

## *Reading for Faith and Learning*

**John B. Weaver and Douglas L. Gragg, eds. *Reading for Faith and Learning: Essays on Scripture, Community, & Libraries in Honor of M. Patrick Graham*. Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 2017. 326 pp. \$50.00. Paperback. ISBN: 9780891124290.**

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Sometimes the collected essays in a *Festschrift*, to borrow a line from the movie *Forrest Gump*, resemble a box of chocolates — you never know what you are going to get. In the case of *Reading for Faith and Learning*, which was edited by librarians John B. Weaver and Douglas L. Gragg, one finds a rich and varied assortment of nineteen essays. The contributors include colleagues and friends of our esteemed associate M. Patrick (Pat) Graham, Director of the Pitts Theological Library at Emory University, whose career is honored with this volume. These authors represent a variety of disciplines including library and information science, preaching, church history, Hebrew Bible, religious education, and others.

Perhaps reflecting the diversity of contributors, the essays encompass an amazingly wide array of genres. For example, there are traditional exegetical studies, a translation of a sixteenth-century treatise, a commentary on a third-century CE letter, an essay that reads a bit like popular business literature, and a piece that has the flavor of a bibliographic essay.

Despite the breadth of the materials in the volume, Weaver and Gragg have done a masterful job of creating a well-structured tome. They chose to organize the essays into three distinct sections: “Reading the Bible,” “Reading in Community,” and “Reading and the Library,” which contain six, seven, and six articles, respectively. These sections correspond to three emphases of Pat Graham’s own vocation as a Hebrew Biblical scholar, a minister in the Churches of Christ, and a leading theological librarian.

Most remarkably, while the sections of the book appeal to three distinct academic audiences, a reader will be richly rewarded by absorbing the entire text from cover to cover. Each article has been carefully placed so that not only are the common themes of reading and learning highlighted, but also so that each essay serves as a stepping stone to the next. In the first section, for instance, Carol Newsom’s study of several Bible pericopes that highlight reading includes the story of Josiah’s interaction with a scroll. As a result, her article introduces Brent A. Strawn’s fuller exposition of 2 Kings 22-23. For his part Strawn describes his method as theological and hermeneutical (33-34), which opens the way to read the three essays that follow as a sampler of interpretive techniques. They include Steven McKenzie’s text critical study of Jezebel in the books of Kings, Carisse Mickey Berryhill’s literary-critical treatment of Ruth, and Joel M. LeMon’s reading of the troublesome Psalm 137:9 from the vantage of reception history. This section of the *Festschrift* closes with Armin Siedlecki’s English translation of Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt’s “The Books that are Biblical.” The sixteenth-century author makes recommendations to Reformation-era printers about the appropriate canon for Protestant editions of the Bible. This treatise serves as a bridge to the next section.

Indeed, the first chapter in “Reading in Community” is John Witte, Jr.’s study of the youth catechism written by Karlstadt’s contemporary, John Calvin. In turn, the discussion of Calvin’s attempt to write material accessible to lay and youth audiences forms the perfect segue to E. Brooks Holifield’s study of the book trade. Holifield focuses on the various markets for religious publications in the eighteenth through twentieth centuries. Weaver and Gragg continue the chronological sequencing with Kathy Pulley’s review of several twentieth-century feminist publications that are useful for pondering the role of women in Churches of Christ congregations. Her questions about women in the pulpit provide a connection to the next chapter, in which Thomas G. Long asks how preachers might read the biblical text faithfully. He proposes drawing out parallels between individual characters in biblical stories and the lives of those in the pews.

At this point the focus within the “Reading in Community” section of the volume shifts from those who disseminate religious information, either by publishing or preaching it, to a series of three essays that draw attention to readers of

texts and the formative aspects of written words. Carson E. Reed explores how narrative history and the Christian story help us to form community, Richard T. Hughes reminisces about a course he once taught at Messiah College on memoirs that made a lasting impact on students, and Tracy Powell Iwaskow, a freelance librarian, asserts that one of the tasks of library communities is to cultivate love.

The third and final section of the book, “Reading and the Library,” follows quite naturally on the heels of Iwaskow’s contribution. All of the articles in this last section save the initial one, in which New Testament scholar Richard A. Wright takes on the question of how books were preserved and stored in the late second century CE, were written by librarians. Richard Manly Adams, Jr. and Donald G. Davis, Jr., who co-writes with Jon Arvid Aho, remain immersed in the era of the Roman Empire. The first writes on Lucian Samosata’s caustic observations about dilettante book collectors, while the later pair comment on a late-third-century letter by Theonas, Bishop of Alexandria. For his part, Jack Ammerman turns the discussion from the ancient world to the fast-paced, digitally super-saturated, hyper-reading climate of the information age. His is the only article to employ data mining techniques and includes two charts. David Stewart contributes the final chapter, writing about how librarians are aptly suited to assisting in the vocational formation and guidance of students.

All of the essays are sweet treats, but four will have a larger readership than others. The first is McKenzie’s work on Jezebel. McKenzie’s conclusion that all of the Hebrew Bible passages in which the villainess appears have been strongly affected by later editorial activity has implications not only for text critics but also feminist scholars. He offers a persuasive challenge to the received view that her negative characterization is due to the Deuteronomistic historian.

Two other contributions, one by Hughes and the one by Holifield, have the potential to become standard reading for junior faculty members or even doctoral students who are looking to learn about teaching and publishing. Hughes provides an anecdote about an experience teaching in which he and his co-teacher spouse sought to guide students from surface readings of texts to deeper meaning without imposing their own will on learners. He details how students were encouraged to make independent discoveries and engage in critical thinking about texts that reflected religious traditions different from the students’ own.

Holifield, by contrast, offers a concise history of religious publication. It details how religious presses come and go, genres burst into fashion or disappear into obscurity, and other subjects come to dominate public discourse. Along the way, he addresses the relationship of public notoriety to prolific publication.

Finally, Richard A. Wright centers his essay on a treatise written by Galen that was just discovered in 2005. The fact that this document so recently surfaced means this piece will be of immediate interest not only to librarians and biblical textual critics but also to classicists.

The last entry in *Reading for Faith and Learning* is a selected listing of Pat Graham’s published books, articles, presentations, and book reviews. Compiled by Craig Churchill, it forms a fitting *inclusio* with the photograph of Pat that graces the front piece. The cover design and layout of the book honor Pat, too. Pat was an innovator in providing digital open access images and the cover design makes use of a graphic from the Pitts Library collection.

A delightful book, it has only a few minor weaknesses. For instance, while there is an attractive page border to mark the start of each article, chapter numbers were omitted. Therefore, it is difficult to locate particular essays when flipping through the text. In addition, the book includes a combined person, scripture, and subject index, but much material is missing. For example, there is no reference to PPaul Griffiths (225) or Acts 2:24 (45). Perhaps separate indexes might have proven more useful. Finally, the absence of a comprehensive bibliography leaves readers to focus on the footnotes to access the broader scholarly conversations represented by the research presented in the articles.

Speaking of footnotes, it is very interesting to observe that of the 582 footnotes in the volume, only 29, or slightly less than 5 percent, refer to an electronic-only resource that is identified with a URL. Further, of those 29 notes, 24 of them (82 percent) occur in the last section of the book — the section dedicated to librarianship. As a result, like any excellent and highly recommended work, *Reading for Faith and Learning* raises as many questions as it answers about how readers

read, the role reading plays in religious research, and whether or not librarians are more optimistic about the pace of the adoption of digital resources and content by religion scholars than is currently demonstrated in those scholars' published work.

Congratulations, Pat, on your retirement.

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