

Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S. J. *Spiritual Exercises: Based on Paul's Epistle to the Romans*. Eerdmans, 2004.

If Joseph Fitzmyer set out to cook up “chicken soup for the soul,” the result is a hearty stew indeed, complete with big chunks of meat and vegetables – though a tad short on the spices. Fitzmyer, who wrote the detailed commentary on Romans for the Anchor Bible series, here uses his vast knowledge of this letter to provide a series of exercises that can be used for devotional purposes. The title, *Spiritual Exercises*, refers to the method developed by the sixteenth-century monk Ignatius of Loyola as a way of “preparing . . . our soul to rid itself of all disordered affection and . . . of seeking and finding God’s will in the ordering of our life for the salvation of our soul” (quoted, 9). Fitzmyer structures his 24 exercises using this method. Each chapter is only 7-8 pages long and includes the Romans text, discussion of its main ideas, questions for spiritual reflection, and a psalm with some relation to the Romans text.

This book was first published in 1995 and was reissued last year by Eerdmans with a new preface. As a professor at a Christian college, I am only too aware of the yawning chasm between lay Christians and biblical scholars, so Fitzmyer is to be commended for working to bridge this gap. Nevertheless, though less technical than his commentary, this book will call forth commitment and determined effort by laypersons to plumb its depths. While the author writes in clear and accessible language and omits footnotes, he does not water down Paul’s theology and extensive interaction with the Hebrew Bible.

However, although studying Romans has been a deeply spiritual experience for me, Fitzmyer’s approach is not mine. Over the past generation or more, a new paradigm for interpreting Romans has emerged which seeks to understand the social situation of the Jews and Gentiles in the Roman house churches. (John Toews’s recent commentary on Romans in the Believers Church series exemplifies this approach.) Fitzmyer is certainly familiar with these new insights and interacts with some of them, but they do not frame his entire discussion. Rather, he extracts a more abstract theology from Romans and seeks immediately to apply it to the individual reader’s spiritual life. For example, concepts like “sin” and “faith” are seen as personal

rather than communal; often readers must supply their own assumptions of what is considered sinful or righteous.

Further, Fitzmyer limits the purpose of Romans to Paul's introduction of himself and his gospel to a church he has never visited but hopes to visit in the future (2-3). By stressing personal salvation, Fitzmyer follows a traditional interpretive paradigm, whereas other scholars have recently framed their interpretation around the conflict between Jews and Gentiles in Rome caused in part by the political marginalization of Jews under the Emperor Claudius.

Though using the social sciences to understand the Romans letter may seem a devious way to obtain personal meaning from it, I believe it is the particularities [of the social setting] that can better address current issues like racism, church conflict between conservatives and liberals, reconciliation among believers, or the role of women in church leadership. Much can be learned about the socio-political situation in Rome from the names in Romans 16:1-16, including Phoebe's role as Paul's patron in traveling to Rome and interpreting his letter to the believers there. Yet Fitzmyer dispatches this section at the end of the book in one paragraph (216-17).

Fitzmyer also suggests in his preface that Romans 1-8 is more important than the rest of the letter (4), even though the section comprising chapters 9-11 is the theological climax of the letter, and chapters 12-15 are the ethical demands that flow from the theology of chapters 1-11. In this sense, his approach seems more Lutheran than Roman Catholic (his religious background) or Anabaptist.

Nevertheless, *Spiritual Exercises* may be congenial to Christians familiar with a traditional interpretation. It is definitely congruent with traditional assumptions about interior spirituality, especially as articulated by Ignatius of Loyola. For readers aware of how easily distracted one can become in our complicated and commercialized society, this book provides a focus and plenty of nourishment on the journey toward spiritual maturity.

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Harry Loewen. *Shepherds, Servants and Prophets: Leadership among the Russian Mennonites (ca. 1880-1960)*. Pandora Press/Herald Press, 2003.

I first became aware of a few of the significant Russian Mennonite leaders in my small orb during my formative years at Canadian Mennonite Bible College (CMBC). I met J.J. Thiessen, then chair of the board of CMBC, and marveled at his recall of student names. Through family lore I heard about David Toews, friend to my grandfather Cornelius Harder, an “aeltester” in Alberta. Toews officiated at my grandfather’s second marriage, leaving a hilarious story in our memory bank.

