

O. Wesley Allen Jr., ed. *The Renewed Homiletic*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010. 160 pages. \$14.96.

In the fall of 2007 O. Wesley Allen brought together five homileticians to engage one another in public conversation at Lexington Theological Seminary. Thirty years earlier, these men had produced the homiletic models that became known as the New Homiletic. They include David Buttrick, Fred Craddock, Eugene Lowry, Henry Mitchell, and Charles Rice. This book is the outgrowth of that conference.

Each of the men contributes a chapter in which they reflect on their particular model. Each chapter contains a rehearsal of their core contribution, a description of how the religious and cultural landscape has changed since the model was first proposed, and a critique of how they would reshape their core contribution for the future given the new landscape. At the conclusion of each chapter, two homileticians from “the next generation” give a response. The format results in a spirited dialogue that takes place within the book. Not only do the individual men make an honest attempt to critique their own work but also the respondents, who deeply respect their contribution, critique them as well. A DVD of the sermons these men preached at different churches on the Sunday they were in Lexington is included. The sermons are intended to represent the rethinking of their own homiletic perspective.

In the first chapter Charles Rice reaffirms the place of storytelling in preaching and the importance of preaching dialoguing with culture. One of the respondents to Rice, Mary Alice Mulligan, affirms the contribution he has made but takes issue with his nostalgic views of the past and the lack of offering suggestions for addressing the cultural changes that have occurred over the past forty years.

After almost forty years, Fred Craddock believes his focus on emphasizing the responsibility of the listener to take ownership of the sermon is still an important perspective to maintain. At the same time Craddock says he would change some things. For example, the lectionary tempts preachers to chop up Scripture in pieces. Listeners, who already think episodically, don’t get the whole picture. He would emphasize more the need to help listeners, who have no meta-narrative, make connections to Scripture.

In response, Ruthann B. Hooke takes issue with Craddock’s assumption of the reality of universal experience. Hooke argues that postmodern thought has successfully challenged that notion. Preachers, however, can still appeal to a sense of shared human experience but “all preachers must be self-critical and self-conscious about their own social location” (60).

One of the core contributions Henry Mitchell highlights is that sermons must have more than a cognitive purpose. They must also have a behavioral purpose. The sermon must generate a behavior in listeners that acts in a manner consistent with the text (66). In response, Ronald Allen questions if Mitchell has downplayed the “transformative potential of ideas, at least for some people” (78).

After offering a couple of revisions to the “Lowry Loop,” Eugene Lowry provides a valuable critique of the use of media in preaching and worship (88-92). He emphasizes the ongoing tension between orality and textuality, advocating the power of voice and the potential intrusion of print in the context of preaching. Eunjoo Mary Kim believes, however, that in contrasting orality with textuality Lowry devalues an important writing stage during the preparation of the sermon. She argues it is necessary for preachers to prepare a quality script “that is a written oral form, rather than a manuscript or a note” (102).

In the final chapter, David Buttrick calls for a recovery of theology, rhetoric, and the prophetic voice in our preaching. In addition he responds to the issue of how we preach to a people who feel God is a benign, inactive God. Preaching must show listeners signs of God beyond the sacred pages of Scripture and show where God is now. Where is God present? Buttrick replies “. . . wherever you see beatitudes beginning to come true, there is where you will find the presence of an unseen, astonishingly modest God” (115). Alyce McKenzie responds by correctly observing that Buttrick does not reflect on or critique his own work. She applauds what he does offer as he describes what shape responsible preaching must take as preaching moves forward.

Many volumes written by multiple contributors often lack coherence. That is not the case here. Allen has produced a work that flows nicely. The self-reflection and critique by the contributors along with the critique from the respondents makes this book an engaging read. This is an important resource for the seminary classroom.

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