

Thomas G. Long, Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, eds. *Teaching Preaching as a Christian Practice: A New Approach to Homiletical Pedagogy*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008. 240 pages, \$29.95.

This project, funded by the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning, grew out of a two-year consultation period in which the fourteen contributors interacted with each other, read each other's manuscripts, and came together on two different occasions to discuss the task of teaching preaching.

This volume offers a new paradigm for teaching preaching which is neither teacher-centered ("the teacher holds all the wisdom") nor learner-centered ("the learner holds all the potential") but learning-centered (vii). This learning-centered approach recognizes preaching as a Christian practice.

The book is divided into four sections. Section one contains three chapters that provide perspective on what the authors mean by preaching as a "practice." Section two contains eight chapters that explore the particulars of the practice of preaching. Sections three and four each contain two chapters. Section three investigates how teachers might identify and assess excellence in preaching. Section four offers suggestions for designing a basic course in preaching and how such a course integrates into the larger seminary curricula.

In the opening chapter, Long suggests that the teaching paradigm used in the 1989 Academy of Homiletics volume, *Learning Preaching*, was learner-centered. The purpose of homiletics teachers was to draw out the gifts and qualities that the student already possessed within to become a good preacher. This paradigm revolved around an internal focus.

The contributors of the present volume advocate changing the paradigm to an external focus where the center of attention is on the ministry, tradition, and the practice of preaching that has developed over the centuries. A learning-centered approach shifts the focus away from both the teacher and the student to the process of learning. Teacher and student share a commitment to the goal of learning. The "practice-oriented" approach allows for standards of excellence in preaching which means that good preaching "can be taught and learned," "communicated and nurtured" (16). This "practice-oriented" approach also views preaching holistically which means, among other things, that preaching does not simply apply theory, it embodies theory.

The authors devote the majority of the book to exploring the particular practices of preaching (section two). They include the following practices: exegeting the text, exegeting the congregation, understanding the social context, exploring the rich tradition of preaching, developing the form of the sermon, engaging the imagination, the use of language, and the use of the voice. The heavier emphasis falls on those practices related to the context of preaching: exegetical, congregational, social, and traditional context.

The authors acknowledge that not every practice of preaching is nor can be discussed in the volume. The editors say, "To the list of components treated here could be added others, such as theological analysis, the use of electronic media, and the spiritual disciplines needed for the formation of a preacher" (viii). It would have been helpful, however, for the reader to know the rationale for choosing the eight practices on which section two focuses. Were they chosen because they happened to be the specialties of the contributors? Are these practices the most important or most central to the practice of preaching? Are they representative of the variety of practices related to preaching? Such an explanation would help resolve any question about the arbitrary nature of the practices selected.

It would also be helpful to devote an opening chapter to identifying and possibly classifying and organizing as many of the practices of preaching as possible. Preaching does involve a complex constellation of practices. All the more reason to unclutter the homiletical landscape and at least attempt to survey, identify, classify, and show the interconnectedness of as many of the practices of preaching as possible. Then out of those practices choose those that are representative of the various disciplines upon which the teaching of preaching relies. Such a chapter would contain much heuristic value for future research. Further, it would have been helpful to offer suggestions on how to integrate these eight practices into a semester format, devoting a chapter on ways to bring them together.

This book offers excellent insight into the practice of teaching preaching. The contributors provide a fresh approach that looks at homiletics holistically. As a result, I am reinvigorated for the challenges and opportunities that teaching preaching presents. It will reinvigorate our students as well. All through the volume, various authors offer quality suggestions for in-class exercises that will contribute to teaching preaching as a practice (e.g., 109). They also offer resources one might consider for a particular practice.

In her chapter on imagination, Anna Carter Florence challenges preachers with the task of “staying in shape (imaginatively speaking) over time, rather than scrambling for a message on Saturday night” (123). That challenge not only applies to the practice of imagination but also to what practice-oriented preaching and teaching is all about. This volume makes a significant contribution to those who teach preaching.

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