At CMBC I also became aware of the ending of that era of strong church leaders. There was a strong critique, not only of some of the individual leaders but of the entire “bishop” system where too much power and authority, it was said, rested in these Mennonite “popes”. We have gone through a long period of pendulum swings between giving too much power to leaders and taking away their power and authority, between putting too much emphasis on office and then too much on function.

It is good to read these leadership stories in our context of struggling rather continuously with power and authority, especially in terms of pastoral leadership. We probably will never recover the era of strong Mennonite leaders profiled so well in this book. And probably we shouldn’t. But did they, in their era, faithfully lead the Mennonite people? The answer to that, of course, is varied.

Harry Loewen describes three types of leadership which emerged in Russia, and profiles each of them in this book. (1) “The primary form of leadership was at the congregational level and might be considered as ‘spiritual’ or ‘pastoral’ leadership” (elders, ministers and deacons). (2) “In the Russian context another kind of ‘practical’ leadership emerged, more secular in form, and often concerned with economic affairs and government-Mennonite linkages” (administrators and politicians). (3) “Finally there was intellectual leadership which developed in connection with schooling and higher forms of education” (educators, writers, preacher-teachers) [pp. 12-13]. I appreciated this broad sweep and the inclusion of leaders from each area.

I also appreciated reading about many Mennonite Brethren leaders whom I in the General Conference had heard about only generally if at all.

That gave a much broader and complete scope to my sense of the Russian Mennonite story. I was also intrigued by the inclusion of the stories of some leaders on the fringe of Mennonite respectability: people like David Penner who condemned Mennonites in his 1930 book, *Anti-Menno*; David Schellenberg, who became a communist writer and ridiculed his people; and Walter Quiring, who was anti-Semitic and a Nazi sympathizer, and who rejected Mennonite non-resistance as a “bankrupt” doctrine.

The exclusion of any women leaders from a volume such as this is glaringly obvious. Loewen acknowledges that “None of the individuals dealt with are women. There were few women who would have fitted the chronological or thematic parameters of this collection. The historical circumstances of the period restricted the role of women from gaining positions of power and influence in the community, even though many women received a higher education in the late Mennonite Commonwealth” (9). He also admits that “had it not been for the courage and strength of the mothers and grandmothers in the years of the Stalinist terror and especially during the ‘Great Trek’ in 1943, little of the Mennonite faith-heritage would have survived” (10). Do we simply recognize – and bemoan – the reality of leadership roles that excluded women during that time, or do we need to redefine our parameters so that significant women’s stories can also be recorded and celebrated?

Loewen wanted the writers of these profiles to include their subjects’ personal foibles and failings, to be critical and objective enough so that we don’t have only “perfect” leaders portrayed. Some writers did better at this than did others. Overall I found the stories quite fascinating. But I did miss reading about J.J. Thiessen and David Toews, the first two significant Mennonite leaders in my memory. While book-length biographies have recently been published on both men, I still wanted to see them acknowledged and profiled here.

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William Sloane Coffin. *Credo*. Westminster John Knox Press, 2004; Warren Goldstein. *William Sloane Coffin, Jr.: A Holy Impatience*. Yale University Press, 2004.

“True, we have to hate evil; else we’re sentimental. But if we hate evil more than we love the good, we become damn good haters, and of those the world already has too many. However deep, our anger, like that of Christ, must always and only measure our love” (*Credo*, 20). Not many are masters of the turn of the phrase, the one-liner, the memorable quote, like William Sloane Coffin. Coffin’s newest book, *Credo*, is a compilation of many of his most memorable lines from fifty years of ministry. Arranged topically, his quotes remind us that more is going on here than simply a quick wit; his wit is used in the service of something larger, the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is a wit that challenges and inspires us toward a more courageous witness.

Warren Goldstein’s biography of Coffin comes along at just the right time to be paired with *Credo*. Goldstein traces Coffin’s life from privileged birth in New York City to his retirement in Vermont in 1990 where he lives today at age 81. It includes his Yale education (like that of most of his ancestors), and his training to become an accomplished musician, his fluency in several languages, his years as a CIA case officer and then as a motorcycle riding seminarian back at Yale. Coffin became famous during his seventeen years as college chaplain at Yale for his activist ministry in the civil rights and anti-war movements from the late 1950s until the mid-’70s. In 1977 he became pastor of the most influential church in American Protestant liberalism, Riverside Church in New York City, and after ten years moved on to become president of SANE/Freeze, the largest disarmament organization in the US.

