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Preaching Without Contempt: Overcoming Unintended Anti-Judaism

Marilyn J. Salmon

Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006

176 pages, \$21.00 Softcover

Only uninformed preachers would intend to preach anti-Judaism. However, good intentions alone are not good enough. Salmon states it well in the Preface: “This book is for preachers who think it is not for them. They think it is not for them because they would never knowingly say anything overtly negative about Jews or Judaism.” (ix)

Through reading this book, some preachers will be astonished to find out how they have been saying some things they never intended to say. As my former teacher Mary Boys has pointed out, no seminarian should fail to understand the complexity of the emergence of Christianity; yet when she listened to some seminarians preach she expressed disbelief when she heard anti-Judaism from some of the best students. The realization of the discrepancy between biblical studies and practice in worship prompts Marilyn Salmon, a scholar of New Testament studies, to write this book.

This book will appeal to preachers and teachers who have intellectually concluded that anti-Judaism is theologically unacceptable and who possess all the desire to end supersessionism in preaching, yet have found themselves preaching sermons that carry forms of anti-Judaism. Salmon articulates well in this book that caricatures of Judaism are deeply ingrained in the Christian tradition and that it is extremely difficult to get rid of them in sermon preparation. Although academic studies in the classroom provide students informed and objective knowledge about the origins of Christianity, when it comes to preaching in the context of worship, and especially in seasons of the church year such as Advent, Christmas and Easter, many pastors may preach a traditional form of Christian superiority at the expense of Judaism. Salmon points out that it is more likely that preachers perpetuate unintentional forms of anti-Judaism in these seasons of the church year because conventional Christian teachings based on supersessionism are so familiar to them that they do not even consider them problematic.

In addition, most preachers still focus on the Gospel texts in preaching. As Salmon points out, those writings are part of Jewish

literature with Jewish culture as their core. However, the nature of the Gospels is to demonstrate the “superiority” of faith in Jesus. Compounded with the usage of anti-Jewish polemics from antiquity, preachers can easily caricature Judaism without knowing it. Preachers would be shocked to realize how much they rely on a supersessionist history of Christian origins. Salmon is speaking to those preachers who have renounced supersessionism theologically in their minds.

It is unfortunate that some seminary courses on biblical studies, especially the related-topic Jewish-Christian relations, are often separated from other courses. A regrettable result is that students gain biblical knowledge in the realm of the intellect but that knowledge seldom translates into preaching. Salmon reminds us that Christian identity is inseparable from Judaism. It is impossible for preachers to preach the Gospel without grappling with its historic roots in the Jewish community.

The purpose of this book is to raise awareness and to connect Jewish-Christian relations with preaching. It aims to help students as well as practicing preachers to stop unintended anti-Judaism in preaching. It has five chapters: *The Gospels as Jewish Literature*; *Supersessionism*; *The Pharisees and the Law*; *The Gospel of John*; and *The Passion Narrative*. While these chapter titles sound academic, the major feature of this book is that it is written in a language with preachers in mind. It’s also helpful that Salmon frequently inserts brief sermon samples to illustrate her point. This book will undoubtedly raise one’s awareness of the issue and enhance one’s preaching with the goal of eradicating unintentional anti-Judaism from the pulpit.

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