

discerning pioneer," whom they extensively quote in support of the ECT documents. They concede that their thinking "will not satisfy strong partisans who cluster at the poles of contemporary discussion" (15).

However, the positive ecumenical sentiments of Noll and Nystrom may have to be readjusted in light of recent official statements issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith of the Catholic Church: "Response to some Questions Regarding Certain Aspects of the Doctrine on the Church," dated June 29, 2007. Protestants are duly reminded: "Fifth Question: Why do the texts of the Council and those of the Magisterium since the Council not use the title of 'Church' with regard to those Christian Communities born out of the Reformation of the sixteenth century? Response: According to Catholic doctrine, these Communities do not enjoy apostolic succession in the sacrament of Orders, and are, therefore, deprived of a constitutive element of the Church. These ecclesial Communities which, specifically because of the absence of the sacramental priesthood, have not preserved the genuine and integral substance of the 'Eucharistic Mystery *cannot, according to Catholic doctrine, be called 'Churches' in the proper sense.* The Supreme Pontiff Benedict XVI, at the Audience granted to the undersigned Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, ratified and confirmed these Responses, adopted in the Plenary Session of the Congregation, and ordered their publication [emphasis added]."

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Petersen, Eugene H. *Eat This Book: A Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006. xii + 198 pp. Hardcover, \$20.00.

Eugene Petersen, of *The Message* Bible paraphrase, has written a book for people who write books about the Bible. Petersen, a retired pastor, suggests that we ought not read to the Bible as we do any other book. Rather, we are to feed on its words and incorporate them into our daily lives.

The book's nine chapters in no way diminish the scholarly approach to Scripture. Petersen knows that "exegesis cannot be slighted" (51), for it is "the discipline of attending to the text and listening to it rightly and well" (50). But he also knows that exegesis has sometimes taken charge of the text, treating the Bible like "a warehouse of information" (55), instead of submitting to the text in "an act of sustained humility" (57). Nor is scholarly detachment humanity's only distraction from hearing and eating the Word of God. Generated ecstasy has given some a sense of immediacy with the divine; "moral heroism" (16) has persuaded others to call up and disclose the god within; private asceticism, the holiness of the hermit, has convinced still others. But the church community has said "no" to all these.

Today, however, the church community in America is threatened by a "self-sovereign" spirituality, apparently much more exciting and glamorous than the pedestrian way of walking after Jesus through faithful submission to words in an ancient book (16, 17). Be that as it may, self-centered spiritualities may only appeal as they do because the excitement of living, yes, of eating the book of God, as John the Revelator was once commanded to do, has been lost.

Having convinced us of the virtue of eating the book, Petersen goes on to show, in chapter 3, the relational character of the Trinitarian God who reveals himself in the Scriptures. The God of the Bible is a personal Being committed to personal interaction with humanity. Chapter 4, "Scripture As Form," lays out some of the main issues involved in following the Jesus of the Bible story, highlighting the compelling

significance of the story itself as story. The Bible is not various forms of writing, including story. It is all story (47). The Bible is "story-shaped" because story is the shape of history, our lives, reality, and the world (62).

Chapter 5, "Scripture As Script: Playing Our Part in the Spirit," speaks authoritatively to the conviction that everything, comprehension included, is secondary to obedience. Eating the book is "virtuoso spirituality" (76), playing a score by living the experience, experiencing the life; it is the performer becoming a part of the narrative recounted by the master musician's composition.

Section 2 (chaps. 6-7) expounds upon the four elements of *lectio divina* ("reading to live the text"): *lectio* ("reading"), *meditatio* ("meditating"), *oratio* ("praying"), and *contemplatio* ("living"). The four are not particularly sequential. They are more like sodium and chlorine, potentially dangerous and even deadly as individuals, but a blessing to bland foods in the form of sodium chloride. Petersen labors to liberate *contemplatio* from its conventional understanding. Despite 1,500 years of monastic living, there is nothing in the word that requires the stereotype of vowed separation from full human living. Petersen is "determined to do what [he] can to get the term 'contemplation' into circulation in the world of the everyday" (110-111). He will democratize the concept by noting that children all begin as contemplatives, attentive enough to flowers and ants to be oblivious to all else (111).

Section 3, "The Company of Translators," is the best section of the book. Its first chapter (chap. 8) traces the process of translation through Ezra and Aramaic, the NT and Greek, to translation in English. It lays the groundwork for his longest chapter, chapter 9 on Petersen's remarkable Bible paraphrase, *The Message*. In it, he warns against "sacrilege downward," blasphemous language, and "sacrilege upward," pretentious language (138), and expatiates on the translation history of the fourth petition of the Lord's Prayer. Whether or not one knows the story, Petersen's storytelling mastery makes it worth rehearing, rereading.

For all the times we have striven to know instead of grow, Petersen urges that we practice once again, as our ancestors did long ago, a reading whose goal is wisdom: the wisdom for "becoming true and good, not just knowing about the facts of life or how to change a tire" (177, emphasis original). His *Eat This Book* is eminently readable, completely credible, and irresistibly relevant. Read it. Eat it.

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Reuther, Rosemary Radford, *America, Amerikkka, Elect Nation and Imperial Violence*. London: Equinox, 2007. 291 pp. Hardcover, \$90.00.

*America, Amerikkka* is a historical analysis of America's view of itself as an elect nation chosen by God to redeem and dominate the world. The author traces this idea across the span of American history and notes that America's messianic role has always been present but has been constantly adjusted and retooled in each era to justify its imperialistic designs. It was manifested in the wars of conquest against the native population; the Western expansion with Manifest Destiny as its watchword; the Mexican war that captured over half of Mexican territory; the Spanish-American war that captured the Spanish territories of Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines; and the Monroe doctrine and its corollary that gave America economic and military hegemony over Latin America and the Caribbean. Presently, we hear its echo in the war against terror that justifies America's invasion and occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq. The neoconservatives who propelled America into war against Iraq, having failed to find