

Marc Zvi Brettler, Peter Enns, and Daniel J. Harrington, S.J. *The Bible and the Believer: How to Read the Bible Critically and Religiously*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012. 210 pages. \$27.95.

Is there a way to read Scripture with intellectual integrity without sacrificing one's deeply held religious convictions? This is the question that drives Marc Zvi Brettler, a Jew, Daniel J. Harrington, a Roman Catholic, and Peter Enns, a Protestant, each of whom are eminent biblical scholars who undertake a three-way dialogue as to the ways in which biblical criticism can both challenge and enhance one's religious engagement with the Bible. They focus primarily on the Hebrew Bible/Tanakh/Old Testament, though Harrington and Enns naturally extend their scope to some New Testament texts as well. Each writer takes a turn offering their perspective, to which the other two give thoughtful and reflective responses.

As a Protestant, I expected to learn the most from the tradition most different from my own—Judaism. This proved true, but I found myself equally drawn into the other two authors' essays as well. All three are equally committed to biblical scholarship, have the ability to explain succinctly the history of their tradition's relationship with Scripture, objectively note the points of tension with biblical criticism within their religion, share enlightening nuggets of insight, and give examples of how texts are critically engaged from their perspective. Just as important, each writer includes a summary of his own personal religious journey and struggle with biblical criticism. Thus the book is not simply an academic exercise, but authentically engages in the vital question of personal meaning.

The book is intended for a college-educated audience, but not necessarily seminary-trained. This would be an ideal book for a clergy-led study group of laypersons, a Christian-Jewish dialogue group, a college-level course on Introduction to the Bible, or an inter-seminary seminar of Christian and Jewish students. In homiletics, the book would be useful in a course on exegesis for proclamation, especially one that is team taught by a preaching professor and a biblical scholar. Harrington's section on actualization, bringing the significance of the biblical text into the present, is especially relevant for preachers. The glossary of terms is a helpful tool for navigating the terminology used throughout the book. Also, each chapter ends with a list of resources for further reading on that particular perspective.

There are a few notes of critique. Brettler's section on the Jewish perspective deals with endnotes in a confusing way, listing all references at the end of each paragraph. This makes it difficult to track quickly the source of the quote in the text. The reader will also note that all three perspectives are written by men. Aside from the annoying fact that all pronouns referring to God are masculine rather than gender-neutral, it would have been refreshing to hear a voice from, say, a feminist or post-colonial scholar who could point out that struggles with biblical criticism are often intertwined with issues of gender, race, culture, economics, and power differentials. This book, then, should be seen as a starting point, rather than as the finale, one model rather than *the* model.

These critiques, however, do not detract from the usefulness of the book and the contribution it makes to ecumenical dialogue. The subject of anti-Semitism is dealt with forthrightly, and one detects neither Pollyanna-ish arm-linking nor hesitancy in pointing out the differences and tensions between each perspective. The book also makes an important contribution to the ongoing struggle between literalist and critical readings of Scripture. Those students who may circle the wagons when they feel the authority and reliability of the Bible

threatened by scientific and historical studies would do well to consider Brettler's Jewish perspective, which places much more emphasis on how the Bible is read and interpreted *in community*. Also, Enns does a remarkable job of guiding the defensive literalist reader along a path to a more critical reading that is not only non-threatening, but offers an affirmation of one's faith in the text, albeit from a different standpoint.

Not only will readers understand other traditions better through this book, they will come to a greater understanding and appreciation of their own. When it comes to biblical criticism, this reviewer re-echoes Brettler's quote of Benjamin D. Sommer: "It can add to Torah, but it can't subtract, and so – Go, learn" (39).

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