

Consensus

Volume 21

Issue 1 *Women and Men in Theological Education:
Exploring the Present, Creating the Future*

Article 33

5-1-1995

Ministry in an Oral Culture: Living with Will Rogers, Uncle Remus, and Minnie Pearl

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Recommended Citation

Rattee, Mike (1995) "Ministry in an Oral Culture: Living with Will Rogers, Uncle Remus, and Minnie Pearl," *Consensus*: Vol. 21 : Iss. 1 , Article 33.

Available at: <http://scholars.wlu.ca/consensus/vol21/iss1/33>

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I found this book very text-bookish, but that is what the author intended. I also found the second section very informing, for it is in this section that the author presents "Human Problems as Contexts for Care". It is here that he presents four of the major human problems to which pastoral care is addressed, and brings all three of the paradigms to reality in the cases cited.

The first part of the book brought me up to date with language and experience, while the second gave me some tools that I can use effectively in my work as a pastoral carer.

This was a good read!

Val Hennig

Wilfrid Laurier University and University of Waterloo

Ministry in an Oral Culture: Living with Will Rogers, Uncle Remus and Minnie Pearl

Tex Sample

Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994

ii + 100 pp.

Ministry in an Oral Culture is a book aimed at helping literate ministers trained in academia to do more effective ministry among the "traditionally oral" people of society. This is not a homiletics text with details on how to preach to an oral culture, although there are a few references to storytelling, illustrations, and the power of sound. As the title suggests, the book deals with many issues of pastoral ministry (socializing, solving conflict, managing change, etc.). Applying this material to preaching is really left to the reader's imagination.

The author describes 11 marks of a traditionally oral person. Some of these traits include: a preference for proverbs and storytelling, apprenticing and learning by doing, the preservation of community relationships, importance of tradition, and resistance to experts from the outside. As an advocate for oral people, Sample reminds us that they aren't illiterate, or less important; they simply experience life through a different lens. In fact, he estimates that one-half of the U.S.A. and two-thirds of the world are predominantly oral (p. 6). The popularity of rap and country music is an illustration of how dominant orality is in this culture (p. 11).

Sample generalizes that the majority of ministers are not trained to understand the oral culture, and that most are even prejudiced against these "common/vulgar" folk (p. 6). A church that is not sensitive to their ways will not attract them, keep them, or minister to them (p. 18). Throughout the book there are quotes and references as evidence that Sample has been informed and motivated by Walter Ong's *Orality And Literacy*.

The author is wise enough not to elevate his message as being the only true strategy for churches. He shows balance when he says "the church mustn't become only oral... to be effective in the world we must also be literate" (p. 18). He also agrees that our culture is being shaped by a combination of oral, literate, and electronic communication. His prediction is that in the next century all three will continue to have importance, and so the church must be sensitively indigenous (p. 11).

Sample is to be commended for the style of the book. His theories about proverbs, stories, community relationships, are always backed up with examples and illustrations of what he means. It is to his credit that he practices what he preaches, and to the reader's benefit so we can see what this truth looks like in real life. Interestingly, the book ends with a moving, four page story about how a minister with a Ph.D. learned the importance of traditional orality.

One minor issue is the puzzling subtitle, *Living With Will Rogers, Uncle Remus, And Minnie Pearl*. Sample never does explain who these figures are or their importance to his thesis. It was only after talking with some older colleagues that I deduced they were storytellers who appeal to the oral culture. A more universally identifiable example would be appreciated.

I hesitate to give this book an enthusiastic recommendation. Certainly white, middle-class, polished ministers always need to be reminded that their way is not the only way. The message is true, but I suspect that most pastors with common sense and a few years experience would find this information repetitive and obvious.

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Pastoral Life and Practice in the Early Church

Carl A. Volz

Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1990

240 pp.

Pastoral Care and the Means of Grace

Ralph L. Underwood

Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993

160 pp.

Carl Volz, professor of early church history at Luther Northwestern Theological Seminary, has written an earlier book on *Faith and Practice in the Early Church*. The present book under review focuses specifically upon the development of the office and role of parish pastor in the early church,