



Rethinking Celebration

Cleophus J. LaRue

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""This book is a clarion call for African American preachers to think more deeply about the aims and ends of their preaching—namely to stop putting so much emphasis on celebratory endings to our sermons and focus more on the substantive content in our sermons. Our so-called celebratory preaching, designed to excite the congregation into action through a highly emotional closing of the sermon, has had the opposite effect. Rather than inducing action, it has lulled generations of black congregants to sleep. While we are jumping up and down, shouting, and waving our hands in the air every Sunday during the worship hour, we seem not to notice the growing number of churched and unchurched alike who are becoming powerfully alienated from any form of institutional religion.""

—from the introduction

""Celebration"" is a term that has long been used to describe African American preaching, characterized by content that affirms the goodness and powerful intervention of God as well as style that builds from quiet beginnings to an emotionally rich crescendo in conclusion. Cleophus J. LaRue argues that while celebration is one of African American preachings greatest gifts to the larger church, too many black preachers have become content with the form of celebration—volume, vocabulary, pitch, speed, rhythm, and the like—to the neglect of its essence—the proclamation of the mighty acts of God in the lives of their congregations and communities. This kind of preaching, LaRue contends, fails to address the ongoing problems of the African American community and is powerless to prevent the growing disaffection of black America with the black church. In words both prophetic and practical, LaRue suggests ways to improve black preaching that honor both the form and the power of the African American homiletical practice of celebration. Preachers will learn how to use celebration more selectively and as part of a fully formed preaching practice rather than as a means of distracting the congregation from pressing social and theological questions. The book includes six illustrative sermons from LaRue as well as Paschal Sampson Wilkinson Sr., Brian K. Blount, and Claudette Anderson Copeland.

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