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# Preaching to a Church in Crisis: A Homiletic for the Last Days of the Mainline Church

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While we need to be reminded that no lectionary resource (including this one) can substitute for a quality commentary, nevertheless this and its companion volumes are valuable because they are deliberately intended for preaching and teaching, briskly and productively gathering mind and imagination to focus on just this set of lessons at this time of the church year.

As users of the Revised Common Lectionary are aware, each cycle offers in Propers 4 through 29 (the post-Pentecost season) both a set of paired OT-Gospel readings and a set of semicontinuous OT readings. *Texts for Preaching* follows the semicontinuous pattern—which is the pattern adopted both by the Anglican Church of Canada and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada.

An index of all the cycle A texts, in biblical order, is included.

In your list of lectionary resources for preaching and teaching, put *Texts for Preaching* at the top!

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## **Preaching To A Church In Crisis: A Homiletic For The Last Days Of The Mainline Church**

John Killinger

Lima, Ohio: CSS Publishing Co., 1995

123 pp.

The near-Buttrickian tone of this book's subtitle immediately ignited my interest; as I read the introduction, my imagination was soon captured as well. With ever-increasing anticipation I savoured its description of the "almost unbearable" stresses on clergy and the petty "agitation" rampant among congregational members nowadays, which have meant that "the incidence of clergy breakdowns, resignations, scandals, and firings has risen dramatically in recent years" (9).

My growing sense of hope for relief reached its zenith when I read, "This book is my attempt to say something to [those clergy] who have called or written about their troubles in ministry...and [address] what it is like to preach in times like these" (10). Instantly, I wondered whether this book might prove enlightening to the variously designated Protestant 'curia' currently cloistered around the 'magisterium' of Bibby, Percy & Mead, Inc.!

Following the introduction, the book's three chapters discuss, respectively, the "disintegration" of the church and reasons for it ("The End Of An Era—And The End Of The Mainline"); the "enormous cultural shift" parishioners continue to endure ("The Sensibilities Of The Saints"); and

finally, potential “themes and factors that must be present in our preaching” (120) if the church is to revive (“Preaching In The Last Days Of The Mainline Church”).

Two particular, and consecutive, pages from chapter 1 will serve to illustrate the range of subjects and the depth of imagination evident throughout. This example also highlights the very occasional disappointment I felt in this overwhelmingly worthwhile book.

Commenting on biblical literacy, Killinger traces the evolution of society from agrarian through industrial and into the current “computer” age. Therein he draws a fascinating parallel between the pre-literacy of the first age and the post-literacy of the contemporary age: “. . .our Bible derives from the Agrarian age. . .characterized by folk knowledge—by stories, proverbs, mnemonic sayings. . .Now we are in the computer age, when many people can again relate to the Bible as a book of folk stories and images. . .” (40).

A profound and helpful insight and, for me, a new one! However, on the very next page, Killinger characterizes the “great debate about abortion” as “. . .a clash between those who. . .sense the transformation of human existence from an age of extensive social control to an age of privatization and individual choice and those. . .trying to restrain the transformation” (41–42).

Again, this is a new insight for me, but one I find perplexingly simplistic. There would seem to be much more involved in the abortion controversy than mere resistance to change!

More typically, this book is intellectually stimulating, personally affirming, and pastorally challenging, as this excerpt from its concluding pages testifies: “Imagine being the pastor of a group of people excited about studying the New Testament, reviewing church history, and becoming conversant in theology in order to take part in meaty congregational discussions about the life and ministry of the people of God. Instead of feeling run over and burned out all the time, such a pastor would feel constantly renewed. . .[I]magine what could happen in our churches, decimated and decrepit as many of them are, if we could only secure the primary commitment of folk remaining with our institutions to a reconsideration of the meaning of the core story and its application to the time in which we live. Does anyone doubt the power of the Holy Spirit to regenerate the church through such an encounter?” (118, 121).

As one who espouses this kind of approach and attitude in ministry, I am thankful for the encouragement of this little book, and I am confident that the regeneration Killinger envisions is a promise God will fulfill.

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