

Ellen F. Davis and Richard B. Hays, eds., *The Art of Reading Scripture*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003.

This compilation of articles approaches reading scripture as an art rather than a science. The critical methodologies that have dominated and limited the objectives of Bible study in seminaries and universities are here demoted from masters to servants that assist in revealing God's "action to rescue a lost and broken world" (xiv) in order to "claim us and make us into new people" (xvi).

The articles are guided by "nine theses on the interpretation of scripture," the product of *The Scripture Project*, a seminar of scholars and pastors that met at the Center of Theological Inquiry in Princeton, New Jersey from 1998 to 2002 to "recover the church's rich heritage of biblical interpretation in a dramatically changed cultural environment" (xv). These theses unapologetically accept the New Testament's witness to Jesus' identity and treat the Old Testament as part of a single drama for which the death and resurrection of Jesus is the climax. Members of the Church, in which many academics find their home, should welcome this willingness to question the presuppositions of critical scholarship and to consider ways of reading that will reclaim the Bible as the central, authoritative voice in the Church.

The first of four sets of essays, provided by Ellen R. Davis, Robert W. Jenson, Richard Bauckham, and David C. Steinmetz, should be read by all teachers of the Bible in church colleges and seminaries. The critique of higher criticism and modernity is not new, but the articulation of how we move towards a confessional approach to scripture is refreshing. The essays address a number of modern tendencies including the failure of Bible courses to inform faith, the paucity of sermons based upon scripture, and the steep decline in biblical literacy. They offer a framework by which to acknowledge the authority of scripture without shackling oneself to a notion of truth that both limits the capacity for scientific inquiry and the exercise of imagination and denies the presence of troubling passages.

For example, Davis discusses how the OT can be read to illuminate our understanding of Jesus without ignoring the rich tradition of Jewish interpretation. She emphasizes that the Bible should not be reduced to the single theme of salvation but should be read as a revelation of God's nature

and will for God's people. Bauckham's essay tackles how we approach scripture as one coherent story without straying into the meta-narrative reading that has legitimized various forms of imperialism in the past.

The essays in part two, provided by Brian E. Daley S.J., James C. Howell, William Stacy Johnson, Christian McSpadden, and L. Gregory Jones, explore the recovery of reading practices employed in the early Church but neglected by modern methodologies. In particular, Daley's essay "Is Patristic Exegesis Still Usable?" and Jones's essay, in which he invites us to read scripture the way that Augustine and Martin Luther King, Jr. did, may inspire a renewed engagement with scripture. McSpadden's essay "Preaching Scripture Faithfully in a Post-Christendom Church" encourages pastors to preach from the Bible by directing them away from a naïve or literalist reading or a dry explication of meaning and toward the creation of a space for wondering about a story or passage.

In the third section, subtitled "Reading Difficult Texts," Ellen F. Davis introduces the awkward language of "critical traditioning" in order to draw our attention to a tendency within scripture to challenge passages that cease to be edifying or ethical. R.W.L. Moberly, Gary A. Anderson, Richard B. Hays, and Marianne Meye Thompson then illustrate how to use the nine guiding theses to reinvigorate our reading of a selection of passages. The final section contains six sermons given by Davis and Hays, along with brief reflections on how interpretation of lectionary passages informs their homiletics.

Warning: Anabaptist readers may find they must suppress feelings of pride. Authors frequently arrive at a point from which early Anabaptism began. Repeatedly, they conclude that if we read scripture with the presupposition it is making a demand upon us – not simply telling us what to believe but rather in what we should place our trust – we will be called to a life of self-giving and humility.

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