

Mennonites will be reminded that polite silence weighs at least as heavily on their ways of engaging culture and politics as conflict does.

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Paul G. Doerksen. *Take and Read: Reflecting Theologically on Books*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2016.

When I graduated from high school, my home congregation (Steinmann Mennonite Church in Baden, Ontario) gave me a bookmark with a scripture verse on it—presumably one meant to offer some guidance and counsel as I entered university life. The verse was from Ezekiel 3, part of which reads: “Mortal, eat this scroll that I give you and fill your stomach with it. Then I ate it; and in my mouth it was as sweet as honey.” Around the same time, I read Richard Foster’s *The Celebration of Discipline* (Harper & Row, 1978), which outlines spiritual disciplines for the Christian life, among which is what Foster refers to simply as ‘study’ but which includes many modes of inquiry. These two events soon led me to discover that the disciplines of reading and writing were deeply meaningful paths to spiritual and moral formation.

Paul Doerksen, Associate Professor of Theology and Anabaptist Studies at Canadian Mennonite University, has recently published *Take and Read: Reflecting Theologically on Books*, which is the result of taking this spiritual discipline of study seriously in a long-term group environment. The book is an excellent example of how to do service to church and community as a university professor. Picking up on a reading circle begun in 1993 by Gordon Matties, for well over a decade Doerksen has led a group of diverse individuals through scholarly and popular texts of all kinds.

*Take and Read* offers selections from the papers Doerksen read at each gathering, and the title of the collection comes from the conversion of St. Augustine, which itself was inspired by the prophetic words of a child: *tolle lege*, take and read. Augustine’s life was changed when he began to read and be challenged by the gospels (*Confessions*, VIII, 12), and the words from Ezekiel also reflect this transformational message in the image of the scroll tasting

sweet and being incorporated into the body. The powerful experiences of reading something new, and having one's mind opened by a text, are often underappreciated forms of spiritual practice, and the short critical reviews in *Take and Read* serve that exact purpose.

The authors dealt with in this volume's twenty-nine chapters include Martin E. Marty, Wendell Berry, David Bentley Hart, Daniel Bell Jr., Rob Bell, Stanley Hauerwas, William Cavanaugh, James Cone, Saint Augustine, and many more. The kinds of books that Doerksen addresses range from the popular writing of Malcolm Gladwell and Matthew B. Crawford to the academic work of Norman Wirzba and Shelly Rambo. Fiction and non-fiction alike make the list, and both Christian and 'secular' texts appear in turn. The book concludes with a selection of sermons that further express the theological voice and interpretive eye that Doerksen demonstrates throughout the book.

Although a comprehensive summary of the book's contents might be tedious in this context, highlights include Doerksen's helpful critiques of A. J. Jacob's *The Year of Living Biblically* and Malcolm Gladwell's *David and Goliath* (46, 194), his critical engagement with the 'new atheism' (52-60), an exposition of Augustine's *Confessions* (94-102), and a discussion of death and funeral practices (201-207). The difficulty of summarizing the text does call to mind the one criticism that I have of the book, namely that the occasional character of the short essays and sermons makes reading it *as a whole* difficult. Apart from the fact that the essays arose from the same book discussion group and the general theological hermeneutic that Doerksen employs, there is very little that unites the chapters. This lack of unity may be helpful for readers who may be interested in starting a similar group in their context, but alienating for those who have not read the books that Doerksen deals with (although brief and helpful summaries are provided at the beginning of each chapter).

Despite this criticism, theologian Karl Rahner's suggestion that books are consecrated and existentially significant ways that we experience the divine *logos* rings true, *Take and Read* makes the potential for transformative experience in the reading and discussing of books feel exciting, and even urgent.

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