

## Book review

Joanne Gallardo

*In Other Words: Incarnational Translation for Preaching*, by Charles H. Cosgrove and W. Dow Edgerton. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007.

**O**ne of the many daunting tasks preachers face is that of opening up the scriptures in a way that facilitates meaning and understanding for our listeners. Our meaning sometimes falls flat somewhere between the pulpit and the pew. And we sometimes find ourselves in limbo between fear about losing the authenticity of scripture by daring to reinterpret, and fear about manipulating the text into cheapened relevancy. It is out of deep respect for scripture and the discipline of homiletics that Charles H. Cosgrove and W. Dow Edgerton, in *In Other Words: Incarnational Translation for Preaching*, seek to restore the sense of the living Word.

**Combining hermeneutical scholarship with creativity and pragmatism, the authors offer this book as a resource to preachers who want to reach their congregations in new and exciting ways.**

Cosgrove and Edgerton define incarnational translation as part recital, part homiletical commentary. As the sermon illustration assists in fitting text to time and place, incarnational translation seeks to bring a contemporary light to scripture, giving it a rhetorical effect similar to the impact it would have had on ancient listeners. *In Other Words* contains both theory and practice for this translation.

In the chapter “Psalms, Hymns, and Oracles,” the authors consider the form and genre of the Psalms, hymns of the New Testament, the prophetic oracles, and the oracles of salvation. Interspersed throughout are examples of incarnational translations of well-known passages, reinterpreted and adapted in compelling ways. The NRSV translation of Amos 5:21, in which

the prophet rails against worship without justice, reads: “I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.” The incarnational translation begins: “I hate your Christmas trees with their brightly colored lights and glimmering tinsel; I despise your Advent wreaths” (47). This rendering replaces the description of ancient worship with a portrayal of a contemporary North American mainstream Christmas Eve service, and ends with the words of the original translation: “Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream.” The new version retains the essence of the old text, but the description of worship has been translated incarnationally into a setting with more meaning for the modern listener.

Criticisms of this method and questions about interpretation are sure to arise. What criteria are used to translate texts incarnationally? Does the preacher run the risk of misinterpreting the text? Does this approach lead to excessive allegorizing of scriptures? In their final chapter, Cosgrove and Edgerton briefly speak to these concerns. In straightforward fashion, they articulate their views on hermeneutic frameworks, allegorical exegesis, and the risk taking required in all translation work. These brief responses, though helpful, leave a lot to the preacher’s discernment. But translation of scripture is always a risky venture, and for those who dare to preach, the risks associated with interpreting scripture are familiar.

While Eugene Peterson’s *The Message* and Walter Wangerin’s *The Book of God* have set texts in modern paraphrase, *In Other Words* serves as a valuable resource for preachers who seek to address their congregation with a text that lives and breathes. Combining hermeneutical scholarship with creativity and pragmatism, Cosgrove and Edgerton offer this book not as a method of preaching but as a resource to preachers who want to reach their congregations in new and exciting ways. This book can also be an excellent resource for Bible study leaders and other teachers of scripture, or for anyone who wants to see the Bible as a transformational text.

### **About the reviewer**

A native of Wauseon, Ohio, Joanne Gallardo is completing an MDiv at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Indiana. She is a member of College Mennonite Church and a ministry intern at Eighth Street Mennonite Church, Goshen.