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Lectionary Preaching Workbook, Series 2: Cycle B

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Whether preaching in the mode of immediacy (narrative texts), the reflective mode (non-narrative texts), or the mode of praxis (relating experience to gospel rather than gospel to experience in that the beginning place is a human situation rather than a text), the otherwise extraordinarily helpful "move" tends to dominate, and this in spite of the fact that each move as well as the entire sermon can articulate various points-of-view.

This is a major re-expression of Homiletics based on current developments in hermeneutics, homiletics, phenomenology of language, literary criticism, communication, rhetoric, narrative and narrative theology, metaphor, style, and biblical studies. It will be the touchstone of further homiletical research and writing. Above all, it must become the partner of every serious preacher.

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Lectionary Preaching Workbook, Series II: Cycle B
Perry H. Biddle, Jr.
Lima, Ohio: C.S.S. Publishing Co., Inc., 1987
310 pp.

C.S.S. Publishing Co. devotes much or most of its energies to publishing preaching and worship resources, and many of its authors are pastors in parish ministry. Volumes of sermons on sections of the lectionary are plentifully represented in its catalogues, as are workbooks such as the one under review. Perry Biddle is pastor of First Presbyterian Church, Old Hickory, Tennessee, and has been invited by C.S.S. to write a workbook on each of the three series of the Common Lectionary. This is the first.

Apart from its actual usefulness as a workbook, two features intrigued me. One is that the workbook comes highly recommended by some noted homileticians and writers: John Killinger; Don Wardlaw, F. Dean Lueking, and Wm. H. Willimon. The second and more compelling factor was the "promise" that he was using Buttrick's "move" approach (see my review of Buttrick's *Homiletic* above). Aha! I thought, I will see Buttrick "in action"!

Biddle is careful to emphasize that this is a *workbook*. He urges preachers to plan ahead in blocks of 13 weeks (one-fourth of a year), familiarizing themselves with the pericopes, selecting the texts for sermons and starting a file for each sermon. (Certainly it seems that more liturgically determined blocks of time would be better suited to the preacher's purpose than an arbitrary number of weeks.) More intensive planning occurs in two-week

units, and the final sermon preparation in one-week units. This is wise advice for a number of reasons, not the least of which is that doing a creative thing like preaching takes time.

The workbook follows the same format for each Sunday and the festivals of the Epiphany, The Transfiguration, Reformation Sunday, All Saints Sunday, and Christ the King: (1) citation of the lessons according to the Common, Lutheran and Roman Catholic lectionaries; (2) "Comments on the Lessons" which presents overviews of the variations and sometimes the themes of the lessons; (3) "Commentary" on each lesson, exegetically based; (4) "Theological Reflections" which attempt "to locate any common themes in the passages and relate them, and to restate the central thrust of each passage"; (5) "Homiletical Moves" which are " 'moves' to 'move' the preacher to 'move' the congregation to faith in Christ or more faithful obedience to Christ"; each set of moves is given a suggestive title, and one of the lessons is selected and elaborated upon as "this preacher's choice"; (6) a suggested hymn; and (7) a brief prayer.

It is worth remarking that preachers will need to open their *Bibles* alongside this workbook, and not just their lectionaries. Biddle comments on the longest lections (e.g., John 2:13-25, RC, vis-à-vis 2:13-22, Lutheran, Lent 3), and frequently backs up to get an adequate context. Moreover, RSV versification is not always used (cp. RSV and JB on the First Lesson, Advent 1). As well, the practice of skipping verses (especially true of RC lections) is deplorable.

The "Theological Reflections" are more or less helpful. The weakness of them is that in a short paragraph the attempt is made to reflect on three lessons (or more when lections vary). In Buttrick's scheme, the articulation of the "field of Theological understanding" of a text is a crucial stage, because "moves" are developed by putting together theological understanding and lived experience so that preaching may in fact be mediation between God and our neighbours, between the gospel and the world in which the "being-saved community" finds itself.

It is hard to evaluate Biddle's "Homiletical Moves". Here is an example, the First Lesson of Lent 1, Genesis 22:1-18, which is entitled "God Will Provide":

1. God tests Abraham by commanding him to offer Isaac as a sacrifice.
2. Abraham obeys God and Isaac trusts Abraham.
3. God provides a ram for the burnt offering.
4. God promises to bless Abraham and multiply his descendants because of his faithful obedience.
5. God tests us but will not allow us to be tempted beyond our endurance, therefore let us trust in God when tested.

"Moves", according to Buttrick, begin in an analysis of the movement of the text (plotting the moves of a text, a structural analysis), develop into "move sentences" which are expanded into carefully designed "moves" which, when preached, will form one "image" in consciousness. Biddle's suggestions lie somewhere between a plot of the text's structure and "move

sentences". Generally he is closer to the former, except for the last entry which is usually of a "let us" variety urging some response to the text.

It is in fact those last entries to his series of "moves" which get to be annoying because they are invariably of a hortatory nature. A "let us..." functions exactly like a "must" or an "ought" or a "should", and thus each set of moves ends up in "law" language. Such language does not create faith nor obedience; it vitiates gospel and promise. Ignore these last entries.

Biddle encourages users of the workbook to read Buttrick and other homiletics. I would second that. I suspect that without an understanding of how "moves" are designed and of the "logic" which links them into a coherent sequence, Biddle's series of "Homiletical Moves" will become not only so many "points" (which are anathema to Buttrick), but will encourage a dull rehearsal of the text with an hortatory moral tacked on at the end.

Nevertheless, users will certainly benefit from the exegetical commentary and other format features, and gain significant help from Biddle's brief overview of the lectionaries, his thoughts about becoming more creative in preaching, his introduction to the liturgical seasons, and his bibliography of preaching and worship resources.

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Songs For A Gospel People

Edited by R. Gerald Hobbs

Winfield, British Columbia: Wood Lake Books, 1987

A new thoroughly singable collection of hymns old and new has been compiled to reflect the diversity and heritage of the Christian church in today's world. Published under the auspices of the United Church of Canada, as a supplement to their *Hymnal* (1930) and *The Hymn Book* (1971), the hymnody attempts to bear

the mark of today's church. It is ecumenical, drawing from all members of the family of God throughout the world. It is pluralist, recognizing that in the church we are a mixed community, and that our words and musical styles need to reflect that diversity. It is biblical and rooted in our church's story, because being faithful in the great issues of justice and peace in our world means drawing nourishment from our past. It is inclusive, imaging and nurturing the wholeness of the body of Christ (foreword).

A public request for new Canadian hymns by the editorial committee presented them with the incredible task of sorting through 3,000 submissions. Only 12 of these are included in the book, but with selections from