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# Preaching as weeping, confession, and resistance: radical responses to radical evil

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provides directions for prayer. When used for family or household devotions the commentary is highly productive of discussion, as we can attest.

It goes without saying that a book of this nature and for these purposes will evolve, and one hopes the church will provide structures and means for continuing work on it even as the process of the Adult Catechumenate undergoes refinement and change. It may be noted, for example, that often the language is formulaic (e.g., in the commentary on the benefits of Baptism, p. 111), or difficult conceptually (just what does "dominion of God" mean? p. 65), or experientially limited (e.g., the farm conservation efforts in one of the commentaries on the First Article of the Creed, pp. 52-53). And Jesus did not say "Today, salvation has come to this house" to Lazarus, but to Zacchaeus (p. 111). After all, the world view, images, and metaphors of the Bible and the *Small Catechism* are increasingly remote from our secularized and technologized population. It is appropriate, therefore, that *Praying the Catechism* is set in a total discipling process.

Don Johnson is pastor of Gloria Dei Lutheran Church in North Vancouver, and served as chair of the task force on the Adult Catechumenate for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada. We owe him huge thanks for creative and innovative work.

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## **Preaching as Weeping, Confession, and Resistance: Radical Responses to Radical Evil**

Christine M. Smith

Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993

191 pp.

Christine Smith, Associate Professor of Preaching and Worship at the United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities in Minneapolis, has written this odd book, which claims to be on the subject of homiletics, but is no such thing. Instead, it is a personal testimony of the author's discovery of what she calls "radical evil" in the world, and her suggestions of "radical responses" to this evil by the preacher. Her responses to evil are expressed in the three words of the book's title: Weeping, Confession, and Resistance.

She calls her study a reflection on the "third world of preaching" (p. 1), and focuses on "the particular issues, social systems, pervasive values, and theological understandings that dominate and structure the world in which we preach" (p. 1). Her response to evil, then, is to preach against it, and to focus on preaching as the act of naming evil, and a commitment to change. By this, she wishes to "help preachers become more politically and socially aware and more theologically responsible in a world caught in a web of radical evil" (p. 7).

The core of the book is made up of five chapters identifying and describing the principal sources of radical evil. They are HANDICAPPISM, AGEISM, SEXISM, HETEROSEXISM, WHITE RACISM, and CLASSISM. These are predictable topics, and their choice by Smith readily confirms her as belonging to the feminist liberation theological movement.

After describing these vices in predictable terms, she offers homiletic advice for dealing with each one in preaching. For example, her homiletic advice in response to HANDICAPPISM is to be critical of one's use of seeing/hearing/walking/running/standing imagery. To AGEISM her response is: speak out against the injustices of ageism, portray the elderly positively, and debunk ageist stereotypes and myths. To SEXISM her response is: listen to the voices of women, empathize with them, confront the injustice, envision new gender relations, and critically examine the myths.

Her suggestions for HETEROSEXISM are to name the problem and link it to power, critique the system, and affirm gays. For WHITE RACISM she recommends: listen to the oppressed, preach for conversion, name and understand whiteness, acknowledge and transform one's language, honour the differences, and celebrate counter-cultural festivals. Finally, for CLASSISM she advocates that one challenge the myths, break the silence, educate, encourage responses of compassion and judgment, and avoid the theology of the cross in preaching(!).

The book concludes with four of Smith's own sermons: Good Friday, Advent, Eucharist, and Judges 11:29-40. Only the last of these truly reflects the structure of weeping, confession, and resistance. The general impression is that text is used as pretext to deal with topics of interest to the preacher.

It is awkward to criticize a book like this, because, after all, who can be FOR sexism, ageism, etc.? Yet her discussions are unconvincing. Perhaps this is because of the changes in our world. Ten years ago, such a study would have ended with advocacy of leftist socialism as a vehicle for change. In the absence of this option today, her critique sounds hollow, and her recommendations incomplete.

Moreover, her writing has a "you will never understand what I understand" flavour to it. She says a lot about the six "ISMS", but very little about how preaching might change hearts, lives, behaviour, and society. Moreover, to adopt her preaching tips means also to adopt her ideology. Is this an instance of a latent imperialism within liberationist/feminist theology? She assumes a society which is not structured as most of us believe it is, but according to a radical feminist viewpoint. Furthermore, there is little use of scripture or theology—they almost seem to be a hindrance.

Smith is a straight, white, middle-aged, middle class, fully-abled, prosperous American woman. And so all she writes comes across as second-hand, and suffers trivialization because of it. She claims to write about six different "ISMS", but in each case, she manages to reduce everything to feminism.

Her book is not really about preaching at all, but about the six issues. One might be inclined to use it as a reference for social analysis or pastoral care. But not for preaching.

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### **Texts for Preaching: A Lectionary Commentary Based on the NRSV—Year B**

Walter Brueggemann, Charles B. Cousar, Beverly R. Gaventa,  
James D. Newsome  
Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1993  
viii + 616 pp. \$32.00 U.S. hardcover

The widening official acceptance of the Revised Common Lectionary (RCL)—most recently by two Lutheran Churches, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America—is generating renewed publishing efforts, and one largely freed from earlier attempts to include Lutheran and Roman Catholic alternatives. Not a small further incentive has been the arrival of the NRSV text. Of the dizzying number of lectionary “helps” available—some for computer use—*Texts for Preaching* stands head and shoulders above most. The writers nowhere lose sight of dual aims: “the centrality of the Bible in preaching”, and “respect for those who regularly face the task of bringing the text to contemporary speech” (Preface).

While the pericope studies “focus directly on the task of proclamation”, this does not result in either snappy sermon starters or pre-packaged mindless outlines. Rather, the material is constantly homiletically suggestive. Sometimes the structural movements of a text tug the preacher along; or a verse by verse exposition forces detailed attention; or the distinct movements of thought ensnare the wandering mind; or a theme (usually themes) captures the imagination; or an incisive shift in rhetoric or the exploration of a word injects adrenalin; or the very content itself opens windows and doors into the heart and into our corporate life under God. In addition, each Proper is prefaced with a short articulation of a common theme, and the participation of each lesson in that theme is deftly sketched.

One needs to be careful of these unifying themes. In the Advent to Pentecost semester thematic unity of lessons is quite pronounced, yet even here there is occasional “lectio continua” (as in the use of 1 and 2 Corinthians in Epiphany and Acts in Easter), and thus to subsume each Proper under a theme requires more or less force. Even more so is this the case in the post-Pentecost season in which the First Lesson takes us through 1 and 2