

Apologetic Preaching: Proclaiming Christ to a Postmodern World

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Apologetic Preaching has much to commend it. For instance, it offers one of the clearest explanations why a preacher would consider making much more use of the inductive/narrative quality of many sections Scripture when preaching to postmoderns (see the end of this review).

However, it also won't take long for the discerning reader to put his discernment to use. For example:

- On page 72, the author carves out an all-too-neat dichotomy between faith and science that should make uncomfortable those who take Scripture's statements on creation at face value.
- On page 75, the "certainty" of Christianity is based on the testimony of the changed lives of believers. This seems to be a caving in to the subjectivism of the age. While such subjective testimony of our lives is important to gain a hearing among those yearning for something that can infuse difference and meaning into the monotony of modern life, the fallen nature of sinner/saints will forever turn this subjective experience into an unstable foundation for salvation. Without the unshakable promises of God's Word this will only set people up for great discouragement.
- For anyone who takes the exposition of Scripture seriously, the sermonic examples (complete sermons are a large part of almost every chapter) are often disappointing.
 - The sermon on Jonah (79-83) seems to come close to proclaiming law and gospel but never quite gets there.
 - The "sermon" on pages 94-99 can only by the greatest stretch of definition be called textual. The assumptions it makes about why Pilate said what he said and what was behind his writing of the charge against Jesus end up driving the sermon. When assumed knowledge becomes the major emphasis of the sermon, the authority of the sermon quickly takes a hit.
 - In general, the book's sermons might make interesting lectures on a university campus, but to call them Christian preaching seems somewhat of a stretch.
- He defines what it means to have "faith" as: "It means being totally sold out for Jesus" (114), thereby utterly confusing justification and sanctification.

But the assumption of this reviewer is that a Lutheran pastor would not pick up this book looking for ready-made sermons nor seeking a replacement for Walther's ***Law & Gospel***. If that is what the reader is looking for, then he should look elsewhere. But if, instead, a Lutheran pastor is

looking for a relatively brief and insightful tour through the postmodern mindset and how to speak to those who think that way, then Loscalzo offers much that is worth pondering.

For instance, Loscalzo speaks eloquently as he addresses why we do not want to become timid about speaking the whole counsel of God to a postmodern world.

- Far too many pulpits have been, for too long, apologizing - that is, making excuses - for God. Timid sermons that dismiss sticky issues of Christian faith...pabulum preaching pleasing to peoples' ears but unable to offer transformed lives will be transparent to the skeptical lenses of postmodernity. Will Willimon was right: the gospel of Jesus Christ is an intrusive word. It cuts against the grain of societal wisdom. It calls into question rational sensibilities and sticks its finger in the face of rabid relativism. It demands more than intellectual assent. It does not tolerate dilution in the company of modernism, postmodernism, or postpostmodernism. More than anything, the postmodern world expects authenticity. If our preaching offers anything less, for God's sake let us shut up and let the stones themselves cry out. (22)

Loscalzo also offers some well thought through encouragements for why we might be wise, if we haven't done so before, to branch out from preaching only theme and part, deductive sermons. Here is a sizeable portion of Loscalzo's defense for why we would be wise to consider the use of more inductive and narrative approaches.

- The homiletic method I propose, without being dogmatic about methodology, is based on induction rather than deduction. Deductive logic requires a predisposed commitment to a premise or proposition. The primary homiletic method of the modern era used deductive logic for presenting the gospel. An example is Billy Graham's use of the phrase "the Bible says." This phrase dominated his preaching through the mid-1980's. His assumption was that if he could prove something was biblical, he would have a better chance of convincing his hearers to respond to what they heard. I presume he believed his hearers had a predisposed commitment to the Bible as an authoritative word on matters of faith.

While Graham still uses that phrase, it is not peppered as liberally throughout his sermons today. I believe the reason is that he knows he must first move his hearers to accept the Bible as a basis for faith before they will accept or believe what it says. This was not an assumption he had to make with his modern listeners. His newer strategy addresses the postmodern milieu, and thus his sermons have become more inductive in structure and method.

Please take note here that a particular homiletical method- inductive or deductive - merely has to do with how the message is unpacked for the listeners. In other words, homiletical method should not affect the theological content of the sermon, only how the

message is communicated. My presupposition for this book is that postmodern listeners will respond favorably to an inductive homiletical method because of this method's starting point.

Induction begins with people's experiences and moves them to an appropriate conclusion. Induction in preaching often begins with human experience and moves people to the truth of biblical revelation. The inductive method, then, does not require a prior commitment to a premise or proposition. This homiletic method leads the hearers to the theological conclusion presented in the biblical text.

Thus I am proposing that apologetic preaching to postmodern listeners be sensitive to their appreciation of stories and take seriously their desire to be led to - rather than bombarded with - theological truth...I am not advocating a fixed absolute homiletic method....I am suggesting a homiletic method that intentionally takes into consideration postmodernism's craving for stories and its inherent skepticism of objective religious truth. (39-40)

Insights such as these help make *Apologetic Preaching* a worthwhile read.