As a young minister, Coffin quickly learned the importance of being able to think on his feet and say something memorable. During Coffin’s years of riding buses during the Freedom Rides or going to jail for opposing the Vietnam War, Goldstein says that the press was attracted to him because of his energy, charm, and blue-blooded background. “You become quickly aware of the fact that the press and the country generally tend to value the sensational over the valuable,” Coffin remembered, “so you better cooperate gracefully with this and try to sensationalize what is valuable. And you better have that

message ready. You better have done your homework.” He learned that “when they stick that mike in your face you better know what it is you want to say” (127).

His approach in using language and the memorable phrase to get his message across is an indicator of his approach to ministry and the mission of the church in proclaiming the gospel in today’s world. For Coffin, whether it was the given question of a reporter or the social issue of the day, he saw it as an opportunity to show the relevance of Christianity in engaging the world. And given his personality he did it with courage, elan, passion, and wit.

Goldstein reports that early in his ministry at Yale, Coffin said, “There is a big need to present the relevance of Christianity to all major areas of life [and] to the campus as a whole.” But Goldstein points out that “he made no effort to hide Christian messages under secular rubrics, to sneak in discussion of ‘values’ or ‘meaning’ without identifying their religious source. A biblically grounded, liberal Protestant minister, Coffin enjoyed the role of evangelist and wanted the entire Yale chaplaincy to reflect that unapologetic thrust and engagement with the world” (105).

Looking back, we now know that in seeking to be relevant to the world, liberal Protestantism often became so relevant there was little of the gospel left. But Goldstein’s Coffin is a reminder that it was not always quite so. Coffin’s relevancy was salted with the Bible and the love of Jesus Christ. Even though he was often impatient with the church, throughout his ministry the church remained central and the pulpit was always where he was at his best.

In both Goldstein’s enjoyable biography and in his own *Credo*, Coffin challenges the church of today to out love the haters and to be bold in its witness of Jesus Christ. As he puts it, “Most of all, in these times that are neither safe nor sane, I love to see Christians risk maximum fidelity to Jesus Christ when they can expect minimal support from the prevailing culture. I have in mind what the prophet Nathan did to King David – he spoke truth to power” (*Credo*, 148). Perhaps for such a time as this have these two books come along.

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Ben C. Ollenburger and Gayle Gerber Koontz, eds. *A Mind Patient and Untamed: Assessing John Howard Yoder's Contributions to Theology, Ethics, and Peacemaking*. Telford, PA: Cascadia Press, 2004.

In March 2002, a group of scholars, church folk, and the curious gathered, under the auspices of the Believers Church Conference series, to assess John Howard Yoder's theological, ethical, and peacemaking legacy. As one of the participants, I was glad for the opportunity to re-visit some of the papers presented there. Considering these essays now in book form, I was struck by the fluidity of who this legacy is for and how it ought to be regarded. There is no clear consensus about the legacy we have inherited from Yoder.

One has only to look at this volume's table of contents to see that among Yoder's most immediate constituency (the Believers Church) there is a pleasing diversity of approaches to both affirmation and critique of his work. Something uniting the chapters is how they all seem to "take it to the next level": each writer wants to take Yoder along with them as they pursue their own intellectual and spiritual questions, believing they are indeed asking the right questions. Lest this comment be taken as an attempt to harmonize the diversity in this volume, let me quickly reassert that there is no lack of scholarly debate among Yoder's current interpreters, especially those included here.

For us Mennonites, academic conferences and gatherings are simply another way of doing and being church – a dynamic to which Stanley Hauerwas's caution in the introduction speaks, at least in part. Hauerwas writes, "the Mennonite character of this book could give the impression that Mennonites are more likely to understand Yoder than those outside that community. . . . Because Yoder is equally challenging to everyone, non-Mennonites should not let the Mennonite 'ownership' of Yoder deter them from reading this book" (12).

