

Donald H. Juel. *Shaping the Scriptural Imagination: Truth, Meaning, and the Theological Interpretation of the Bible*. Eds. Shane Berg and Matthew L. Skinner. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2011. 216 pages. \$32.95.

The book *Shaping the Scriptural Imagination* is about those elements that shape our understanding of scripture, the foremost of them being reading. Reading scripture out loud or silently allows the reader to internalize the words in a way that facilitates imagination, interpretation, and understanding. The book is ultimately about imagination and interpretation and how these concepts and practices relate to scripture. Yes, there are some technical concerns regarding the meaning of Mark's Gospel ending at 16:8 or the longer version that professor Juel seems to reject, but the overall focus of the book is on reading and interpretation. Certainly scripture interpretation, like interpreting a poem by Adrienne Rich or Langston Hughes, requires imagination. For me, imagination is the prelude to liberation and freedom, a goal that Donald Juel achieves with this book because it privileges the life of the Gospel through reading. Reading brings the Gospel Story alive, especially Mark's Gospel.

The tentacles of this book reach beyond New Testament studies into philosophical theology, practical theology, and hermeneutics giving substance to the idiom that "reading is fundamental." It is indeed fundamental to performing the scripture in the way that the Gospel of Mark has demonstrated. Moreover, Juel indicates that the performance of the text contributes to its meaning and understanding in ways that may not be captured through silent reading. Juel's book is filled with literary and hermeneutical jewels from the first chapter to the sermons near the end. His concept of reading the Bible as a communal event for the church is not only novel, but refreshing, such that it encourages participation and multiple interpretations and clear communication. He also writes as a storyteller by injecting reflections on things that happened in his classes into his more pedagogical discourse.

While all the chapters are informative and easy to read, chapter 8, "Interpreting Mark's Gospel," stood out for me as one of the most powerful. Juel is able to make palatable and practical the complex work of hermeneutic theory, especially Friedrich Schleiermacher, Paul Ricoeur, and M.M. Bakhtin without really referencing them. He also draws upon Aristotle's *Poetics* in his rhetorical approach pointing out that the elements of persuasive speech also apply to scripture reading. This reminds me of Augustine's Book IV in *On Christian Doctrine* which sets forth certain rules for speaking and preaching. Juel's balance between "getting behind the text" associated with the traditional historical-critical method and the more postmodern Ricoeurian method of getting in "front of the text" will be helpful to any preacher. Because the preacher is the most practical interpreter of scripture via the sermon, this chapter should serve as a helpful guide to sermon preparation for the experienced pastor as well as the novice preacher.

Juel's advice to the Bible reader who does not know the biblical languages is priceless. He encourages reading the text in multiple translations in order to get a sense of the difference between the language of various translators because he understands that all scripture translations make an axis through history and culture. Even those who claim to understand the "original languages" recognize that the language of the Bible may not be original at all. Moreover, when Professor Juel speaks of New Testament Greek, he is speaking about the language of the common people during that period. Reading a passage in the high classical style of the King James Version will be different from reading the same passage in the New Revised Standard Version, the Contemporary English Version, or the New International Version. For me, reading scripture is a part of exegesis and reading scripture orally and collectively contributes to its

meaning. How the hearer hears what is read or said is critical to both the event of reading and the event of hearing. Moreover, there is dialectic between event and meaning that helps us to understand that while the event fades, the meaning of the event perdures.

The audience or the context of reading scripture is integral to interpretation and understanding. Similarly, preaching the sermon is context-driven because all sermons are grounded in interpretation. This means that the hearers' or congregational context inherently affects reading scripture and preaching sermons. Juel helps to make this clear.

Finally, I recommend using this book in preaching and biblical studies courses because of its focus on interpretation and reading. The spirituality of the author permeates almost every page.

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