

RESEARCH REPORTER



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I am pleased to welcome Professors Michael Bruner and Stephen Bell of the Department of English as guest reviewers in our *Research Reporter*! Michael Bruner attended Whitworth College and earned his B.A. in English from the University of Washington. He was awarded an M.Div. from Princeton Theological Seminary. In addition to teaching at APU, he has worked in business and in the pastorate. Stephen Bell earned his B.A. in Literature from Wheaton College, his M.A. in Literature from the University of Virginia, and is currently studying for his Ph.D. in Literature and Criticism at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. He has enjoyed teaching literature in APU's High Sierra humanities-based program as well as film studies at Mount San Antonio College. He has recently served as an officer in the United States Army.

I am grateful to Michael and Stephen for their cogent, sensitive reviews of our colleagues' publications.—Carole Lambert

Professor of English Sheryl O'Sullivan astutely incorporates child developmental theory and pedagogical praxis in her recently published "The Invisible Being: Finding Images of God in Secular Children's Literature" (*Christian Educational Journal* 3 [1]: 43-57). Working from the premise that "[w]hether named or unnamed, God is present in all manner of children's literature, even that which is ostensibly written for the secular market," O'Sullivan delivers an excellent example of faith integration as she seeks to assist Christian educators and parents in their goal of helping children to identify, and spiritually benefit from, images of God they find in the books they read.

O'Sullivan begins by affirming how important it is to consider the developmental age of children before selecting worthy books for them to absorb. Appropriating the ideas of such theorists as Jean Piaget, Erik Erikson, and especially James Fowler, she demonstrates that children begin life with relatively concrete and sensory understandings of God, and that it is not until they begin to reach adolescence that they are able to consider more abstract issues and questions

associated with God, such as "the existence and nature of God or the purpose of life." As O'Sullivan argues, "Older children can increasingly deal with ambiguity, complexity and subtlety, but primary age students still need a straightforward storyline, and unambiguous characters." What becomes critical then for teachers and parents, is to be able to discern the kinds of books that are appropriate for a child's spiritual development at a specific stage in his or her life. O'Sullivan provides some very helpful guidelines that will make this book selection easier, to include considerations of appropriate subject matter and the quality and type of illustrations (if any). She also incorporates some fascinating and practical exercises to stimulate discussion and analysis of God-images in literature that should prove valuable to Christian teachers at any level.

The conclusion of the article deftly considers, through the lens of these developmental theories (particularly Fowler's), a wide sampling of children's literature that contains either explicit or implicit representations of God. Analyses of such beloved works as *The Polar Express* (1985), *A Wrinkle of Time* (1973), and the traditional Algonquin tale *The Rough-Face Girl* (1992) provide clear examples of how "God has included himself" in beautiful and beguiling ways. O'Sullivan's sensitive reading of these works demonstrates that God makes himself visible not only to those characters whose hearts belong fully to him, but also to those readers and teachers who are spiritually ready to apprehend his presence in its manifold guises.—Stephen Bell

Two faculty members have contributed chapters to *Mission in Acts: Ancient Narratives in Contemporary Context* (Orbis Books, 2004—now in its third edition), a book that, as its title suggests, seeks to deal with the question of mission in our present-day context by looking back at the missionary movement depicted by Luke in the Book of Acts. The idea of looking back in order to be contemporary is nothing new, of course. The rallying cry of the Reformation was *Christum praedicare ex fontibus!*, which translated means, “Preach Christ from the sources!” A thousand years earlier, Augustine advocated a return to the biblical tenets of faith and was, in a wonderful historic irony, a thousand years ahead of his time. One of the deep biblical paradoxes is that in any age and season, interpreted correctly, ancient scripture is the most contemporary voice in a culture.

The first article, by **Dr. Paul Hertig, Professor of Global Studies and Sociology**, seeks to shed light on the often complicated dynamics of immigrant congregations and first- and second-generational tensions by looking back at the story of Stephen (Acts 6:8-8:2) and his own experience with the emerging church in 1st century Jerusalem. Throughout the article, Hertig weaves his own experience as an Associate Pastor in an immigrant congregation and draws parallels with Stephen’s experience as a “pastor” who himself had to deal with an immigrant population in the form of Hellenized Jews. As part of this new Jewish sect that would eventually come to be known as “Christian,” Stephen was in a unique position to appeal to Jews (made up of Cyrenians, Alexandrians, Cicilians, and Asians) who had returned from the Diaspora and were zealously defending the strict rules and theology of Temple worship.

In a wide and clear overlay of the socio-cultural dynamics of the Hellenized Jewish population surrounding the Temple in the decades just after Jesus’ death, Hertig allows the reader to see the multifarious situation for just what it was: a ruckus mix of traditions and cultures and theologies. The collision of Hellenism and Judaism was complicated enough, but then to introduce a burgeoning missionary movement of Jesus followers only made the fault lines between them even more explosive. It is no wonder that Stephen was stoned to death before he could even finish his sermon.

Hertig traces the thematic contours of the Lukan narrative, beginning with Stephen’s interactions with other Hellenists (Stephen himself was a Hellenist) and moving into a fascinating discussion of his sermon, which included his rather unorthodox historical gloss of Jewish history that emphasized the itinerant nature of God’s relationship to his people. God could not be

confined to a single place: God was everywhere. The point Stephen was trying to make was that the Hebrew scriptures point *away from*, not *toward*, Temple worship (and by extension to Jesus Christ), and so to insist that God could only be known within the confines of the Temple was, in fact, to go *against* their Jewish heritage and tradition, which obviously didn’t sit very well with his Hellenized Jewish hearers.

