

Jon Meyer Ericson. *The Rhetoric of the Pulpit: A Preacher's Guide to Effective Sermons*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2016. 120 pages. \$19.

The author of *The Rhetoric of the Pulpit* may not be familiar to homiletics, but his command of the classical rhetoric tradition for contemporary public discourse is clearly on display in this book for preachers. Ericson is dean emeritus of the College of Liberal Arts at Cal Poly in San Luis Obispo and a professor of communication who spent years teaching rhetoric and public address at Stanford, Central Washington, and Pacific Lutheran universities. In retirement he serves as the director of adult education in an ELCA congregation and writes from his informed perspective in the pew to help those in the pulpit.

The Introduction invites clergy who aspire to be effective communicators in the pulpit to discover how the rich resources of the classical tradition applied to their efforts in “sermon building” can be their solution. The remainder of the book explores these resources in four chapters organized by the five canons of classical rhetoric: Invention, Arrangement, Style, Memory, and Delivery. This is followed by a series of appendices; ten sample sermon excerpts from Lutheran, Anglican, Episcopal clergy and a Jewish rabbi with helpful introductions as to how each serve as an exemplar of a resource for preachers. Three other brief appendices provide possible resources for pastoral ministry. A bibliography and an index are included. In the final paragraph of the study itself, Erickson restates his aim in writing the book: “to apply rhetorical principles ranging from Aristotle and Augustine to Kenneth Burke and I. A. Richards to the task of sermon building . . . as a helpful guide and companion” for a preacher’s “journey” (71).

In the chapter on Invention, Ericson helps preachers imagine how to come up with what to say about the theological concern of a sermon. He succinctly introduces Aristotle’s three kinds of proofs (pathos, ethos, and logos), expanding logical proofs with appropriate types of arguments (e.g., sign, example, analogy, and cause). He offers twelve suggestions for keeping the sermon’s argument interesting and provides further classical resources to vary the way this can be accomplished. In the chapter on Arrangement, Ericson offers the standard public speaking array of logical (topical), chronological, spatial arrangement strategies, and adds Monroe’s Motivated Sequence as a fourth alternative. Surprisingly, in a book clearly written by a Lutheran layperson, there is no reference to the classic Lutheran sermon pattern of law-grace (public speaking’s problem-solution design). The chapter on Style focuses on how correctness, clarity, appropriateness, and distinctiveness are rhetorical resources that can help preachers negotiate the symbolic nature of language, the creation of identification, and conceptualize the question of meaning. The fourth and final chapter raises the topics of Delivery and Memory. Memorization, he argues, is best used for a poignant moment in preaching. Otherwise, its role is more one of memory since Ericson is a strong advocate that sermons should be preached extemporaneously from well-organized outlines rather than full manuscripts. Classic public speaking concerns for voice, breathing, articulation, pronunciation, pause and rate, eye contact, as well as gesture and movement are all briefly treated.

Since this book arrays the classical resources of public speaking for preachers, I will use the same “strengths” and “stretches” that speech teachers use with students in responding to what is offered here. The strengths of this book are its clarity, brevity, and uncomplicated overview of the resources of the classical rhetorical and contemporary public address traditions applied to the pulpit. For teachers looking for an inexpensive resource for classroom use that introduces these resources and for clergy looking for help in understanding rhetorical resources that can aid in communicating what they have to say, this volume provides helpful aid. The stretches of this

book are that the author provides a rhetoric of preaching that views the homily or sermon merely as a particular kind of public speaking that aspires to be effective (see the subtitle). He appears largely unaware of contemporary homiletic discussion concerning the role of rhetoric, the turn to the listener that has occurred and been challenged in contemporary homiletics, and even the concern with distinguishing being effective from being faithful. Though he mentions the Academy of Homiletics once, the only contemporary homileticians he appears to engage at any length are Joseph Sitler (1986), Donald MacLeod (1993), Craig Loscalzo (1992), and Barbara Brown Taylor (2009)—and even these are cited more as examples of an idea rather than engagement with the idea.

Though this is far from the “exciting new approach” the venerable James J. Murphy would have us believe on the book blurb, *The Rhetoric of the Pulpit* is a contribution to the venerable genre down through the ages of “a rhetoric of preaching.”

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