

'A powerful reminder of  
how nourishing Scripture can be'  
Paula Gooder

## HOW TO EAT BREAD

21 NOURISHING WAYS  
TO READ THE BIBLE



MIRANDA  
THRELFALL-HOLMES

### Miranda Threlfall-Holmes:- 'How to eat bread'.

This is an attractive little book on ways of reading the Bible which needs no endorsements from me, coming as it does with baubles from the greats such as the Archbishop of York and Paula Gooder. For many, it won't contain a lot that is startlingly new, but it is extremely well put together with short chapters offering some brief comments before suggesting exercises to try out various approaches.

Wisely, Threlfall-Holmes warns us, on different occasions throughout the book, of the limitation of interpreting the 'Old Testament' purely as a commentary on Jesus. She doesn't shy away from difficult passages but uses them as an opportunity to remind us that the Bible doesn't just contain instructions for how we *should* live. Rather she

invites us to examine our gut reactions when we read about the violent predatory nature of some of the characters in the stories.

She takes us on a theological journey through the book dismissing various myths as she goes. She reminds us that there is no such thing as a 'plain' interpretation of scripture but that we all bring something of our story and our prejudices to it. She even suggests that the foundational influence of much Christian theology today – the Fall – is a victim of such influences, challenged as it is by Liberation Theology which sees greed, not disobedience as the primary sin.

On the way she dismisses the remarkably persistent falsehood that before the Enlightenment the church held a literalist understanding of scripture, quoting Origen (2<sup>nd</sup> c.) and Augustine (4<sup>th</sup> c.) as scoffing at such a naïve and inadequate approach, encouraging us towards a deeper and more truthful and honest engagement with what God is trying to tell us through the text.

This more personal encounter with scripture is at the heart of all that Threlfall-Holmes has to say. We must bring our minds and learning, but in the end, it is how we are transformed that is important. Her exploration of the Good Samaritan wonders with us what journey we are on, what robs us of things of value and how we encounter the despised parts of ourselves. She sees the Temptation as 'voices in our head' questioning our sense of worth: *If* you are... which she compares to the oft-heard phrase: *If* you loved me, you would...

There is, of course, engagement with the classic biblical exercises of lectio divina and Ignatian spirituality as well as encouragement to be more 'playful' with scripture using art, drama and improvisation to fill in some of the gaps.

This is a very readable book but it is not really meant to be read – it is to be used. The whole aim is to deepen our faith and bring us to a fuller understanding of God's love and purposes for us. If there is one minor criticism it might be that she accepts unexamined the idea that Jesus thought allegorically. Certainly, allegory is a very early Christian way of thinking but many scholars today consider this a Greek rather than a Semitic form of story-telling. This apart, there is enough scholarship here to reassure and not too much to baffle.

An excellent resource for us all. Just ask Paula Gooder!