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Preaching the hard sayings of Jesus

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conversation, ready to repent of past infidelities when they are recognized. Ecumenical progress thus depends not on church mergers and theological “agreement” but on the readiness of all parties to converse frankly and to repent, especially of the sin of failing to love each other. Unlike some other evangelicals, Yoder demonstrated by his own candid conversations with members of mainline churches that he accepted them as his Christian brothers and sisters. The sectarian tag which he cautiously accepted is “inclusivist” in that it did not preclude speaking freely and directly with all who identified themselves with Christ.

Yoder was appreciated for his penetrating observations, keen sensitivity to unexamined assumptions, and intelligent advocacy for “believers’ church” principles. He would not have cared for a debate about how “great” a theologian he was. Indeed, as often as he was dismissed as merely a “sectarian” thinker, Yoder must have rolled his eyes to find himself more recently elevated to the status of “postmodern”. One suspects he would have been happy just to be recognized as one who fit reasonably well his description of what theologians were supposed to be: “the immune system of the language flow that keeps the body going...the scribes...selecting from a too-full treasury what just happens to fit the next question...the ecumenical runners, carrying from one world to another the word of what has been suffered, learned, celebrated, confessed elsewhere” (139f). This collection of essays will ensure that his unsettling voice will continue to speak and, one may hope, enliven an inter-denominational conversation for which few, unfortunately, continue to have much enthusiasm.

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Preaching the Hard Sayings of Jesus

John T. Carroll and James R. Carroll
Peabody Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1996
xiv + 174 pages, \$22.50 Softcover

When selecting a book with a title like this, it is good to know what you are looking for. Are you interested in preaching the “hard sayings” without compromise, hoping for the chance to be as demanding and hard-hitting as Jesus was himself? Or, aware that preachers rarely stray too far from their cultural and theological superstructures, are you looking for new ways to accommodate the sayings to a new listening culture — in other words, to take Jesus “seriously”, but not “literally”? This volume, co-authored by the

father and son team of John T. and James R. Carroll, is decidedly slanted toward the second, the accommodation, option.

This accommodation is both the book's main weakness and main strength. Any time an exegete, and thus a preacher, provides an "explanation" for Jesus' hardest sayings, the standard for discipleship is lowered. For example, Jesus calls us to hate our families (Matthew 10:37, p. 40-42) and every Christian and congregation must strike its own bargain with the challenge. But as soon as the preacher stands and proclaims his or her own understanding of the bargain that needs to be struck, that compromise becomes the "word preached" — and the hearer now grapples with this new, inevitably lower, standard. So, for example, James R. Carroll reduces that hard saying about "hating" our families to a call for single-minded vocational dedication (46). Taken to the extreme, such accommodation makes one wonder why the selected sayings even qualify as "hard". For example, in their treatment of "The Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus" both Carrolls agree that if the rich man had been a nicer fellow, he would have gone to heaven (101). That is what every modern Christian already wants to believe! The parable is only hard if we follow Luke's implication that the rich man went to Hades simply because he was rich.

The strength of the book is that it is clearly geared for those who know that the preacher's wrestling with the Word faces a firm, weekly deadline. The Carrolls are unapologetic and intentional about offering conclusions about meaning in the case of every saying. There is evidence, though no acknowledgment, that they apply to the hard sayings a strong dose of the history of interpretations and also modern sensibilities (for example in asserting that in spite of Jesus' hard saying about divorce, "sometimes the loving thing is to break up the marriage"). The thoughtful preacher will want to dialogue and disagree with some or all of their accommodations, but still, the Carroll's treatments stand as helpful starting places for thinking about the move from text to sermon.

The format makes the book quite useful. Each "hard saying" is presented in the authors' own translation, then John T. Carroll under the subheading "Interpretation" provides a helpful exegesis, drawing from traditional and modern (including literary) scholarly sources along with some of his original work. Then James R. Carroll presents, under the subheading "From Text to Sermon", some specific thoughts on how a sermon on the passage might be shaped. Individual pericopes (and their parallels) can be located quickly in the Table of Contents as well as in either the Scriptural or Lectionary indexes. The authors also provide extensive end notes in which additional lines of thought are presented and developed. James R.'s homiletical musings are sometimes overly sentimental or moralistic, but his illustrations and stories seem true to life and are sprinkled with good humour.

I was also bothered at times by some sloppy inter-gospel harmonizations.

If you appreciate, but do not currently have access to, the kind of cross-fertilization that a thoughtful pericope study group provides, then this book will serve as a decent substitute. In it you will find yourself in dialogue with two guys who will help you to begin your wrestling with some of Jesus' hardest sayings.

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The Comparative Liturgy of Anton Baumstark

Fritz West

Cambridge, UK: Grove Books Limited, 1995

46 pages, £ 3.50 paperback monograph

Why a monograph on this obscure, Roman Catholic lay theologian, who spent most of his career teaching secondary school, never held down an academic appointment, was an active member of the Nazi party, and only authored one major book in his entire life? Simply because Anton Baumstark (1872-1948) invented the discipline of comparative liturgy. This, in fact, is the title of his only book, published in French in 1934, but not translated into English until 1953. Unless you have access to a specialized library, you are unlikely to see a copy of Baumstark's *Comparative Liturgy*, long out of print. This monograph by Fritz West is likely the closest you will come to Baumstark.

Baumstark lived and worked in the narrow Roman Catholic world of the turn of the century, in the shadow of Vatican I, when "LITURGY" meant "THE ROMAN LITURGY". He was the first to identify the historical as well as the theological dimension of liturgical study. He spoke and wrote against the prevailing euro-centric and Roman-centric view of liturgy and church history. He was the first modern scholar to espouse a comparative view of liturgy and liturgies.

Baumstark based his theories and research on parallel comparative studies in the fields of language, biology, zoology, paleontology, and other new sciences. These fields were developing an *organic* model of development, in which both social and genetic factors of evolution were considered. In this process, the researcher assumed an original *archetype*, from which subsequent *types* evolved and grew.