

CIRCUITRIDER *Reviews*



Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary: A Guide

by Gail R. O'Day and Charles Hackett (Abingdon Press, 2007 ISBN 9780687646241)

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Candler professors Gail O'Day and Charles Hackett have written an informative and inspirational guide to the lectionary—part historical overview and part preaching manual. Preachers will find it immensely helpful, illuminating and challenging. Writing explicitly from their own faith traditions, Reformed O'Day and Anglican Hackett explore just how those frameworks shape how they view the text in the context of worship. O'Day's frame is the centrality of the word preached, specific biblical texts assigned for a Sunday or season. Hackett, on the other hand, reads the text through the lens of the church year. Their book will therefore speak to persons coming from a range of traditions situating themselves in relation to the text from diverse perspectives. At the same time, each reader will be challenged to stretch his or her own perspective to embrace more of the variety within the larger church.

Hackett and O'Day cover much more ground than the proverbial "to lectionary or not to lectionary" preaching choice, although that choice is brought into persuasive focus. They begin with an overview of the formation of lectionaries through the lens of the experienced faith and worship practices of the Hebrew and Christian communities. The story of the changing and dynamic place of Scripture in worship is fascinating. The authors further relate the

formulation of the church year in the context of the changed character of Christian community after Constantine and subsequent shifting understandings of baptism and salvation. Thus, for the preacher, the largest frame for the preaching task becomes the church year itself, now understood as the means by which Christians participate again and again in the events of their salvation.

The church year is described in terms of the Paschal Cycle, the Incarnational Cycle and Ordinary Time. These over-arching segments within which all the various seasons of Lent, Advent and so forth develop, are seen as the means through which Christians remember and rehearse the foundational events of Christian identity—Jesus’ passion, death and resurrection, the divinity of Christ in the incarnation and the ways in which Christians then live out their baptism. But O’Day and Hackett go further. They then “thicken” the richness of this trajectory by layering in the development of the canon, pointing to ways in which the biblical texts themselves contain strands of different contexts and understandings.

The result is what they describe as a fourfold “hermeneutic of the lectionary:” the re-telling of the story, the presentation of basic Christian doctrine, living a Christian life and the “otherness” of the biblical texts themselves. Preachers will find themselves invited into a deeper and more intentional form of sermon planning and preparation to consider what the authors call the “cumulative effect of preaching.” Stepping out and back from the weekly mad dash to come up with a sermon, preachers are given a method for thinking in terms of season, text and theme—all for the sake of spiritual formation.

The rhythms of the church year and the great sweep of the story set the stage. The authors, in the second half of the book, very helpfully work through their approach for the seasons of Advent, Easter, and Ordinary Time, so that preachers can learn how to work from this rich discipline. They also describe how this work can be shared with clergy colleagues or with interested laity.

The great gift of this book is its implicit summons to more intentional and faithful preaching preparation. The lectionary is revealed for the rich and fruitful blessings that it offers for Christian formation. Moreover, the book itself blesses the preacher and the work of preaching with dignity and purpose. For any preacher worn down by current fixations with the charisma of the preacher, banal illustrations, power point oversimplification and so forth, this is a text to read and treasure. It will be a source of renewal and renewed

dedication to preaching for those called, ordained, empowered and entrusted to be stewards of the mysteries of God.



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