

Consensus

Volume 32

Issue 1 *Cultural Reception of the Gospel*

Article 17

5-1-2007

Six lives: a memoir

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Recommended Citation

Wehrfritz-Hanson, Garth (2007) "Six lives: a memoir," *Consensus*: Vol. 32 : Iss. 1 , Article 17.

Available at: <http://scholars.wlu.ca/consensus/vol32/iss1/17>

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certain possibility of forgiving and loving in humanity. The book closes with an epilogue that sums up nicely the carefully wrought findings of Léon-Dufour's critical investigations.

I found the work and the topic refreshing. From the standpoint both of contemporary Christian proclamation and engagement in the world, this kind of study is of great importance. While I am less fond of viewing the problem as a kind of sweeping Biblical theological one (especially since such orientations tend to level distinctions between various texts and traditions), it is worthy of careful theological consideration – and any good theology of the gospel (or here, a kind of “theological ethic of the gospel”) should make account of the Biblical materials. Theologically, I found the repeated appeals to a synergy between God and humanity a little distracting. In actuality, the very theocentric orientation of Léon-Dufour's view of the gospel made the synergistic tag somewhat less than apt. In the end, he himself makes it all hinge on a God who comes, forgives, and loves. What he describes may be less synergistic than he thinks (especially judging by the number of the favorable quotes from Augustine toward the end of the book). Even with these disagreements, however, I recommend the book for wider reading. For anyone who has to think about the relationship of Biblical texts to a theology of the gospel and the way that gospel enables action – and what preacher doesn't! – this book is a very helpful conversation partner.

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Six Lives: A Memoir

Dow Marmur

Toronto: Key Porter Books, 2004

212 pages, \$26.95 Softcover

Dow Marmur was most recently known as senior rabbi of one of the world's largest Reform synagogues, Holy Blossom Temple in Toronto, which he served from 1983 to 2000. That institution, with its six to seven thousand members, is perhaps the most influential Reform synagogue in Canada.

The first thing about this book that caught my attention is the title; it is an apt description of Rabbi Marmur's life journey. The chapter titles also reveal the author's distinct pilgrimage: "Poland: Beginnings, Soviet Union: Exile, Sweden: Refuge, England: Vocation, Canada: Challenge, and Israel: Homecoming." Although Marmur was born in Poland, an only child, he and his parents fled the Nazis to live in the Soviet Union Republic of Uzbekistan for five years. Life was very difficult there; exiles like the Marmur family had to steal food in order to survive. Dow, although a young boy at the time, took on an adult role in his community, since he had learned the Uzbekish language quite well and served as an interpreter.

After World War Two, the family moved to Sweden, where Dow's parents settled for the rest of their lives. His parents were secular Jews, therefore not overly happy when Dow decided to move to England, where he studied for the Reform rabbinate at London's Leo Baeck College. Prior to this move, Dow met and married Fredzia Zonabend, a Holocaust survivor of Ravensbruck concentration camp, who, with her family, also had settled in Sweden.

After Marmur completed his studies at Leo Baeck College, he served as an ordained pulpit rabbi of two Reform synagogues in London. These were happy and fulfilling years, where the Marmurs raised their three children and they resided for more than a quarter century.

After this, the Marmurs were up to the challenge of moving to Canada where Dow served Toronto's Holy Blossom Temple Reform synagogue. (It was not an easy move for their children. Both daughters eventually chose to move back to England and pursue careers in palliative care nursing and acting. Their son made *aliyah* and lives in Israel, where he is a rabbi and dean of a Reform theological college.) Under Marmur's leadership, Holy Blossom Temple was able to successfully navigate through several conflicts and changes – including new liturgies and worship books, practicing *kashruth*, wearing headgear, revitalizing the youth and offering significant educational programs for members of all ages, becoming involved in social activism through projects like "Out of the Cold" for Toronto's homeless, and engaging in interfaith dialogue with Christians and other faith traditions.

After serving Holy Blossom Temple as senior rabbi for seventeen years, the Marmurs realised that it was time for a change so they officially retired and made *aliyah*. They now reside for half of the year in Jerusalem and in Canada for the other half-year.

As we journey along with Marmur, we learn of his survivor's guilt, his persistent feelings of inadequacy and struggles with identity. He observes that there are basically two kinds of rabbis: "cat rabbis" and "dog rabbis." Cat rabbis are introverts; they prefer a life of solitude and scholarship. Dog rabbis are extroverts; they prefer to be in the limelight and serve people well. Although Marmur spent most of his rabbinate in the synagogue, he claims that he appreciates times of solitude, reading a good book.

In order to compensate for his inferior feelings, he became a workaholic, deeply involving himself with several high-profile international Reform organisations, writing a few books, teaching courses in Judaism in a Toronto theological college, and engaging in interfaith dialogue and social action projects. This was all in addition to his full-time duties as senior rabbi at Holy Blossom Temple.

One thing I appreciated about the memoir was Marmur's determination to write with honesty – his "tell it like it was/is" style – yet without rancour. He tells of synagogue members who, at first, adamantly opposed his leadership, only to eventually, by the grace of God, changed their hearts and minds and become his loyal supporters. Some praised him as a person of conviction and a courageous leader, as well as a distinguished preacher and teacher; but he describes his courage more as the fear of failure than anything else. The last chapter, entitled "Afterthoughts," extends that confessional tone, as he honestly examines some of his motives that determined the path of his life. A final chapter, written by his wife and titled "Coda 'My Luck' by Fredzia Marmur," rounds out the memoir. She makes the point that had it not been for her work and support, and in numerous cases the sacrifices she made, husband Dow would never had been able to pursue many of his involvements as rabbi of three synagogues.

Throughout the memoir, one can see God's grace working in and through people and events, filling Rabbi Marmur's life with countless blessings. The last two sentences of his chapter "Afterthoughts" are very telling: "Mine has indeed been a rich and rewarding life. I thank God for it daily" (199). Hopefully those who read this memoir can say the same thing.

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