

BEST ADVICE FOR PREACHING

Edited by John S. Mc Clure

Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998, (Paper, 170 pages)

Supposed you could get 27 outstanding men and women preachers and homiletics to comment on ten central and practical preaching topics. That was Mc Clure's goal in putting together this book. He explains that he sent out ten-page questionnaires to the 27 and asked them questions that focused on ten areas of concern for preachers: the preacher's calling; getting a message; patterns in sermons, collecting supportive material, feedback, resources, etc. He then sent the results of the questionnaires to ten noted homiletics who focused on one topic, and each presented his/her material in a chapter.

Mc Clure describes this book in the Introduction as an "experiment in collaborative homiletical wisdom." It is very collaborative. He even sat down with colleagues for input on what topics needed to be covered in the questionnaires he sent his experts. This book can serve the reader in more than one way.

First of all, there is lots of information and practical advice for preachers. Topics are discussed from various religious, cultural and racial perspectives. The respondents share their thoughts in non-technical conversational language. It is as if they are all gathered in a room together giving their responses to an interested listener. The advice they give is practical, from their own experience and study. They seem to be saying---- This is what we have learned, and this is what we do when they preach. They don't all agree. Some are prone to more traditional, tried and true methods; others are less structured and experimental. There are ample quotes in each chapter, and the conversational tone of the book makes it easy to read. But anyone familiar with recent studies in preaching will not be fooled by its seeming informal tone: there is much to learn about contemporary homiletical theory in these thoughtful preachers' responses.

The chapters have the same format. Each contains sections entitled: "Goals", "Instructions", "Things Encouraged and Discouraged", "Best Answers to Questions" and a bibliography for further research. Another plus for the book is that each chapter is edited by a well-known homiletics. These chapter editors not only choose the quotes from the responders; they also add their own valuable comments to the discussion. Thus, we get additional insights into a topic by an expert in the field. If you haven't read a preaching book for a while, here is a chance to learn who are some of the current important homiletics in North America.

This would be a good book for a preacher's discussion group. One or two chapters could be discussed at each gathering. The material is open-ended, and so it leaves room and even encourages other preachers to reflect and value their own preaching experience—and maybe to be willing to share that experience with other concerned and listening preachers.

----*Jude Siciliano, O.P.*