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The Principle of Mercy: Taking the Crucified People from the Cross

Jon Sobrino

Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1994

199 pp.

The Principle of Mercy: Taking the Crucified People from the Cross is a collection of nine essays about the church's practice of mercy in the context of "this divided humankind where some live and others die, where the life of some partly depends on the death of others and vice versa". The book has three parts: I. The Essential Character of Mercy, II. Two Manifestations of Mercy: Priesthood and Solidarity, and III. An Analysis of the Crucified Reality of the Third World. Sobrino's examples come from experience with the crucified people of El Salvador—not only his martyred friends and Archbishop Oscar Romero but also the nameless *campesinos* who suffered crucifixion long before the church brought their suffering to the world's attention.

Jon Sobrino is a Jesuit priest and liberation theologian from Spain who has spent most of the last forty years living and working in El Salvador. Because he was out of the country at the time, he survived the 1989 government massacre of six of his Jesuit companions and two women at the University of Central America.

The idea of "taking the crucified people from the cross" comes from Sobrino's beloved, martyred colleague Ignacio Ellacuria. "Crucified people" was Ellacuria's way of referring to the Third World. The church's most urgent demand, according to Sobrino, is to take the crucified people from the cross. This, to him, means practicing a risky kind of mercy. Using the Parable of the Good Samaritan as inspiration, Sobrino explores The Samaritan Church and the Principle of Mercy, Theology in a Suffering World, Yahweh's Suffering Servant Today, A Theological Analysis of Christian Solidarity and The Legacy of the Martyrs of the Central American University.

Sobrino's essay "Towards a Determination of the Nature of Priesthood" responds to the question "What is the essential nature of priesthood?" Not surprisingly, Sobrino thinks that the essence of priesthood is mercy: the priest comes near in mercy as Jesus does and sacrifices his own life. Sobrino contrasts this New Testament view of Christ's priesthood with the Old Testament view of priests who were set apart, "rigorous with human beings", and distinct from victims.

Sobrino extends these thoughts about priesthood beyond the narrow sense of ministerial priesthood to an entire *priestly church* filled with forgiven people who are capable of risky mercy in the middle of real history. This priestly church identifies with victims and shares in their crucifixion and resurrection. It uses the example of the Good Samaritan to reclaim what it means to be a human being who "absorbs in her innards the suffering of another".

Pastors who hope to help congregations reflect on the difference between simple *works of mercy* (feeding, clothing, housing) and a guiding *principle of mercy* (a risky ongoing process of sharing the crucifixion and resurrection of the majority of the world's people) will find encouragement in these essays. This book is good preparation for accompanying a congregation through the process of writing a mission statement. It challenges North American readers (for whom it is written) to consider what it means to be the church in a world of misery and injustice that is marked by movements of liberation and unexpected hope.

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The Practice of Preaching

Paul Scott Wilson

Toronto: The United Church Publishing House; Nashville:
Abingdon, 1995
329 pp.

Pretty well every year someone, somewhere, offers a homiletical primer to preachers and seminary students. Each is important if only to signal contemporary concerns and developments, and to share the accumulated wisdom of the author. Occasionally a primer becomes a homiletical benchmark. Henry Grady Davis' *Design for Preaching* (1958) was one; Fred Craddock's *As One Without Authority* (1971) and David Buttrick's *Homiletic* (1987) are others. My judgment is that Paul Scott Wilson's *The Practice of Preaching* will be the latest homiletical benchmark.

H. Grady Davis signalled two major shifts in homiletical theory: the concept of organic unity (content and form are inseparable), which opened the door to ways of knowing other than rational logic; and the perception of language as the creator of reality, which allowed us to begin to perceive the sermon as the creation of an alternative world in which we can live. Craddock articulated the postmodern shift from preacher-oriented to listener-oriented preaching, which means that it is the listener, finally, who through participation in the sermon makes meaning. Buttrick examined meticulously "what happens" in the preaching-listening situation ("images", he concluded, are "formed in consciousness") and thus installed ancient rhetoric as once more the companion discipline of homiletics.

But homiletics has always been uneasy with this mate because rhetoric, after all, is the "art of persuasion" while preaching's aim is to "proclaim". Does not, therefore, the embracing of rhetoric mean the wholesale abdication of the *kerygma* of the N.T. in favour of catering to the needs and whims of the listener? In a day of huge media influence, panic regarding member