THE BLUE PARAKEET

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Category: Reviews

Scot McKnight, who must rank as the most prolific Christian blogger I know, has just written an intriguing little book called The Blue Parakeet: Rethinking How You Read the Bible. I was fortunate enough to get my hands on a review copy (and I'll be happy to receive review copies of other books on the Bible or on Christian mission if anyone any publishers are reading).

On a broad note, this book fits a current trend in Evangelical publishing by liberally scattering personal anecdotes and references to the author's friends and family in amongst the teaching. I'm not sure that this adds much value to the book, but then again it doesn't distract either, so I guess it's a question of personal preference. The obscure title makes perfect sense once you actually get into the book and realise what Scot is talking about (unlike Rob Bell's Velvet Elvis, where I never really understood why the book had that name).

The book breaks down into five sections: the first is a brief introduction in which Scot tells us about himself and also explains where the book title actually comes from. Though the introduction is brief, it is very important as it lays out a truth which is both self evident (if we open our eyes) and highly subversive: that is that Christians (even those who claim to believe the whole Bible) pick and choose the parts of the Bible that they pay attention to.

Story: What is the Bible: What is the Bible?

The first major section of the book examines the nature of the Biblical text and suggests that the Bible should be read as a story. If you have read my posts on the purpose of the Bible, you will know that I share this view. This is summed up in an excellent quote from John Goldingay "The biblical gospel is not a collection of timeless statements such as God is love. It is a narrative about things God has done." (p. 59). Scott suggests that rather than reading the Bible as a story, we tend to take a number of short cuts. We can treat the Bible as a series of Morsels of Law, Morsels of Blessings and Promises a series of Roarschach inkblots or a series of puzzles which map out God's mind. Each of these shortcuts actually serves to tame the Bible by bringing it down to our level and adapting it to our needs, rather than being God's unfolding story into we must fit our lives.

Listening: What Do I do With the Bible?

This section looks at how Bible reading should affect our life, there is a lot of good stuff here but perhaps this quote from page 85 captures the essential.

> *As a college student one of my favourite chapters of the Bible was psalm 119. Why? Because the psalmist and I shared something:we both loved God's Word and we both loved to study its words. But the palmist's approach to his Bible - and you can just sit down and read it - is not expressed like this : "Your words are authoritative, and I am called to submit to them." Instead his approach is more like this: "Your words are delightful, and I love to do what you ask." The difference between these two approaches is enormous. One of them is a relationship to the Bible, the other is a relationship with God.*

Discerning: How Do I Benefit From the Bible?

At this point, the book gets to grips with the whole concept of us picking and choosing which bits of the Bible we choose to obey - or discernment if you prefer. Again, without wishing to rehash all of the arguments, a quote captures the essence of how the author feels we should approach Scripture:

> *Adaptability and development are woven into the very fabric of the Bible. From beginning to end there is a pattern of adopting and adapting. It is the attempt to foist one person's days and ways on everyone's days and ways that quenches the Holy Spirit. Can we be biblical if we fail to be as adaptable as the Bible itself was - only for our world? Is this messy? Sometimes it is. Was the Jerusalem Council messy? Ys it was. Did the discern what to do for that time? Yes the did. Was it permanent, for all time, for everyone, always, everywhere? No.*

This sounds subversive, but as you read through the book, you come to realise that this is actually what we have always done - it's just that we are not always as honest about it as Scot McKnight.

Women in Church Ministries Today

This section is a longish piece applying the principles outlined in the rest of the book to the question of women's ministry in the Church. Though I agree with the conclusions he draws, I feel that this is the weakest section in the book. The change from the first three sections is very marked and a little jarring. I also feel that the section is too short to do itself justice: there is enough information for those who share the author's point of view or who are agnostic on the question, but those who disagree with find it unconvincing. The idea of applying the principles in the book to a particular question is a good one, but I fear that in choosing such a contentious subject on which there is already a huge literature, Scot has done himself a disservice. Better to have taken a different subject for this section and then written a whole book on the women in ministry theme.

My comments on the last section, notwithstanding, I feel that this is an excellent little book. It isn't a book for the specialist of the Bible scholar, but anyone who wants to be serious about having a relationship with God through reading the Scriptures would benefit from it. It will probably ruffle a few feathers when it is published in November, but I believe that a genuine and honest approach to Scripture like the one Scot McKnight advocates is what is needed in this generation. When it comes out: buy it!