

Ron Boyd-MacMillan, *Explosive Preaching: letters on detonating the gospel in the 21st century* (Paternoster, 2006)

I like this book. The author writes with humour, with verve and with originality. He makes a contribution in a crowded market where so much is redundant. It is an ideal book for someone who has been preaching for awhile and is feeling the need to ~~click~~ refresh It is ideal pastor-study-leave material...

The assumption behind the book is that most preaching out there is terrible! It is written as a series of 31 short letters although I don't think he sticks to that genre or develops it to its potential. Section One is entitled ~~The~~ Crisis in Preaching and deals with ~~the~~ problems+. Section Two is entitled ~~The~~ Great Preaching and deals with ~~the~~ elements+. Section Three is on ~~The~~ History of Preaching and deals with ~~the~~ forms+. Section Four is entitled ~~The~~ Preachers' Life and deals with ~~the~~ issues+.

The things I found most helpful include:

1. His critical engagement with the field of Homiletics in Letters 5 & 8 & 9.
2. His six elements of great preaching, introduced in Letter 10 and then opened up, one at a time in Letters 12 . 17. He starts with his definition of preaching and then he breaks it into its components to give his ~~tests~~ for effectiveness. Practical, fresh, and wise!
"Preaching is: reaching the whole person, where they live, with the word from above, in love" (67):
 - the oral test: ~~teaching~~+ [Letter 12]
 - the experience test: ~~the~~ whole person+ [Letter 13]
 - the author has gone from no-notes back to using notes again!
 - the reality test: ~~where~~ they live+ [Letter 14]
 - the author makes a case for *"a description of reality that is authentically complex; an explanation of reality that is genuinely insightful; and a reframing of reality that is biblically liberating"* (111)
 - the exegetical test: ~~with~~ the word+ [Letter 15]
 - for the author it is about ~~gripping~~ and checking *"exegesis begins with being gripped by the passage, and continues with checking that the truth we have been gripped by is in line with the author's intention"* (121).
 - the grandeur test: ~~from~~ above+ [Letter 16]
 - the tenderness test: ~~the~~ love+ [Letter 17]
3. His confidence in the Word . in Letter 11 (pp71 . 79) is fabulous. He really goes for the jugular here . on why preaching is ~~the~~ biggest bang in the universe+
"See how vital the word is – it began everything beautiful, sustains everything wonderful, and outlasts everything temporal ... besides what other form of speech has these five effects: to delight God, to astonish angels, to discourage devils, to encourage saints, and to restore sinners? I've done my time preaching to virtually empty halls and churches and it is a great fillip to remember that three of the five audiences of a sermon are unseen." (79)
4. He does a good job of combining a discussion on the history of preaching with an understanding of sermon form. Letter 19 helpfully discusses ~~the~~ biblical hints for sermon formation and then it is into the ~~patristic~~ homily, the ~~scholastic~~ deductive, the ~~moral~~ essay, the ~~evangelical~~ revivalist, the ~~liberal~~ inductive (in which he places Bill Hybels!),

and the post-liberal narrative form . each done with a deft touch and with far more interest than it sounds!

5. In his final section he raises all sorts of interesting issues. Letter 26 is about thirteen ways to manage criticism better. Letter 27 is about learning what we can from Jesus. Letter 28 is odd, very odd. He asks the question about whether it is OK to want to be successful. That is OK. Then he talks about Billy Graham (OK!), Martin Luther-King (OK!) ... and Robert Schuller?! Where did that come from? I didn't see it coming. Letter 29 is one of the better engagements with multimedia/powerpoint that I have read. And Letter 30 is precious not just in the wisdom it conveys about habits but . yet again - the way the ideas come with such freshness. It is really a chapter on spirituality.
6. And if you want somewhere to start, start at the end. Read Letter 31. Three pages. Afterword . the Chinese are coming!+in which he relates how he designed a preaching curriculum for some of the house churches in China. Fascinating ideas.

Ron Boyd-Macmillan has quite a life behind him. Having lived on three continents and worked as a pastor, bible smuggler, human rights analyst, and a journalist the book is evidence of an intriguing life lived. My only complaint? I don't like the title!

Paul Windsor