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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

Samuel, sections of Wisdom (Song, Proverbs, Job), and Ruth; the Second Lesson proceeds through 2 Corinthians, Ephesians, James, and Hebrews; and the Gospel of course journeys from Mark 2 through 13, interrupted by a five-Sunday coverage of John 6. Given this intentional stress on the continuous reading of Scripture, one wonders why the authors are so insistent on a "unifying theme for the day".

We are confronted here, on the one hand, with a peculiarly Protestant phenomenon. The so-called "liturgical churches" (Anglican, Lutheran, Orthodox, and Roman Catholic) have historically been content to let unity "happen" in the context of the liturgy of Word and Sacrament, with, at most, allowing an Introit or the Collect, and most of all the liturgical season, to sound a bit of a louder note. Which is to say, the lectionary served the liturgy. Now, on the other hand, the Revised Common Lectionary, though it is based on the Roman Catholic *Ordo*, is particularly conscious of preaching: the lectionary serves the preacher. *Texts for Preaching* attempts to incorporate both these dimensions, and the valiant struggle to define a theme for the day highlights the tension. Occasionally the authors acknowledge the tension: "The Epistle reading is a bit of an odd fit here" (Epiphany 6, p. 143); "The choice of the parameters of the Gospel lesson for this Sunday seems unusual" (Mark 6:1-13, Proper 9, p. 418); "At first glance, the only thing these readings appear to have in common is that each of them has some relationship to the priesthood. . . . At a deeper level, however, each of the four passages becomes a reminder of the need for perseverance in matters of faith" (Proper 28, p. 586). I find myself objecting: why this fierce determination to find, at all costs, a total unifying theme, especially in the semester of the year so distinctive for the continuous reading of Scripture? Beware of these themes; they are helpful, of course, but at what cost to scriptural interpretation?

Not all the RCL properes are treated. Omitted are those for the Holy Name of Jesus (January 1) and its alternative, New Year's Day; Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Saturday of Holy Week, and (understandably) the lessons for the Easter Vigil; Thanksgiving Day; the non-continuous First Lessons for the post- Pentecost season; and any single lesson alternatives.

The authors are first-rate scholars: Walter Brueggemann, Charles B. Cousar, and James D. Newsome all teach at Columbia Theological Seminary, Decatur, Georgia; Beverly R. Gaventa teaches at Princeton Theological Seminary. According to the Preface, "From the First Sunday of Advent through Good Friday, Walter Brueggemann contributes studies of the Old Testament lessons; James Newsome, the Psalms; Charles Cousar, the Epistle lessons; and Beverly Gaventa, the Gospel lessons. For the remainder of the year, James Newsome writes on the Old Testament lessons, Walter Brueggemann on the Psalms, Beverly Gaventa on the Epistle lessons, and Charles Cousar on the Gospel lessons. The writing of the introductions is shared by all."

An Index of readings completes the volume.

Very highly recommended not only for preachers but also for Church School teachers whose curricula are integrated with the RCL.

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