What this means is that we have a sense that our academic work is part of our corporate Christian witness as a church. The reverse is also true: for many of us in the academy, our scholarly work is as a noisy cymbal if it is disconnected from congregational life. This is why I find the essay by Gerald Biesecker-Mast, "The Radical Christological Rhetoric of Yoder," particularly helpful. He uses Yoder's own rhetoric and what we might call "method" to ask about the rhetorical force we employ in our own speech, and urges us to

take seriously Yoder's conviction that "the church . . . must in its very social and institutional character make visible the patience and nonviolence intrinsic to the witness given in Christ" (48). "God's speech performance in . . . Jesus Christ" has everything to do with the character of Christian witness (47).

Harry Huebner's essay, "The Christian Life as Gift and Patience," reminds us that Yoder's critique and ultimate rejection of liberation theology was based on its methodological and, I would add, rhetorical choice to "ignore nonviolence and divine agency" (36). This emphasizes the need for continuity in how we speak about God and practice the rituals and ordinances of Christ's church.

Biesecker-Mast's essay also creates space to voice a couple of persistent questions: (1) Why are so few women writing about Yoder from a feminist perspective? (Rachel Ressor-Taylor's "Yoder's Mischievous Contribution to Mennonite Views on Anselmian Atonement" is the sole representative of women's work with Yoder; however, she does not find much value in feminist-oriented readings and critiques of Anselm's theory.) (2) Why are so few men bringing feminist perspectives into conversation with Yoder in their own work?

The event occasioning these thoughtful essays took place ten years after a conference at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries concerning Mennonite peace theology and violence against women. At that time another collection of thoughtful essays wrestled with another persistent question: If we as pacifist Christians cannot make peace and live nonviolently in our own homes, what integrity does our peace witness have in the wider world? This question was raised again this past summer as part of the Mennonite Central Committee-sponsored Peace Theology Research Project. As a church, we continue struggling to offer an answer that has the theological weight Yoder taught us to demand of ourselves.

Surely, Yoder's legacy does not lead us to turn away from immediate and pressing questions of justice, a point made by Alain Epp-Weaver's piece comparing the work of Yoder and Edward Said, titled "On Exile," and Willard Swartley's examination of jubilee, titled "Smelting for Gold."

As we continue reflecting on who Yoder is for us as (a) church, should we consider how impatient he could be with those who had allowed their minds to become tamed by asking easy questions?

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David B. Greiser and Michael King, eds., *Anabaptist Preaching: A Conversation Between Pulpit, Pew and Bible*. Telford, PA: Cascadia Publishing House, 2003.

Anabaptist Preaching may signal an era when children of the Radical Reformation are willing to engage in conversation and considered reflection on homiletics, the art and theology of preaching. David Greiser and Michael King, with sponsorship from the Institute for Preaching at Eastern Mennonite Seminary, offer here a collection of fourteen essays by North Americans from the Anabaptist tradition who preach and dare to write about it.

One theme running through their work is the Anabaptist sermon as a “conversation” between pulpit, pew, and Bible. Greiser introduces this three-way conversation with a thumbnail historical sketch of Anabaptist preaching. Key for him is the early practice of *Zeugnis*, or testimony. The preacher’s interpretation of the Bible was commented on immediately by the testimonies of fellow believers, thus creating conversation. Nancy R. Heisey continues this discussion. The metaphor of hermeneutic is often that of a bridge: we simply need to bring the freight of the gospel to our own era over the bridge that spans history and culture. Heisey suggests that reading the Bible looks less like a bridge and more like a dance where the Bible, the pew, and the pulpit, together with the Holy Spirit, join one another for the sake of the gospel. June Alliman Yoder gives practical advice on including the communal voice in the process of sermon preparation. Dennis Hollinger gets to the heart of this issue by looking at integrity on the part of the preacher and the congregation.

Another theme is the nature of the “postmodern” world. The complexities of preaching in a time when the authoritative place of the Bible, the church, the preacher, and faith itself appears undermined raises crucial questions. Michael King encourages the “weaving of enchantment” – an imaginative but truthful reading of the Bible – as a way to connect with postmodern hearers. With respect to the erosion of biblical authority and the increase in biblical illiteracy, Mary Shertz gives encouragement and strategies for reading the Bible. Nathan Showalter treats preaching in the context of the multicultural church, offering insights into how the gospel can be shared in it.

