

Sleeth, Ronald E. *God's Word and Our Words: Basic Homiletics*. Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1986. 120 pp. Paperback, \$7.95.

Reading Ronald Sleeth's book, *God's Word and Our Words*, reminded me of my own pilgrimage as a preacher. As I searched for the ultimate style of preaching, I wanted a specific procedure whereby I could write and deliver sermons. I heard voices from all sides saying, "This is the way to do it." Eventually I became disenchanted with most of those methods and worked out my own. Sleeth's book is refreshing because he is not presenting highly structured methods. Rather, he emphasizes the content of preaching, with each pastor choosing a method comfortable to him.

Sleeth's book centers in three predominant themes: the emphasis on the power of the word, the individual expression of each preacher, and, most importantly, the "why" of preaching. His first theme on the word is exciting. Preaching becomes an event. As a result, what took place in history can occur today, with the same power and results. His second theme stresses that each preacher is not to be a clone of former preachers, but to be an individual who must allow for personal expression. He urges the pastor not only to work within his own personal preference, but also to use variety and not to be fearful of exploring different avenues of conveying the good news.

Rather than another book on the "how" of homiletics, this book explores the "why" in its third theme. It jerked me from the mundane rudiments of technique to the reality of what is really going on in the pulpit. In the first chapter Sleeth states that "Christian proclamation is a theological act." He ties it to the gospel itself. "One could say that the preaching of the gospel is part of the gospel. . . . Preaching is part and parcel of what it proclaims" (p. 1). Sleeth's reverence for the word is obvious. As the word was powerful when first uttered, it is equally powerful today. The entire preaching event is dynamic. In every phase of preaching—from the study, to the minister's life, to the delivery, to the recipient's mind—the word is powerful.

Each phase of sermon delivery is examined to discover the "why" of preaching. This is part of the strength of Sleeth's contribution. Rather than a tightly structured approach, he emphasizes freedom of style and expression. For example, the author is not particularly concerned with the hairline difference between an expository and a textual sermon. He states that "the test of a biblical sermon is not how much Bible is used. . . . The test for a biblical sermon is whether the insight of the Word expressed in the passage in that day becomes insight and Word for us in ours" (p. 53).

Every seasoned and aspiring preacher needs to be exposed to this essential book on the basics of homiletics. It provides freedom and yet clear direction for sermon preparation and delivery.