

Duncan MacPherson. *The Splendour of the Preachers: New Approaches to Liturgical Preaching*. London: St. Paul's Publishing, 2011. 141 pages. \$14.50.

British homiletician Duncan MacPherson offers ordained ministers a useful preacher's manual for developing catechetical and kerygmatic homilies and biblical sermons for ecclesial contexts. Perhaps the most notable feature of this work is its practical examples for preparing exegetically sound, contextually-fitting pulpit discourse. This book honors the liturgical Sunday calendar, but could also be useful for a range of other special occasions of worship, namely those associated with ceremonial rites within the Roman Catholic tradition. While MacPherson's theological perspective is patently Roman Catholic, this manual, from start to finish, resounds intriguingly with ecumenical sensitivity, to the extent that Protestants could welcome, embrace, and appropriate a significant share of its practical insights. Beyond this accessibility, MacPherson, lends his reflections on matters related to church renewal, with particular concern about declining memberships and the challenge of religious pluralism.

The central thread that runs throughout this work is MacPherson's insistence that homilies and sermons are distinguishable by virtue of their liturgical purpose. As he expresses it, homilies, properly understood, are never abstractions but messages preached that directly flow from the liturgical action of which it is a part. Differently, the sermon, as a service of the Word, is not only a lengthier discourse than the homily, but in many causes it might be considered "free-standing" discourse. This trait is why, according to him, sermons are not necessarily attached to assigned lectionary readings, especially those preached in certain Protestant settings (43). When liturgical homilies are delivered at the Sunday Eucharist service their purpose is to relate "the proclamation of the word of God to the sacramental celebration and *the life of the community*," to the end of nourishing the Church and furthering its mission in the world (32).

The Splendour of the Preachers is divided into three sections. Much of the book's content is reprinted from previously published articles. Each section offers the reader its own unifying theme and practical strategies relative to matters of sermonic form and content, specific congregational needs, or some liturgically significant special occasion. The first section, *Proclaiming the Word on Sundays*, examines the person of the preacher, role of the hearer, and interpretation of texts. Chapter 1 is the most illuminating. MacPherson takes his cue from post-Vatican II implemented reforms concerned with theologically reshaping the preacher's social identity and function within specific religious communities, and informed by conference proceedings at the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops held in 1982. He maintains that whether the preacher assumes the role of herald or teacher in proclaiming Christ, competence in biblical scholarship, rootedness in Church tradition—nourished by profound meditation upon the Holy Scriptures and filtered through "the exegesis of the fathers, conciliar documents and the teachings of the Magisterium"—is indispensable to a preacher's homiletic arsenal (19).

The second section of MacPherson's preaching manual is devoted to preaching independent of the Sunday Liturgy. This section, *Preaching at the Margins*, provides homiletical hints for preaching at weddings, baptisms, and funerals. Particularly useful are his heuristic suggestions about how to be faithful to the gospel while anticipating that many of the hearers at these services will have marginal or no commitment to Christianity and its associated practices. For example, Chapter 5 provides the reader a step-by-step full text of a baptismal homily for an infant, which, in support of his claims about the discontinuities between homilies and sermons, demonstrates how a homily directly flows from the liturgical action of which it is a part. This example of preaching focused on the rite of baptism also demonstrates that liturgical preaching,

in this case, “mystagogical preaching,” carries with it a specific theological agenda. Part of the task of preaching for the celebration of baptism, writes MacPherson, is to remind the congregation as a whole that infant baptism is more than a “naming ceremony”; rather, at such a baptismal service, one might consider using a distinct liturgical preaching genre altogether. The truth is, as he explains, the nature and fundamental purpose of “mystagogical preaching” is to usher newly initiated Christians into a deeper understanding of the faith and their sacramental experience (65-70).

Finally, *Preaching Across the Divide*, the shortest section of the book, shifts readers attention to a discussion of new approaches for liturgical preaching in the spirit of Christian ecumenism and interfaith cooperation, where he clearly anticipates questions around the profound realities of globalization (106). This final chapter discusses how preaching in the context of historic Holy Land sites might be done, in a context where centuries old conflicts and rivalry for privileged status to the land continues. Here the reader finds a hopeful charge that should spur on any serious preacher to see that it is only through God’s revelation and salvific actions that liturgical preaching has any power to transform church and society.

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