

Editorial

Mary H. Schertz

Ellen F. Davis¹ tells of sitting with a group of scholars of various disciplines charged with the enviable task of daydreaming about what is most important for the grounding of the church in this age. If money and administration were no object, what issue of theological inquiry would be most helpful for the church? To her surprise, this diverse group representing a broad spectrum of Catholics and Protestants came to agreement in less than an hour—no doubt something of a record in academic circles. They concluded that the most pressing need of the contemporary church is to learn afresh to read and teach the Bible confessionally. As in: this ability is something we once had and have lost.

By reading the Bible confessionally these folks did not mean reading it in line with some denominational focus or creed. They were pointing to

the need for the church to learn afresh to acknowledge the Bible as the functional center of its life, so that in all our conversations, deliberations, arguments, and programs, we are continually reoriented to the demands and the promises of the Scriptures. Reading the Bible confessionally means recognizing it as a word that is indispensable if we are to view the world realistically and hopefully. We acknowledge it as a divine word that is uniquely powerful to interpret our experience. But more, we allow ourselves to be moved by it, trusting that it is the one reliable guide to a life that is not, in the last analysis, desperate.²

That paragraph has undoubtedly had a greater impact on my life and work in these last five years than anything any other scholar has written or said. It resonated deeply for me as a biblical scholar in an age when many congregations and believers wonder

about the place of the Bible in their lives and hearts. It set me on a journey to discover ways we—new Christians or blasé post-modern ones, whatever our political proclivities—can together read the Bible as if our lives depended on it. That has been and continues to be the journey of a lifetime for me, and this issue of *Vision* is very much part of the trek. My orientation in choosing

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and encouraging the writers for this issue was this question of who can help us enliven, awaken, and nurture our relationship, individually and congregationally, with the written word of God?

I am blessed and grateful to set these thoughtful reflections before you. The writers include pastors with a wide variety of experience from Manitoba to Virginia. Some are beginning their lives of service, and others are looking back from the perspective of retirement. The writers include teachers and other

academics for whom the Bible and the people who read it are at the center of their passions. They represent a broad horizon of service from Ethiopia to Kansas and from a variety of interests and investments. And since reading the Bible is an art, I am thankful for contributors who help us explore the topic through poetry, drama, and story, in honor of the artful Book that gathers us into one body.

As I have read and worked with these writers and their writing, my heart is full, my spirit winging, and my head hopeful. I believe, and these writers help me believe, that the Bible is fully in relationship with us in our present generation and will be in relationship with God's church for the ages yet to come. Despite our doubts, questions, and frustrations, the living Word of God continues to comfort, challenge, and confront us. The Spirit is given to those who ask.

Notes

¹Ellen F. Davis is professor of Bible and practical theology at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. She was theological lecturer at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary (Elkhart, IN) in 2008.

²Ellen F. Davis, *The Art of Reading Scripture*, ed. Ellen F. Davis and Richard B. Hays (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 9, 10.