.

Sacred Anthropology opens with the compelling re-telling of the story of the African captives aboard the Amistad who revolted against the ship's slave-trading crew in July 1839. Gardner defines the actions of the slaves along with the advocacy of others as acts of prophetic radicalism. "By resisting and revolting against a racist and oppressive system designed to deny freedom to image bearers of ebony hue, their actions opened the door for many others who would be affected by social and racial oppression centuries after this mutiny."

Referencing Acts 16:26, Gardner makes the case that the function of prophetic radicalism in ministry is to open doors, set captives free, and establish a new Divine order. Sacred anthropology combines cultural anthropology and theological anthropology to affect a holistic understanding of people and their cultures, values, challenges, histories, and experiences to confront injustices through a biblical and Christ-like ethic. Gardner identifies sacred anthropology as the process or form by which "ministry that opens doors" happens, but he is most compelling when discussing the form prophetic radicalism takes as how transformation happens individually and communally.

Prophetic radicalism happens when Christians engage in Christian proclamation and living that exposes the root cause of injustice while advocating for God's redemptive justice and simultaneously acting as agents of disruption in accord with the life and ministry of Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit. In other words, prophetic radicalism demands both faithful declaration and fervent demonstration of the Gospel in ways that expose and dismantle oppressive systems. But it does not stop there. The goal is transformation for the oppressed as well as the oppressor and the seeding of a new community where justice and equity are not simply ideals, but reality.

This liberative proclamation identified by Gardner as social crisis preaching is biblically rooted, Spirit-enabled proclamation that develops and drives congregations to compassionately care for and radically confront social crises in the communities where their neighbors live, work, worship, and play.

The term was coined by Kelly Miller Smith, Sr., in the 1984 Lyman Beecher Lectures entitled "Social Crisis Preaching." It is "the proclamation of that which is crucially relevant within the context of the Christian gospel in times of social upheaval and stress." This type of proclamation is hopeful and has much to offer the divisive and overly politicized climates that pastors and churches often find themselves drowning in. It is particularly relevant to those who preach and teach the separation of church and state while practicing or supporting policies that express an integration or odd syncretism of disparate social, political, and theological ideals. Gardner demands a critical examination of our ideals and a reforming of our theology that subsequently informs authentic community through real reconciliation which is the outworking of the Gospel.

Social crisis preaching leverages the descriptive use of language, interdisciplinary content, and pastoral courage to communicate a clear message that can be both felt and heard. It should inspire listeners to understand the precise pains, afflictions, and injustices of the oppressed and the complicity and suffering of the oppressor. It reveals the danger and terrible human cost of distorted power dynamics for everyone "trapped in this web of mutuality."

But beyond simply rehearsing the present social crises, this type of preaching energizes toward the hope and transformation that lies in God. It employs interdisciplinary content to affirm the ethos of the preacher and lends grace to the listener as to the accuracy, veracity, and relevancy of her description and assessment of contemporary issues. The preacher cannot guess, tell lies, give opinions, or perpetuate myths. Statistics, historical facts, reliable sources, and objective data must be employed within the sermon to give listeners accurate information so that a decision for Christ-like actions can be taken to solve crises within the community.

Finally, pastoral courage is integral to avoiding the pitfalls of popular preaching that leave the listener comforted yet unchanged - affected without being effected. Speaking truth to power is risky when not rooted in the power of the Gospel through

the power of the Holy Spirit. Speaking truth to power transforms the powerful and liberates the powerless. Hard truths must be shared to expose injustice, to inspire personal responsibility, and to address self-harm within the community. Pastoral preaching courage is what we encounter in the prophets but see embodied by Jesus to dismantle systemic evil and injustice.

Gardner compels his readers to engage this work from a deep spiritual well, recognizing the weariness and self-destructive practices that often accompany justice work and advocacy. Gardner also draws deeply on the embrace and exercise of time-tested spiritual disciplines of spiritual detachment, togetherness, and worship that replenish the soul and have sustained those given to such daunting work.

Gardner's work is a deep well that inspires faithful risks, that can alter the present reality and present a hopeful view of the future!