

Preaching
by Fred B. Craddock
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Book Review by

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Reading this volume, one knows immediately that the writer is an excellent communicator who has a thorough knowledge and expansive experience of that about which he writes. Fred B. Craddock is Professor of Preaching and New Testament at Emory University's Candler School of Theology. This happy combination of expertise becomes evident as he demonstrates a serious commitment to biblical preaching. The book is highly readable, written in clear and vivid style, well organized and amply illustrated with biblical examples of the points under discussion as well as with life situations with which the preacher is familiar.

Craddock's purpose is to present a textbook in preaching. He aims this work at both the seminary classroom where the craft of preaching is being learned and at the practicing preacher who needs a refresher course as an aid to reflect on the preaching task in which he/she is engaged. He successfully hits both targets.

The book is divided into three parts: Preaching: I. An Overview, II. Having Something to Say, and III. Shaping the Message Into a Sermon.

In the first part, Craddock states his assumptions, his understanding of the task, his theology of preaching. One senses the seriousness with which he conceives preaching in the Church. Although one finds awareness of the traditional classification of sermons, Craddock takes a fresh and refreshing approach.

The traditional categories of exegetical, textual, expository, thematic and topical have had value in homiletical pedagogy, but in these pages such tags will receive only minimal attention. However, maximum attention will be devoted to the persistent and repeated questions, Does the sermon say and do what the biblical text says and does? (p. 28)

Part II, “Having Something to Say,” is the heart of the book with an especially fine discussion of the hermeneutical process by which the gap between the ancient text and the contemporary situation is bridged. The author places great stress on the necessity of knowing both the listener and the text because preaching is the interpretation of the biblical word to persons in a concrete context. This is a strong section which every practicing preacher ought to return to regularly as a check on performance.

The third section deals with the shaping of the message, now that one has discovered the message of the text. This is a practical guide, helpful in determining how to put together and present the message won through serious wrestling with the text. Craddock stresses the “orality” of the event of preaching. He points out that

much of the educational process today is silent. From grade school through college, students listen to instructors, read, write, take notes, write term papers, sit for exams, and graduate. Many students with excellent records enter seminary with sixteen years of silent education, now preparing for a vocation that will demand oral presentations every week for the remainder of their lives. (p. 21)

Craddock asserts that the goal is to preach,

and writing is a servant, nothing more, nothing less, of that goal. (p. 190)

Again, he maintains,

In textuality there is more often an overload of information while orality tends to adjust quantity to the brevity and fragility of the communicative moment. (p. 190)

Craddock believes strongly in preaching as a God-ordained task but reminds the preacher of its “provisional nature.”

The minister never says, “This is the way God will work through preaching,” but rather he or she says, “This is the way I work because of my understanding of the way God works.” (p. 65)

A final word from Craddock is worth the price of the book:

When preparing sermons, if preachers would write “So what?” at the top of the page, many little promotional talks or clever word games on “Salt Shakers and Light Bulbs” would quietly slip off the desk and hide in the wastebasket. (p. 49)

This is an excellent work to be read, digested and returned to often by the one whose task it is regularly to preach.