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# Spiritual life: the foundation for preaching and teaching

John H. C. Neeb

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As the book is based upon the Roman Lectionary, one might hesitate to recommend it, except that most of the texts considered are fortunately similar to Revised Common Lectionary texts. The reader needs, if using thoughts from the book, only to make certain the verses used as references are indeed verses in that day's Revised Common Lectionary. With that consideration, if a preacher is in the market for sermon-stimulating thoughts for Cycle A, this book might be worth the price.

Kenneth L. Peterson  
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan

## **Spiritual Life: The Foundation for Preaching and Teaching**

John Westerhoff

Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994

80 pp.

A seasoned writer of books, John Westerhoff has provided an autobiographical treatment of his subject, the "spiritual life". The book is based on materials presented in a course at the College of Preachers in Washington, D.C.

Westerhoff defines "spiritual life" as "ordinary, everyday life lived in an ever deepening and loving relationship to God and therefore to one's true or healthy self, all people, and the whole of creation" (1). There is a short chapter on each of the following topics: "Exploring the Spiritual Life", "Preaching and Teaching in a New Day", "The Spirituality of Preachers and Teachers", "The Spirituality of Preaching and Teaching", "Various Ways of Living Spirituality", "Developing a Spiritual Discipline", and a "Conclusion".

His message is very pointed. Maintaining the spiritual life is hard work. Prayer is "highly disciplined", "labor-intensive" and "often without a great deal to show for it" (12). Yet if one is going to preach or teach one must be engaged in learning. "If we are not learners, we ought not teach!" (35).

Preaching and teaching require a different approach in a new day. After the Enlightenment which turned the world into "objects for our analysis and manipulation" we now focus on "faith, character, and consciousness" (19) aware that all knowledge is tacit, personal knowing.

Westerhoff suggests four requirements for preachers and teachers. First, a willingness to embrace suffering; second, to lead lives marked by solitude and silence; third, a willingness to pay attention to the deep restlessness in our lives; fourth, to offer to the community an example of the image of Christ. He draws liberally on the insights of others, e.g., Henri N ouwen's statement "that our worth is more than our efforts and not the same as our usefulness" (35).

Westerhoff claims that preaching and teaching are “first of all, creating the space for the developing of questions and the search for answers” (43). The best metaphor for the human course is a pilgrimage (48).

Westerhoff takes some short cuts in trying to explain the schools of spirituality and this section suffers from a lack of clarity, i.e., kataphatic and apophatic typologies along with speculative and affective categories.

Using the metaphor of jogging, Westerhoff offers a number of practical suggestions for persons who wish to develop a spiritual discipline, noting that one needs to be rigid in following the discipline and maintain a regular time and familiar space (67). Although he doesn't state it explicitly, the tacit goal of the spiritual discipline is to “feel better” (66). He maintains that praying the Scriptures is the most important or central activity of the discipline (70).

In a summary he remarks that people are looking for “a faith founded on first hand experience”. He returns to his main thesis that in order to preach or teach one requires a vibrant spiritual life.

Finally, he admits to a disposition to the Orthodox and Roman Catholic spiritual traditions despite writing for a Reformed publisher. Indeed, Lutheran readers will look for a different kind of grace in the book. However, this book is mandatory reading for those who wish to preach or teach in the church today.

John H. C. Neeb  
Waterloo Lutheran Seminary

## **Pitfalls in Preaching**

Richard L. Eslinger

Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1996

xvi + 152 pp.

Any preacher who has worried about or even despaired of communicating with contemporary listeners will welcome this book. Here is an excellent evaluative companion and guide for preachers. It is also an excellent introduction to what is called the “new homiletic” or “postmodern homiletic”. The new homiletic began with preaching-as-storytelling in the 1970s, blossomed in the loamy mix of metaphor, narrative, rhetoric, liberation theology, and literary and related biblical criticisms in the 1980s, and found consensus in the postmodern trends and characteristics in the 1990s. In effect, the new homiletic is the shift from a rationalistic and propositional (“three points and a poem”) base to a narrative base. The traditional “points”, which organized a set of ideas and followed a propositional logic, have given way to a sequence of “moves”, scenes, or episodes in a homiletical plot. The preacher attempts not to construct a rationalistic outline which appeals primarily to an intellectual way of knowing, but to