Lloyd Pietersen. *Reading the Bible after Christendom*. Scottdale, PA: Herald, 2012.

The premise of this book is that the rise of Christendom in the 4th century radically changed the way that Christians read Scripture. Given the demise of Christendom, Lloyd Pietersen aims, with a little help from 16th-century Anabaptists, to help the church of today once again read Scripture the way the early church did.

Pieterson begins with historical background, describing how the Bible was read by the earliest Christians, outlining how the church's alliance with wealth and power in the 4th century affected the interpretation of Scripture, and indicating how the 16th-century Anabaptists may provide resources for reading the Bible after Christendom. While parting company with them on some issues, he describes his hermeneutic as "true to the spirit and direction" of the Anabaptists, being "Jesus-centered, rooted in community reading, open to the Spirit and oriented to obedient response" (82-83).

In part two Pietersen fleshes out two aspects of his Post-Christendom hermeneutic: it is "Jesus-centered" in taking Jesus as Prophet, Pastor, and Poet to suggest that Scripture be read through prophetic, pastoral, and poetic lenses; and it rejects any reading of the Bible that marginalizes the complexities and competing voices of the Old Testament. The rest of part two consists of a summary of the whole Bible, including chapters on the Pentateuch, Joshua to Esther, Wisdom literature, the Prophets, the Gospels and Acts, the Letters and Revelation. Pietersen's summaries comprise brief discussions of the genre and content of the books with a focus on historical issues and key literary features. Some chapters also discuss contemporary scholarly issues, such as political and apocalyptic readings of Paul's letters.

In part three Pietersen describes what reading the Bible after Christendom might look like in practical terms, focusing on spirituality and mission. Setting aside an overly individualized and internalized understanding of spirituality, he suggests that small groups read scripture together carefully, facing head-on the questions and challenges it raises, and expecting to have their individual and corporate life transformed by their encounter with the text and each other. A discussion of the spirituality of Jesus and of the early Anabaptists further reinforces his understanding of

spirituality as transformation of individual and corporate life. For Pietersen, there is nothing "merely ethical" about this transformation; this is God's work of transforming believers into the image of God, into a union with God that can be described in terms of divinization. With respect to mission, Pietersen draws on the work of Alan and Eleanor Kreider, Walter Brueggemann, and Sylvia Keesmaat and Bryan Walsh to suggest that reading the Bible for mission involves Christian communities being transformed by imaginative immersion in the biblical text so that they "not only expose the idols of our time but also visibly demonstrate to the surrounding communities that there is an attractive, alternative way to live" (226).

Pietersen's exhortation that congregations engage with the text and each other is one of the book's strengths. To this end, the author offers both a general account of what is in the Bible to orient readers and interpretive tools that might foster such reading. His discussion of Anabaptism, for which he depends heavily on Stuart Murray, will be interesting to some, though it would have benefitted from editing to make it read more smoothly.

The central section, an 86-page overview of the Bible, suffers from its brevity. At various points Pietersen's lack of comment on his observations left me wondering why certain aspects of the text were mentioned, and his radical but undeveloped suggestions often left me unconvinced. I suspect this book will be frustrating for an academic reader, but perhaps the questions thus raised will bear fruit if it is used by groups reading Scripture together, as the author intends.

My biggest reservation about *Reading the Bible after Christendom* is the tendency to dismiss the creedal and exegetical tradition of the church as "inextricably bound up with issues of coercion, power politics, and violence" (57). While the rise of Christendom surely had a significant impact on the church's exegesis, the social and political context in which we live has no less impact on how we read. In view of this, perhaps we would do better to approach the church's tradition with the "hermeneutical openness and … willingness to listen closely to, and engage with, those with whom we disagree" (58) that Pietersen advocates for interacting with our contemporaries.

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