

Consensus

Volume 26

Issue 1 *The Baptismal Journey: Adventures on the River of Life*

Article 15

5-1-2000

Eve: a biography

Diane E. Peters

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholars.wlu.ca/consensus>

Recommended Citation

Peters, Diane E. (2000) "Eve: a biography," *Consensus*: Vol. 26 : Iss. 1 , Article 15.

Available at: <http://scholars.wlu.ca/consensus/vol26/iss1/15>

This Book Reviews is brought to you for free and open access by Scholars Commons @ Laurier. It has been accepted for inclusion in Consensus by an authorized editor of Scholars Commons @ Laurier. For more information, please contact scholarscommons@wlu.ca.

Eve: A Biography

Pamela Norris

Washington Square, New York: New York University Press, 1999

496 pages, \$48.95 Hardcover

Pamela Norris' study, described as "the history of Everywoman", traces the evolution of Western thought with respect to the nature and role of women in society. The narrative is held together by the metaphor of Eve, who, in the book of Genesis, is given the title "the mother of all living".

Eve has traditionally been an ambiguous figure: giver of life, yet catalyst for the entry of death into the world; pure and innocent, yet seductive and dangerous. Norris discusses interpretations of Eve and her myriad "daughters" – Mrs. Noah, Sarah, Rachel, Pandora, Psyche, Thecla, Perpetua, Mary Magdalene, the Virgin Mary, Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Aurora Leigh, Thomas Hardy's Tess, Daphne du Maurier's Rebecca – dating from the Old Testament period through to the twentieth century. Norris, an English teacher and literary scholar, draws upon a broad range of sources to illuminate Eve's "biography": myth, folk tale, apocryphal legends, rabbinical legal codes, Greek medical treatises, Reformation theology, popular romance, poetry, drama, and art. Writers as diverse as Rabbi Ben Sira, Aristotle, Homer, St. Paul, Clement of Alexandria, Augustine, Hildegard von Bingen, Luther, Milton, Mary Shelley, Alfred Tennyson, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Charlotte Brontë, Ernest Hemingway, Margaret Atwood and Carol Shields are cited.

Part One, "The Making of A Bad Reputation", explores ancient Jewish tradition, Graeco-Roman mythology, Gnosticism, and the origin of ascetic ideals in early Christianity. It considers various facets of the relationship between men and women, and how the image of woman was increasingly transformed from good to evil. Part Two, "Fantasies of Eve", looks at some of the ways in which aspects of Eve – as mother, sexual temptress, helpmate, sinner – have inspired writers and artists from the Middle Ages to the present day. Most of the commentary in Part One was written by men – Norris calls it, "the unique record of the male imagination at work, wrestling with the female other" (403). Part Two draws heavily on women's own assessments of the place of the female in society. In these retellings of Eve's story, the focus is on interpretations which attempt to free woman from her disreputable past.

Norris' book, originally published in Great Britain in 1998 under the title *The Story of Eve*, provides a scholarly yet easy-to-read introduction to the Eve story and its incarnations for the pastor, student, or general reader. Its wide range of references, including both the theological, the literary and the artistic, encompass a variety of perspectives. Endnotes to each chapter lead to other sources for those wishing more in-depth coverage of topics discussed, although

curiously, the location of the notes are not indicated by reference numbers in the text and this makes their placement somewhat difficult to follow.

Twenty-eight black and white illustrations and 12 colour plates presenting relevant visual images are included, with most discussed in the text. There is an index and select bibliography for those wishing to pursue additional research.

Diane E. Peters

Wilfrid Laurier University/Waterloo Lutheran Seminary

The Jesus Controversy: Perspectives in Conflict

John Dominic Crossan, Luke Timothy Johnson, Werner H. Kelber
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 1999
v + 121 pages, \$26.50 Hardcover

Over the last ten to fifteen years we have borne witness to an explosion of controversy and research in historical Jesus studies, what has been dubbed by some as the Third Quest. Indeed, Luke Timothy Johnson, one of the contributors to this lecture series become book, says that the quest which began in the 1960s "as a small trickle" has become "a major tributary...again in full flood, with new versions of Jesus available at Barnes and Noble almost monthly" (48). Certainly popular magazines like *Time*, *Newsweek* and *Maclean's* have fueled the controversy by laying it before the general public – not that such action offends most of the "Questers". After all, Robert W. Funk, a primary organizer of the recent Quest, has taken great pains to present the scholarly debate before the public eye.

The Jesus Controversy is still another of the mountain of publications that continues to appear on the subject, and between its two covers are lectures sponsored by the Rockwell Foundation, an activity inaugurated in 1938. As one who began his graduate career in the field of New Testament and who took up the challenge of Bultmann student Ernst Käsemann to search for the historical Jesus in order to ground the *kerygma* in history over against Gnosticism, I am caught up again in the simultaneously academic and faith challenge to find the Jesus of history through the layers of faith traditions in ancient documents, canonical and otherwise.

Certainly, the book contains some genuine nuggets, and I applaud these. I appreciated greatly Crossan's debate and challenge with Daniel Boyarin; I find his points profound (especially with our Lutheran love of Paul) and compelling. On some points, here and there, I disagree with Crossan, but overall I applaud his scholarship, his methodological genius, his literary skills and the radical faith he