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Praying the catechism

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in the Holy Week liturgies. It provides a window on another tradition much like our own, and gives background, theology, and pastoral suggestions for enriching the parish celebration of these events.

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Praying the Catechism

Donald W. Johnson

Winnipeg: Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, 1995
211 pp.

The occasion for the preparation of this book is the development of an Adult Catechumenate in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada. The “reintroduction” of this ancient rite acknowledges that “Christendom” has ended and that Christians are once more a minority—in influence if not in number. The process of the Adult Catechumenate is intended both for those who have not been baptized and for those who have and are now, as adults, awakening to the call of Christ. This book is intended to be given to such persons at the time in the process when they are accepted in the congregation as “Candidates for Baptism”; the most advantageous time for this is the beginning of Lent. It provides them with a discipline “to put off the old” and “to put on Christ”, which climaxes in Baptism or the Affirmation of Baptism during the Easter Vigil.

The book provides 90 occasions of meditation, reflection, and prayer: 40 days before and 50 days after Baptism. Thus if Baptism occurs at the Easter Vigil, the 90 days cover the seasons of Lent and Easter. Based essentially on Luther’s *Small Catechism*, Johnson’s intent is to *pray* the Catechism rather than memorize it or discuss it—though these are not ruled out. Accordingly, we made it our daily devotion during Lent and Easter. To emphasize prayer and meditation, and to extend the discipline over 90 days, Johnson augments the Catechism by drawing texts from Scripture and appropriate liturgies (from the *Lutheran Book of Worship*) especially in the sacramental sections. After the section on Baptism he includes a section on “Gifts”.

The book is a breakthrough, not only in its use of the *Small Catechism* as the basis for meditation and prayer, but also in its incorporation of the Catechism, the liturgy, the flow of the Church Year, and the fellowship of the congregation into the process of “making disciples”. Each devotion begins with a text from the *Small Catechism* (or Scripture of liturgy), enjoins a time of reflection, offers several paragraphs of pointed commentary which push the pray-er to probe her/his own life in society and church, and

provides directions for prayer. When used for family or household devotions the commentary is highly productive of discussion, as we can attest.

It goes without saying that a book of this nature and for these purposes will evolve, and one hopes the church will provide structures and means for continuing work on it even as the process of the Adult Catechumenate undergoes refinement and change. It may be noted, for example, that often the language is formulaic (e.g., in the commentary on the benefits of Baptism, p. 111), or difficult conceptually (just what does "dominion of God" mean? p. 65), or experientially limited (e.g., the farm conservation efforts in one of the commentaries on the First Article of the Creed, pp. 52-53). And Jesus did not say "Today, salvation has come to this house" to Lazarus, but to Zacchaeus (p. 111). After all, the world view, images, and metaphors of the Bible and the *Small Catechism* are increasingly remote from our secularized and technologized population. It is appropriate, therefore, that *Praying the Catechism* is set in a total discipling process.

Don Johnson is pastor of Gloria Dei Lutheran Church in North Vancouver, and served as chair of the task force on the Adult Catechumenate for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada. We owe him huge thanks for creative and innovative work.

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Preaching as Weeping, Confession, and Resistance: Radical Responses to Radical Evil

Christine M. Smith

Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993

191 pp.

Christine Smith, Associate Professor of Preaching and Worship at the United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities in Minneapolis, has written this odd book, which claims to be on the subject of homiletics, but is no such thing. Instead, it is a personal testimony of the author's discovery of what she calls "radical evil" in the world, and her suggestions of "radical responses" to this evil by the preacher. Her responses to evil are expressed in the three words of the book's title: Weeping, Confession, and Resistance.

She calls her study a reflection on the "third world of preaching" (p. 1), and focuses on "the particular issues, social systems, pervasive values, and theological understandings that dominate and structure the world in which we preach" (p. 1). Her response to evil, then, is to preach against it, and to focus on preaching as the act of naming evil, and a commitment to change. By this, she wishes to "help preachers become more politically and socially aware and more theologically responsible in a world caught in a web of radical evil" (p. 7).