Hertig draws obvious parallels to the immigrant church situation today and suggests that, like the Hellenized Jews of old, first-generation immigrant believers in this country should not insist that their children and grandchildren worship in the exact same way under threat of being ostracized. Likewise, second- and third-generation believers should understand that there is an unmistakable continuity in worship that, in many respects, harkens back to traditional liturgies. In this way, the story of Stephen serves as a bridge between generational differences in the Christian immigrant community by offering a third way to understand and worship God, a way that seeks to *look forward* in a responsive way to contemporary modes of life and worship by doing the most counterintuitive thing of all: *looking back*.

Who in the Church today are the “Ethiopian eunuchs” of our age—people who have been traditionally regarded as outsiders or even outcasts for their ethnicity or physical handicaps? This is the provocative question **Dr. Keith Reeves, Professor of New Testament and Early Christian Literature**, implies throughout and explicitly states at the end of his chapter. Reeves’ fascination with the subject transcends his professional interests. His wife was born and raised in Ethiopia, a county still ravaged by a disease long eradicated on this continent: polio. Its victims are relegated to beggar status and forced to walk on hands and knees for subsistence. The implication, of course, is clear: the question posed at the end of his essay is more than academic—it is, quite frankly, a matter of life and death.

Luke’s social emphasis (his gospel’s “blessed are the poor” vs. Matthew’s more gentrified “blessed are the poor *in spirit*,” for example) is acknowledged as a compelling impetus for Reeves’ interpretation of the first part of the pericope in Acts about Philip’s conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch. According to Reeves, “The story of the Ethiopian eunuch serves as a window to some of Luke’s concerns for the poor and outcast....” He addresses two related concerns in his analysis: the ethnicity of the eunuch and how the story fits into the Book of Acts as a whole, and he argues that one’s conclusion regarding the latter necessarily determines the answer to the former. Many scholars

conclude that the eunuch is a Gentile (and thus the first—or second ?—gentile convert to Christianity), a conclusion that Reeves finds unconvincing, and he spends the balance of the essay carefully elucidating why the eunuch is an outcast Jew and serves as a bridge between the conversion of Hellenized Jews and Gentiles which, he argues, fits more seamlessly into the larger scheme of Luke’s developing narrative.

Reeves’ use of classical as well as biblical sources adds credence to his overall argument, and even in the face of questions like why the eunuch would travel all the way from Ethiopia to worship in Jerusalem if he knew or even suspected that he’d be turned away at the door, his argument is nonetheless compelling. By first addressing whether the eunuch is a Jew or Gentile, and then moving to a discussion of the eunuch’s ethnicity before finally delving into the overarching narrative progression of the first nine chapters of Luke, Reeves carefully leads the reader to what amounts to a somewhat provocative conclusion: Luke was concerned with those who inadvertently found themselves outside of the religious mainstream, and so he constructed a narrative of the early spread of Christianity that showed how conversion, like concentric circles in a widening gyre, progressively included people who were viewed as being outside the accepted norms of 1st century religious propriety. Does the gyre continue to widen? Reeves seems to think so, and he invites his readers to do the same.—Michael Bruner

Associate Professor of Communication Bala A.

Musa with Cindy J. Price reveals manifold problems and challenges facing both journalists and their readers in *Emerging Issues in Contemporary Journalism: Infotainment, Internet, Libel, Censorship, Et Cetera* (Lewiston, New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 2006). For example, how can journalists present in-depth, often serious findings when audiences now more than ever prefer *Infotainment*? How do reporters trained to investigate carefully before writing their articles adapt to the instantaneous format of the *Internet*? How can writers for any of the media risk exposing corruption in high places when their understanding of *Libel* differs from that of the judicial system? How tempted, or even forced by their bosses, are reporters to apply *Censorship* to stories that reflect negatively on the organizations’ owners or sponsors?

Dr. Musa’s collection of essays explores all of these timely, thorny issues and suggests some tentative answers to these and other difficult questions raised by journalists themselves who seek to preserve the integrity of their besieged profession. He states, “In

addition to informing the public of events, journalists also have the civic responsibility of educating about the context and relevance of the events.” This is what citizens of a democracy *should* desire and support, but in reality their taste for short, simple, and entertaining narratives has challenged this worthy goal. Dr. Musa provides a vivid example of this: “It is instructive to note that immediately when the news of the Clinton-Lewinsky affair broke, all of the network news anchors, who were in Havana, Cuba, covering the historic visit of Pope John Paul II to that country, abandoned the coverage of the Pope’s visit and returned to their news offices in Washington in order to follow the breaking sex scandal story, as if to say, something more important than the Pope’s visit is happening in Washington.” Behind this return to Washington was the journalists’ shared understanding that many viewers prefer to hear about a Presidential sex scandal than a popular Pope’s peacemaking initiatives.

Dr. Musa’s book should be read by all who sincerely want to counter these preferences, both professional journalists and their readers, for these articles have the potential to transform the reader as follows: (1) to raise one’s hermeneutic of suspicion so that one consults many reliable sources regarding important issues rather than trusting a single favorite commentator or network; (2) to instill a desire to change the growing “infotainment” trend by voting with one’s remote and one’s voice regarding the issues raised in this book; (3) to support in whatever way possible those journalists who still strive to inform and educate the public with integrity, for the problems presented transparently in this volume are not just theirs’ but ours’ as well.—Carole Lambert

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