

Paul E. Hoffman. *Faith Shaping Ministry*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013. 114 pages. \$15.30

Readers of this text, *Faith Shaping Ministry*, by Paul E. Hoffman, might appreciate the story of a seminarian who was studying Tillich, but felt as though he was in over his head. He asked his professor for help in discerning and describing the theological essence of Tillich's theology. The answer was, "Water. All in the water. It's a water theology."

That summary would also serve to initiate the reader into the biblical teachings and the practical mysteries of Hoffman's theological response to the modern dilemma of the church. Romans 6 is the source of this inviting yet deepening water of this pastoral theology and offers a preacher the opportunity to dive into the text without fear of the shallows in this monograph.

The rock of modernity demands that we break church theology and practice into finer and finer bits of life-style chaplaincy that appeals to the fragmented identities that present themselves in church to be served. The hard place of post-Christendom can also posit a too firm foundation of traditionally structured Christianity with no compromises or adjustments permitted. Hoffman's pastoral-lay theology avoids the trappings between the weakly relative and the hardened absolute by affirming all the ways that a fully biblical and baptismal theology offers living water from the rock and in the hard places.

His chapters are shaped by stories about the promises made and kept in baptism. This work is, in some ways, a collection of sermon cores that can be used to cut through to the discipleship that can die to the modern world and live in, but not of, the world in the Word of God, Jesus Christ. *Faith Sharing Ministry* takes baptism as the solid foundation and the liquid metaphor of the Christian life as a rock that flows. Hoffman uses prose, poetry, analysis and story to explicate a solid foundation within the flow of spirit-filled possibilities for preaching, confirmation, pre-marital counseling, hospitality, parish meetings, biblical interpretation, worship planning, stewardship, and prayers. This water theology is in service to a faith-forming and faith-shaping ministry. With its foci in baptism and baptismal renewal, this short volume is a small pastoral systematics that clears old clogged springs and breaks new channels for the ways an ordinary thing, water, can be put to sacred use.

It is clearly written so it promises a new vision for ministry. It is also deeply thought, so it encourages a deep and prayerful appropriation of its church-formed and new church-forming theology. In the final analysis, it promises to build the bridges that will cross the troubled waters of modernity, and to use a phrase from the country church, which Tillich would certainly endorse, the baptismal emphasis of this essay will bring us home in new ways, through deep waters, to Jesus.

The chapter on Formational Preaching is located in the last third of the book, not as a final thought, but as clearly positioned in relationship to the ministry of the baptized. When a new model for Sunday School precedes a commentary on preaching, there is a theology of water at work. Hoffman examines six characteristics of what he calls formational preaching to a catechetical community over time. For him, formational preaching does not offer a listener something to do; it offers a believer someone else to be (68). For Hoffman, formation preaching is: intimately connected to the text or texts for the day; embraces ambiguity and mystery; is challenging both to preach and hear; is highly narrative; honestly evaluates the human condition of sin and suffering; and points to Christ on the cross as our only hope, targeted more to the community than to the individual. Those who know Luther well will recognize these descriptions as part of their mother tongue, but the author's message is offered with the hospitality of an open font or the way water is stored in the desert.

Those who have traveled through the American Southwest know that water collects in tanks, natural bowls worn in the rocks over thousands of years. Without these tanks, life in

the desert is impossible. This is the depth of this meditation on Romans 6. It makes us thirsty for the water that gives us life. The newness and creative spirit of this essay is grounded by the ancient practice of blessing, putting ordinary things to sacred use. Water, considered a natural holy symbol in every human culture, becomes a source of Christian renewal, for even a short essay can cut deep channels for the waters of life.

Heather Murray Elkins, The Theological School, Drew University, Madison, NJ