

John S. McClure. *Ethical Approaches to Preaching: Choosing the Best Way to Preach About Difficult Issues*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2021. 128 pages. \$21.

John McClure's new book, *Ethical Approaches to Preaching*, is another excellent addition to his fascinating corpus over the last several decades, inspiring many homileticians and preachers. Like his previous works, this book draws on his understanding of preaching and sermon-listening as *theo-ethical Christian practices*. However, the author specifically designed it to help working preachers learn how to preach about many difficult ethical issues of our time (including those unearthed by the COVID-19 pandemic).

The overall structure of the book is very straightforward, clear, and easy to follow. Each chapter begins with the author's introduction of one of four distinct ethical approaches that preachers can employ for this task: (1) communicative ethics, (2) witness ethics, (3) liberation ethics, and (4) hospitality ethics (xiv). Then, McClure elaborates how preachers will take each approach in the chapter with the following steps but in different ways, like setting out on a new ethical journey with listeners: (1) identifying an ethical problem and pointing to *the way out* of that problem to listeners, (2) guiding *the way into* the problem by facilitating their own experience, understanding, and engagement, (3) creating messages with cognitive and affective signposts (key concepts, symbols, messages, categories of thought, topics, feelings) to show *the way through* the problem, and (4) identifying and claiming *the way toward* a new and better world or a hoped-for future (xvi-xx).

To help preachers get a feel for the approaches and see them in actual sermons, McClure offers his four sample topical sermons on the same topic, immigration, with helpful annotations. Also, since one approach is not universally applicable, he encourages them to read situations and become aware of the assumptions and expectations of listeners in order to discern the best approach. For this, he adds a section regarding the kinds of situations that call for each approach, followed by a situational sample sermon that clarifies how each approach functions in particular historical contexts and situations. Then, McClure includes a list of additional readings for further insights, theoretical formulations, examples, and ideas for application and practice at the end of each chapter.

Since this handbook is easily understandable for most working preachers, it is unnecessary to summarize the entire content. However, because the book has in itself many implicated layers from a wide range of sophisticated, homiletical-ethical-practical resources, it would be helpful to explicate McClure's core arguments. So, what follows is a summary of the unique characteristics of each ethical approach to aid readers.

First, a communicative ethic is *universal* and *intersubjective*, establishing a universally acceptable *moral consensus* on ethical issues in *and* beyond the faith community. Preachers speak to as many people as possible to establish common ethical ground across lines of differences (religious, socio-political, cultural, linguistic, and so forth) and bring about the communicative interlocutors' binding/bonding experiences (1-4).

Second, a witness ethic is *communal* and *non-negotiable*, fostering a Christian *virtue* or *moral agency* for the ethical issues. Preachers endeavor to create *countercultural* faith communities by critiquing and resisting the dominant culture of the larger society. They witness

the uniqueness of the gospel and teach the language, concepts, and practices of the church through its inner communal and liturgical life (36-38).

Third, a liberation ethic is *social* and *intersectional*, addressing the systemic inequities of power and resources disclosed by the issues in *moral advocacy*. Preachers unmask, critique, and change the current oppressive system by educating the faith community (*consciousness-raising*, conscientization) and building solidarity with other organizations or religious groups for the social justice and liberation of the oppressed (60-62).

Fourth, a hospitality ethic is *interhuman* and *collaborative*, creating and enhancing relationships based on *moral reflection* in actual face-to-face encounters in conversations. Preachers welcome genuine others who have different, asymmetrical knowledge, experience, and resources for moral discernment and action on the issues, come to terms tentatively, and foster solidarity among the conversational participants (90-92).

Ethical Approaches to Preaching is a fascinating book, and three contributions should be named. First, this book has exceptional readability for any working preachers regardless of different backgrounds. McClure laid out a clear roadmap and explained difficult, scholarly ideas (philosophical, theological, homiletical, and ethical) to help readers stand on the solid theoretical ground to move forward. Second, the book comprehensively covers almost all current ethical approaches to preaching condensed in a small volume and points to additional resources available, which is to be highly applauded by many homileticians and preachers who desire to get more insights and practical advice. For example, readers can better understand communicative and hospitality ethics by reading McClure's other essential books (*Speaking Together and With God*, *Other-wise Preaching*, and *The Roundtable Pulpit*). Third, McClure's sample sermons on the same topic are beneficial for preachers to see how each approach is practically embodied and understand the difference between the approaches.

There are several caveats to be mentioned. First, while this is an unavoidable limitation for any small-sized handbook, just *reading* this book is similar to seeing only a few plateaus of a mountain range of homiletical-ethical discourse. Therefore, as McClure suggests, it is crucial to read into and learn from the larger body of literature available. Second, while preachers need to understand their contexts and situations to decide on the best approach, using only that approach can aggravate the siloing of each congregation. It is thus necessary to motivate the congregation to move onto other ethical terrains with various approaches to resist its insularity. For example, a preacher can approach a congregation siloed in witness ethics with hospitality ethics or perhaps liberation ethics, not with communicative ethics immediately, because they may not be ready to leap. Each preacher needs to be creative, introducing other approaches or their elements (signposts) in the long run.

This book is highly recommended to working preachers and homileticians. It distills many insights about preaching difficult ethical issues in and beyond our faith communities to transform this world.

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