



Salmon, Marilyn J., Preaching without Contempt: Overcoming Unintended Anti-Judaism

31.03.2008 | James Rowe Adams

James Rowe Adams, TCPC Founder and Honorary Advisor; Fortress Press, paperback, 183 pages

Not many preachers ever intend to deliver a sermon that supports a contempt for Jews or the Jewish religion, and they can't imagine that they could do so unintentionally, so they are likely to ignore *Preaching without Contempt*. Assuming this book has nothing for them could be a serious mistake. At this point in history, when many Christians regularly denounce the state of Israel because of its treatment of Palestinians, hostility toward Jews needs only a little encouragement to break out into the open with predictably tragic results.

Preachers who do not believe that they have ever inadvertently said anything against Judaism would do well to ask themselves some of the questions raised in this book by Marilyn Salmon, who teaches what she calls "Newer Testament" theology at United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities:

- Have you ever used a negative portrayal of Judaism as a foil to demonstrate superior Christian values?
- Have you ever used as a text the first eight verses of the Gospel according to Mark without telling people that it is highly unlikely that Isaiah was talking about John the Baptist?
- Have you ever supported a negative portrayal of the Pharisees in the gospels without checking for historical accuracy?
- Have you ever failed to make a distinction between first-century and twenty-first century Judaism?
- Have you ever reduced one of Jesus's opponents in the gospels to a one-dimensional character representing everything you find despicable in religious people?
- Have you ever allowed the reading of a passage from John's gospel that denounces "Jews" without putting the gospel in its historic context: friction between the sect of Jesus followers and Jews of other persuasions?
- Have you ever preached about the crucifixion without stressing the fact that it was Romans who killed Jesus using a form of execution that was so common for them as to be unremarkable?

Any preacher who can answer "yes" to any of these questions is participating in the two-thousand-year-old Christian campaign to demonize the Jews. Preachers who are not proud of their

unintended anti-Judaism definitely need to spend the three or four hours required to read this book. In *Preaching without Contempt* they will find not only the practices to avoid but also positive suggestions for talking about the Pharisees, dealing with the passion narratives, and coping with the problem of John's treatment of the Jews.

Although *Preaching without Contempt* is aimed primarily at the clergy and seminarians, I recommend the book highly for the people in the pews. Marilyn Salmon can help all Christians avoid unintentional demeaning of Jewish people and their religion. I also suggest that all church members make sure that their pastors have copies of the book.