

Craig A. Satterlee. *When God Speaks Through You: How Faith Convictions Shape Preaching and Mission*. Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2007. 182 pages. \$17.00

A fellow professor at the university where I teach saw this book on my desk. A lively discussion ensued as he questioned whether it is audacious to assume God might speak through a person because of an institutional appointment. It was a great discussion, but not the subject matter of this book. Satterlee assumes preachers and congregations alike believe God can and does speak through preachers. I would have been tempted to title the book *How Preaching Matters: Faith Convictions that Shape Perceptions of Preaching* because questions about how preaching matters are so effectively addressed in this volume. How do sermons matter for listeners?

When God Speaks Through You is an important addition to homiletic thinking about listener-centered preaching and an equally important contribution to providing materials to help clergy facilitate conversations among parishioners about their assumptions regarding how preaching matters. Satterlee explores how preaching matters dialectically with chapters devoted to revealing the multiple perspectives congregation members bring to understanding what sermons are, what parishioners implicitly believe sermons can accomplish, how their different faith orientations shape ways sermons may call forth faith from them, how listeners bring different assumptions about ways sermons ought to connect to daily life, how a listener's approach to what they expect from worship implicitly shapes how they think sermons should connect them to community, how listener perceptions about desired responses to a sermon shapes their sense of sermon effectiveness, and how implicit theologies of the future offered in preaching may shape different hopes.

Each of these chapters provide a set of typologies, usually six to nine different ways listeners and preachers tend to view these matters set in juxtaposition to one another. They are provided as conversation starters rather than answers. The reader is invited to sit in on a conversation among the members of St. Ambrose Church where Pastor Mark has provided a forum for conversation and parishioners *qua* characters show up in each chapter to articulate their different ways of relating to the question at issue for preaching. Satterlee does not predispose readers or listeners to the *right* answer. Instead he depicts a spectrum of possible responses to the question of how preaching matters for listeners. To Satterlee's great credit he avoids stereotyped terminology like "Sacramental Christians" or "Market-oriented Evangelicals," casting differences in the very real language of typical listener perceptions and expectations. The typologies presented in each chapter are grounded in excellent homiletical resources, but these references never get in the way of Satterlee's writing style that is wonderfully accessible for lay congregational use – a primary purpose of the book. Long before the last chapter is reached, the reader will be envisioning how she or he might form an *in-put group* like that of fictional St. Ambrose Church, where congregation members can also learn to see how they each bring diverse convictions and expectations to what they think about preaching.

The first two chapters of the book serve different purposes. Chapter two explores a variety of ways that preaching is understood to function as part of a whole in contemporary expressions of worship. In chapter one Satterlee takes a position that he reiterates at the close of the book as well. And at this point I will pose my only question. He is convinced that the church's proclamation of the gospel, like that of Jesus, functions as leadership. He employs a fourfold definition by a Harvard expert on the subject of organizational leadership to explore

how the preaching of Jesus and that of pastors functions as leadership. Here I wish Satterlee had followed the pattern of later chapters by noting that listeners actually may bring different perspectives about how preaching functions as leadership. As the director of a graduate leadership degree program, I am keenly aware of the disciplinary debate that contrasts the roles of leaders and managers – a debate now generally considered resolved. Managers tend to operate with a *maintenance* orientation that keeps their focus on structures, systems, efficiency, and other operational elements. Leaders tend to operate with a *journey* orientation that keeps its focus on mission, vision, and strategies necessary to realize organizational effectiveness. Managers must occasionally lead and leaders must also attend to managerial concerns, but leadership tends to be most obvious in contexts of change or a crisis where an individual becomes the symbol-bearer guiding followers through the problem. One can imagine similar typologies that might invite comparison with preacher as chaplain and preacher as leader. Does claiming that “All preaching is leadership” require a spiritualizing of leadership that can empty it of real meaning?

Oh, wait. This is what Satterlee wants. I am coming up with an additional typological way of framing my own convictions about how preaching matters as leadership. Satterlee might respond, “Interesting. Are there other distinctions that might serve as listener perspectives or convictions?” And thus the conversation begins.

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