

*Hermeneutics for Preaching:
Approaches to Contemporary Interpretations of Scripture*

Raymond Bailey, editor
(Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992}

By

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This is an important volume because of its strong insistence on the necessity of executing the hermeneutical task in the preparation and delivery of the sermon. The insistence rules out a naive, "I simply preach the Bible." Following an introductory chapter, "Hermeneutics: A Necessary Art," by the contributing editor Raymond Bailey, there follow seven chapters, each describing a hermeneutical model, putting the model into practice in the interpretation of a biblical passage, issuing in a sermon on the passage exegeted, and concluding with a brief reflection on the whole process. The seven models described and put to use are as follows: historical, canonical, literary, rhetorical, African-American, philosophical, and theological.

The format of these chapters is well conceived. Besides Bailey, six other writers contribute an essay and a sermon each. As is often the case in such collections, there is an uneven quality in the contributions. James Earl Massey executes the intention of the format most successfully with an excellent discussion of African-American preaching and an equally excellent example of the hermeneutical perspective put into practice in the sermon. One hopes his review of black preaching might impact all preaching.

The other sermons disappoint. Even though the volume as a whole and the individual contributions evidence a familiarity with hermeneutical theory and practice from Schleiermacher to Gadamer and Ricoeur, one fails to find the best insights of the respective models becoming fruitful in the sermons. Rather, the sermons for the most part smack of a kind of individualistic pietism that could be preached with little regard to the interpretive models set forth.

The idea of the volume is excellent; the call to hermeneutical consciousness and responsibility imperative; the format is well conceived; the concrete execution is disappointing.