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## Bringing the word to life

Kenneth L. Peterson

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all of her selected preachers, who preached the "biblical" sermons Davis selected for this book, also preached sermons that would be called thematic. What made these preachers great was not an exclusive focus on one particular style of exegesis and/or hermeneutic, but thorough attention to the homiletical task and profound understanding of their intended audience. Loren Mead has suggested that before one can proclaim good news, one needs to know the bad news. These selected preachers were great preachers precisely because they knew what was bad news for their listeners, not because they approached Scripture in a particular way.

It is difficult to recommend this book, particularly to Lutheran readers. It is not a good introduction to Anglican preaching, nor to biblical or Old Testament preaching. On the one hand, given the present ever closer relationship between Anglicans and Lutherans, it might serve one useful purpose: because of its polemical nature, it gives a glimpse of the "family fight" happening within one branch of the Anglican family (the Episcopal Church) between "fundamentalist" and "post-liberal" factions on one side, and so-called "liberal Protestantism" on the other. It thus might give Lutherans a more intimate view of Anglicans than can be obtained through the more "official" conversation documents. On the other hand, it also has a quality of the airing of Anglican dirty laundry, and thus might be better avoided.

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## **Bringing The Word to Life**

Michael R. Kent

Mystic, Conn.: Twenty-third Publications, 1995

143 pp, \$9.95 Softcover

This book consists of a series of brief meditations based upon Cycle A of the Lectionary. Each meditation is approximately one and a half pages in length, with an additional short paragraph which raises questions or discussion thoughts for that Sunday or festival.

While definitely Roman Catholic in its origin and approach, the book contains some thoughts for other preachers. Ideas brought forth for such festival or special days as Ash Wednesday, Transfiguration, Ascension, and Corpus Christi were particularly stimulating. For instance, on Ascension Day, reflecting upon the words of the angels (Acts 1), the author reminds the reader that Christianity is a religion of action, not a philosophical debating society.

There is an interesting index at the end of the book, listing topics and themes as they appear in the various meditations. Twenty deal with Spiritual Growth, eighteen with Responsibility, and fourteen with Optimism and another fourteen with Relationships.

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.

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## **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).