While the remaining essays treat the above issues in various ways, new topics and themes also emerge. Some attempt to push the Anabaptist

preacher into territory where he or she does not often venture. Dawn Ottoni Wilhelm encourages prophetic preaching, wisely differentiating between social justice preaching and Biblical prophetic preaching. David Stevens writes about the use of analogy when reading and preaching from the Old Testament. Mark Wenger offers practical suggestions for making theology and doctrine come alive in preaching. The theme of God's grace often gets missed in light of the strong Anabaptist belief in discipleship, an issue Ervin Stutzman explores historically and theologically. Rebecca Slough places the sermon in the context of worship, encouraging a stronger unity between worship and preaching.

Greiser and King bring up new, tantalizing questions. North American Anabaptists may indeed shy away from, for instance, preaching prophetically or doctrinally, or without proper emphasis on God's grace. But how do we know how contemporary Anabaptists preach, apart from local or anecdotal sources? Further study on the actual "state of the sermon" is needed. Is the often practiced "sermon discussion" in our churches a retrieval of the romanticized Anabaptist practice of *Zeugnis*, a child of postmodern egalitarian notions, or a bit of both?

The chapters in this volume range in style and tone, from Renee Sauder's autobiographical-reflective essay on narrative preaching to Lynn Jost's academic treatise on David Buttrick's method, but they all take the pulpit, the church, the Bible, and theological reflection seriously. These theological and very practical chapters and the study-guide at the back of the book make this a collection that begs to be read.

Reading lists for preaching classes in Anabaptist seminaries suggest we have been drawing our theologies and preaching methods from other traditions. However, *Anabaptist Preaching* bids to mark the beginning of an era when a distinctly Anabaptist voice might be heard. So, place this volume next to Craddock, Buttrick, Achtemeier or whatever other popular preaching manuals are on your bookshelf, and listen to the new conversation that develops.

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Robert A. Riall (trans.), Galen A. Peters (ed.). *The Earliest Hymns of the Ausbund: Some Beautiful Christian Songs Composed and Sung in the Prison at Passau. Published in 1564*. Pandora Press, 2003.

In his preface to this book, C. Arnold Snyder writes, “There is no reason why the hymn texts should not be considered primary sources on a par with Anabaptist pamphlets, letters, and prison confessions, and studied in that light.” He laments a historical lack of interest in the study of this sixteenth-century Anabaptist hymnal, and then points out that “Riall’s translation of the Passau hymns goes a good distance in remedying this situation” (10-11). This volume in the Anabaptist Texts in Translation series offers a great service in making this important material so attractively available.

Anabaptists and Mennonites have had a long history with singing. It is entirely appropriate that the contents and history of the Ausbund be more fully known, for both a knowledge of what our forebears sang and a wider understanding of the significance of song in the spread of a radical religious movement.

In his introduction to the translations, Robert Riall describes the colorful and long history of the Ausbund from its roots through its evolution. Of particular value is his articulation of what he calls the “Message” of the book (30-39). There are four points of certainty he explores as the editorial standard by which hymns were included there: Christ’s External and Internal Word, Holiness, Suffering, and Joy and Resignation. This is useful information applicable, I suspect, well beyond studies in hymnology.

The book is a compendium of translations, remarkably and clearly documented with footnotes, endnotes, Scriptural citations/allusions, and all manner of useful details. The cross-references are helpful to the reader who takes the time to pursue them. Riall, his editor, and the publisher have treated a hymnal that has been used continuously for nearly 450 years with the respect appropriate to an important historical document.

Holding this volume in my hands, perusing it to see what it contained, and imagining how it might be used, it seemed to me that it calls for a companion piece, requiring comparable time and attention to other aspects of the Ausbund. Apparently Riall has done some work with meters and rhyme schemes, but it is omitted here. It ought to be made accessible. Such a companion piece

should also explore the musical aspects of the hymnal with the same careful research. Some of this work has been done (cited in the endnote on p.12), but it may well be time for a new look at the hymnal's musical dimension.

Finally, I found myself wondering if it's time – perhaps already overdue – that someone (a poet/theologian) re-visit some of these texts and adapt them for modern usage. Our congregational song would be enriched by having available some of these themes that are as unique in modern Christianity as they were when the book first appeared. Perhaps in the garb of music from the time of the *Ausbund* or in newer musical attire, we could continue to give voice to those life-giving “beautiful Christian songs” that sustained prisoners and set them free. This is certainly no new idea, but one might hope that new energy turned loose by the appearance of Riall's volume will catch the imagination of those who make songs for us to sing.

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