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# Womanprayer, Spiritjourney

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Non-Americans will do a bit of gagging in this last section, but ultimately we get from the book a picture of a venerable congregation and its preacher facing disturbing new realities head-on with a tough faith and a living history, boldly yet humbly attempting to be public Christians.

Eduard R. Riegert  
Waterloo Lutheran Seminary

### **Womanprayer, Spiritjourney**

Judy Esway

Mystic, Connecticut: Twenty-third Publications, 1987

70 pages

*Womanprayer, Spiritjourney* is a collection of 56 meditations in which Judy Esway weaves together scripture and reflections on her own life. Each meditation might be used as the basis for a daily devotional time. The book's strength is in Esway's ability to see the holy in the very ordinary events of daily life, like driving home on the freeway, holding an infant grandchild or taking note of grey hair. Through her openness and expressiveness we see Esway's deep trust in a loving God.

One frustrating aspect of the book is the use of scripture passages employing male sexist language. This book is written by a woman and it shares the spiritual life of that woman in a very creative way. There is no doubt that this book would appeal to other women. Unfortunately, the sexist language may obstruct the message. For example, the reflection "You are Precious in My Eyes" is about self-esteem. It is based on the scripture quotation which says: *My son, with humility have self-esteem; prize yourself as you deserve. Who will acquit him who condemns himself? Who will honour him who discredits himself?* (Sirach 10:27, 28) This male language presents a rather jarring and distracting way to begin the day's reflection. Many women in our society suffer from low self-esteem and need to hear those words "You are precious in my eyes". But it is hard for some women to receive that message in a meditation that begins with the words "my son". I think that it would have been helpful to either replace the male sexist language with female sexist language, e.g. "my daughter" instead of "my son", or perhaps better yet try for gender inclusive language, "my child".

It is interesting that Esway does make a language change for the title of one of her meditations, "It is Not Good For Woman To Be Alone". Here she speaks with warmth and love of her husband and their journey together. She also expresses her fears about losing him. "God, how it frightens me. You know I couldn't live without him. Please remember, God, it is not good for woman to be alone." Esway is being very open and spontaneous

in naming her anxieties before God. And that is a faithful echo of the type of praying found in the Psalms. But her sentence "I couldn't live without him", is troublesome. It could be just an exaggeration to express the deep feelings of loss she would have. But nevertheless it hints at an unhealthy dependence that is not good modelling for others. That sentence raises some disturbing theological questions about the meaning and purpose of her life. Would that meaning and purpose disappear if she were to lose her husband? An answer in the affirmative is not consistent with the rest of her book. The best path out of this dilemma would be to rework the offending sentence and to express her sense of loss in another way.

This book provides a helpful pattern for making the connections between faith and life experiences. But there is some danger in the book becoming a cozy experience of God. If it is to be an authentic "spiritjourney" there needs to be movement out of self and into the world. Esway talks a little about this in her meditation about her friend who speaks out against injustice and who joins peace marches and sit-ins. She acknowledges that these social justice concerns are a growing edge for her faith. Perhaps in a second volume Esway can use her talent to create meditations for this necessary part of the spiritual journey.

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## **Thinking In Story: Preaching in a Post-literate Age**

Richard A. Jensen

Lima, Ohio: C.S.S. Publishing Co., Inc., 1993

145 pp.

Richard Jensen is a systematic theologian (Wartburg Theological Seminary, 1971–1981) who has become a radio preacher (Lutheran Vespers) and a TV producer (communication department of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America). His earlier and justly famous book, *Telling the Story* (Augsburg, 1980)—an analysis of the theological, cultural, and communicational forces behind the emergence of narrative preaching—proposed "proclamatory" and "story" preaching as alternatives to "didactic" preaching; the latter, he argued, derives from a "print" or "literate" culture and is inadequate in a "media" or "electronic" culture.

The present volume is an enthusiastic endorsement of this shift to story, an enthusiasm engendered and informed by some ten years of media work. "How shall we preach to a people," he asks, "whose lives are mightily shaped by the sounds and visual images that impact their lives with unrelenting power?" (8) He answers: by learning to think in story. Accepting the