

REVIEW

Henry F. Knight, *Celebrating Holy Week in a Post-Holocaust World*

(Louisville, Ky: Westminster / John Knox Press, 2005), paper, xix +172 pp.

Reviewed by Richard E. McCarron, Catholic Theological Union at Chicago

In February 2006, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy *Newsletter* reviewed the "correct presentation of Jews and Judaism in liturgical preaching and catechesis" in anticipation of Lent and Holy Week (45–46). That cursory and timid account highlights the need for well-grounded and sustained reflection like that provided by Knight. Associate professor of religion and chaplain at the University of Tulsa, Knight seriously challenges Christian pastors, preachers, and religious educators to think and celebrate Holy Week in a way accountable to the "covenantal wholeness of our faith" (16) and the memory of the Shoah. This book is pastoral in intent and audience, reflecting careful hermeneutical and theological grounding.

Knight, ordained in the United Methodist Church, invites his readers "to limp" with him through Holy Week, the annual celebration of the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus that opens with Passion/Palm Sunday and concludes with Easter Sunday. Chapter one sets out this root metaphor of limping, drawn from Jacob's struggle with the *ish*: The Christian journey through Holy Week must be, he argues, one wounded by centuries of contempt and violence and always cognizant of the horror of the Shoah.

Knight proposes two hermeneutical strategies. The first, reading midrashically, enables pastoral ministers to overcome the supersessionism inherent in the way Christian traditions have wielded typology. Recalling the medieval acronym *PaRDeS* via Michael Fishbane (p. 13), Knight distinguishes the open narrated world of midrash from the closed typological meta-narrative. What Christians need in Holy Week is a logic of plenitude (p. 12) that takes the gaps, spaces, and implicit questions of the gospels seriously. The second hermeneutical strategy is reading post-Shoah, a hermeneutic of solidarity with the victims. He frequently invokes that all interpretation and practice must be credible "in the presence of burning children" (from Irving Greenberg). He calls for honest interpretation and recognition of the interruption of all hermeneutical enterprises in view of the Holocaust.

The subsequent chapters engage these hermeneutical strategies as Knight follows the passion narrative of Matthew with the chronology of Holy Week. He admits that the choice of Matthew is somewhat arbitrary, but the gospel's midrashic style appeals to Knight. After attending to the text, Knight offers sample liturgical celebrations to demonstrate what is at stake if a community begins to celebrate Holy Week in a post-Holocaust world.

Knight helps pastors to see the subversive quality to Jesus' entry into Jerusalem as an important frame to the week. The sample liturgy suggests a "midrashic" reading of Matthew's passion, which involves interrupting the proclamation of the narrative with pointed questions and comment. He takes up Bruce Chilton's work to offer a fresh reading of the so-called Last Supper and a reappraisal of the relationship of Jesus to temple sacrifice. He places strong emphasis on the significance of watching through the night, the "agony in the garden." It is a night filled with

even more anguish since the Shoah. In chapter five on the crucifixion (Good Friday), Knight confronts the theologies of atonement and expiation that underlie most Christian liturgies and the ways that the passion narratives are usually interpreted. This is a particularly evocative chapter that should be read by anyone stepping into the pulpit or ambo on Good Friday. It begs more theological development, but there is enough here that will make a reflective practitioner realize that there are problems with the way Christian theology avoids the “crisis of belief” evoked by innocent suffering and attempts to give intrinsic meaning to suffering.

After consideration of the stillness and mourning of Saturday, Knight limps to the garden with the Marys to find a disturbed tomb, which he emphasizes is first and foremost a “thoroughly Jewish place” (p. 135). The final two chapters relate the experience of Easter to this wounded journey to the garden and note the open-ended quality to the resurrection and the ongoing Christian journey. A select bibliography, scripture index, and subject and author index conclude the work.

While the sample liturgies are helpful as more concrete examples of what Holy Week might look like if we take the author’s contentions seriously, most of them are rather didactic. The trouble, as Knight recognizes, is that the orders of worship found in contemporary liturgical resources are still permeated with supersessionism (p. 94) and troubling typology. Those who are bound to use such texts—as for example Roman Catholics are with regard to the Lectionary and Roman Missal—can use Knight’s suggestions to chasten preaching, deliberate musical choices, and structure evenings of reflection prior to or after Holy Week to engage a more honest reflection. As denominations consider fashioning wounded or limping liturgies of Holy Week, all pastoral ministers need to take Knight’s summons seriously.