

Consensus

Volume 24

Issue 2 *Essays on Liturgy and Worship*

Article 12

11-1-1998

Reclaiming the Bible for the church

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Recommended Citation

Peterson, Kenneth L. (1998) "Reclaiming the Bible for the church," *Consensus*: Vol. 24 : Iss. 2 , Article 12.
Available at: <http://scholars.wlu.ca/consensus/vol24/iss2/12>

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Remus' book on "Jesus as Healer" is a great "little" book. It is as informative as it is well written. Remus' ability to explain complex issues without reducing the content is a gift to the reader. The appendices, "Questions for further thought and discussion", and "Suggestions for further reading" make this book well suited for personal and group studies. This book is highly recommended.

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Reclaiming the Bible for the Church

Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, Editors

Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995
137 pages, \$13.00 Softcover

An impressive array of theologians contributed to this book, which grew out of a conference with the same name held in Northfield, Minnesota in the summer of 1994. Beginning with Brevard Childs' opening essay which states the theme ("On Reclaiming the Bible for Christian Theology") seven theologians representing various ecclesiastical traditions respond or comment in somewhat related manner.

I was happily impressed with the essay from the Canadian contributor, Alister E. McGrath of Wycliffe Hall, Oxford, and Regent College, Vancouver. Writing on "Reclaiming our Roots and Vision", McGrath places strong emphasis on the role of the community of faith in the interpretation of Scripture, which included welcome comments about public reading of Scripture and good lectionary usage. McGrath perhaps went out of his way to criticize Episcopal Bishop John Shelby Spong. I am always a bit concerned when another's position is attacked without any opportunity for response. Nonetheless, in a way, this essay best captured for me a reasonable understanding of what is always a "chicken and egg" issue — what comes first, the church (the community of faith) or its Scriptures? Thus he suggests the reason for the church to reclaim the Scriptures is its need to secure its own identity. As he concludes: "For Christians, the Bible is our book. It tells our story. It judges us, encourages us, and builds us up. Why should we allow others to hijack it?" (88).

It was interesting that as I was reading this book for this review, the *Christian Century* issue (June 17-24, 1998) arrived in the mail with its notice that Gerd Lüdemann, New Testament professor at the University of

Göttingen, had renounced the Christian faith (606). In some ways that announcement seemed to underscore the concern that Childs, McGrath, and the others addressed in this little book, that is, that we of the church are the ones who interpret the Bible, not necessarily the academics, whose faith commitment may at times be in short supply. Many years ago, from researching my own STM thesis, I recall the comment of Ivan Engnell of the Uppsala School of Old Testament research that it is better to go with tradition than against it. How true this is!

To do justice to this little book with its several essays is impossible. One essay I should mention in addition to McGrath's is by one of its editors, Robert Jenson. As one might expect from Jenson there is a good sense of the importance of liturgy, preaching, and devotion in coming to understand the Scriptures. Jenson also stressed that it is at the parish level, not the academic, where ultimately the authority of Scripture will be maintained or undercut.

While not agreeing with all the negative comments the authors made about others and their views, I found this a stimulating and informative book, one well worth reading and having in one's own or in a church's library.

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Is This Your Idea of a Good Time, God?: Discovering Yourself in Biblical Stories

Ralph Milton

Illustrated by Richard Caemmerer, Jr.

Winfield, BC: Wood Lake Books, 1995

192 pages, \$22.50 Softcover

One of the strengths of biblical interpretation and preaching in the folk tradition, especially among the heirs of the African folk tradition, is the ability to move in and out of the biblical narratives, freely identifying with the characters and situations therein, without pausing to worry about the various distances of time and space. A folk preacher can talk about Jeremiah as though the prophet were preaching in the next county, and about Noah so as to make you peek out to check the sky. Ralph Milton's book is an attempt, by a mainline Protestant author, to model and encourage such folk-style biblical interpretation. Milton re-imagines the stories, or the stories behind the stories, of 23 biblical characters in order, as the subtitle puts it, to help us find ourselves in those stories by finding the characters to be our brothers