

ALLIANCE THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

REFLECTION PAPER ON CLAYTON J. SCHMIT'S
PUBLIC READING OF SCRIPTURE

CD 766.RA- WORSHIP IN THE KOREAN CONTEXT
FALL 2006
INSTRUCTOR: DR. JINTAE KIM

BY

NYACK, NEW YORK
DECEMBER 2006

Clayton J. Schmit's *Public Reading Of Scripture* is a largely helpful and practical book despite the book's diminutive size. It admirably accomplishes the two purposes which the book lays out from the beginning.

- (1) to provide Christian laymen and laywomen with an understanding of the importance of serving as readers of Scripture in public worship
- (2) to serve as a resource in teaching them to perform this ministry effectively¹

Early in the book, it is palpable how Schmit emphasizes what a serious and noble task it is to read Scripture publicly. It can be likened to a seasoned marriage counselor who has seen too many failed marriages and is advising young couples to think deeply before they rashly plunge into the sanctity of marriage. Presenting the topic in this way is effective in helping the potential reader to not enter into this *ministry* of reading Scripture lightly. He makes it clear that "a reader who...mistreats the Word clearly has no sense that God is present as the Word is proclaimed."²

Also he states matters appropriately in poetic terms as he likens the reader to an ancient herald. The "herald's beauty lay in the swiftness of his feet"... "Their presence, their skill, their thoughtful articulation of God's Word: these are the things that are beautiful."³ This kind of writing I find inspiring.

The second impression that the reader is given early is that the public reading of Scripture is more complex than what one may originally think. At first one may presume that all you need to do is to ask someone who is available to

¹ Schmit, Clayton J. *Public Reading Of Scripture*. (Nashville, 2002), 9.

² Schmit, 37

³ Schmit, 16

speak loud enough to be heard. But Schmit states that the public reading of Scripture is a calling and an “art that employs techniques for body and voice to make written texts come alive as they are spoken.”⁴ Therefore he states that this is an *art* of oral interpretation. He helps the reader to view highly the skills that need to be built to become a proficient reader. If an individual heeds the instructions of this book it is clear that he or she will most likely have many of the tools to be an effective reader. Schmit also provides a good reference by defining technical terms such as *lector*, *lection* and *lectern*.

I found the chapters that succinctly but sufficiently explaining the techniques and importance of breathing, eye contact, gestures, pitch and inflection to be invaluable if the sample exercises were utilized. Schmit once again shows that there are a surprising number of technical aspects to master when conducting this ministry.

Nowadays, I have not seen any contemporary churches that have a lector. In fact the only ones I have seen are in more classical or traditional churches such as John Piper’s church and a PCUSA church where I have heard an online message. I do see the value of having a separate lay person do the public Bible reading before the message but I see also why some more contemporary churches will just allow the preacher to read the passage if that preacher is doing expository preaching. My guess is that the preacher is the one who has done the exegesis of the passage and if the reader renders a passage with an emphasis that the preacher does not have in mind then that can be detriment to his or her message. So perhaps since the oral interpretation of the passage can be so

⁴ Schmit, 10

powerful the preacher may feel that it is best read by the pastor who has a specific vision for that message.

In terms of how practical this book, now with the advent of DVDs, I wonder if a video showing an individual publicly reading the Scripture well would be a much better learning vehicle system than a book for this topic. Because we are dealing with learning an oratory skill even a DVD training tool would be second-best to an actual class which was led by a skilled orator. Schmit does provide discussion questions so that a small group can discuss and work together in helping each other grow in their skills. Yet if none of the participants of this small group were too skilled then they would just be pooling ignorance. So in lieu of a class on this topic, a DVD with high quality demonstrations of public Scripture reading would seem optimal even if it is accompanied with this book.