
Pro Rege

Volume 39 | Number 1

Article 5

September 2010

Wow! What a Ride! A Journey with Cancer (Book Review)

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Recommended Citation

Adams, Pam (2010) "Wow! What a Ride! A Journey with Cancer (Book Review)," *Pro Rege*: Vol. 39: No. 1, 40 - 41.
Available at: http://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro_rege/vol39/iss1/5

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A quarterly faculty publication of
Dordt College, Sioux Center, Iowa

Book Reviews

Bosma, Cella. *Wow! What a Ride! A Journey with Cancer*. Sioux Center, IA: Dordt College Press, 2010. 274 pages. ISBN: 978-0-932914-84-2. Reviewed by Pam Adams, professor emeritus, Dordt College.

Cella Bosma died in 2009 after a two-year battle with cancer. As she went through the months of treatment—of the hope of a cure, of the agony of a fatal diagnosis—she recorded her responses to this “journey” on a Caring Bridge site. Mike Vanden Bosch, English professor emeritus of Dordt College and Cella’s uncle, compiled these reflections for a book: *Wow! What a Ride! A Journey with Cancer*.

Cella’s words are beautiful to read. She, in her years of health and in her months of sickness, lived for the Lord, and she died in Him. I knew Cella as a colleague and friend and loved her for her kind, gentle, and loving ways. I think everyone who met Cella felt this way about her. To Cella, pleasing the Lord was central. Of course she loved her husband, children, grandchildren, and everyone she knew, but God was ultimately important. I wanted to read her book to see if this was how she presented herself. Indeed she did. In Colossians 3:12 we read, “Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe your selves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.” Cella did.

Compassion and kindness are the first descriptors in Colossians 3:12. Both were quite difficult during the personal health problems that Cella knew could be fatal. But Cella could manifest these because she was “In Him,” as she said when signing off in her daily messages. Cella quotes and comments on Bible passages and thanks God for all He is doing in her life and in the lives of those she knows and loves. Cella writes with an open heart: “And what is incredible is that God sends each of you our way with new and different ways to encourage. Good friends are invaluable. But there is one friend who does it all.” Cella asks for prayers for individuals who have had what the world sees as trials but which Cella sees as wonderful for our growth in the Lord. We will be scaffolded by God, who uses others for some of this work. Visiting the sick and praying for them is part and parcel for a Christian disciple who wants to do the work of the Lord. Cella speaks in this way often in the book: “It comes down to the grace of God and how He manifested it through His wonderful caring people.” Cella saw this in others and truly expressed her feelings with many others—friends, students, and people around the world. Her daughter, Megan, and Megan’s husband are missionaries in Nigeria. I am sure Megan attributes her openness to others, in part, to her mother, whom God directed throughout her whole life.

Humiliation is often unavoidable during illness, but a sense of humility puts us in the arms of Jesus, who gives

grace. Cella says this about wearing a wig: “At this time I’ve decided not to wear my wig. It makes me feel unnatural and it feels as if I’ve got a sign on that says, ‘Bald woman.’ I’ve decided to wear scarves and hats instead.” While there is no one answer to whether to wear a wig or not, her words show how Cella typically reacts when trying to look normal in a very abnormal situation. She will live with people looking at her and asking questions because Cella has the answers that God has supplied to her.

Cella is able—because of her sickness—to reflect on other times in her life. Cella and family spent many summer weeks in Cary, Mississippi, and learned from the people there something about gentleness. She writes that Cary Christian Center and the Straight Gate Ministry “taught us what it really means to be a servant. They’ve shown us what it means to live a life of giving. They’ve also taught us much about other cultures and how to respond to them.” Cella wants to “witness even here in my neighborhood this summer to a Savior who’s given His life for me. I hope you can too.”

Patience is the last trait that is mentioned in Colossians 3:12. Cella needed to be patient with treatment, patient with helpers, patient with the medicine, but also patient with God, to whom she cried for healing. She writes, “My cries to God have increased. I wish that I didn’t have to admit that adversity brings me closer to God.” This is what Cella admitted in several places in her book. Thanking others for what they have done while she was going through brain-cancer treatments shows patience that most of us would love to possess. I believe patience is very possible when one holds onto God and His Word. Cella proclaims, “I do not know what the future holds as far as my disease, but I do know that He holds it. I know that He cares for me and will never leave or forsake me or my family. For that I am grateful!”

Who Cella was—her gentleness, compassion, patience, kindness and humility—shine in the memoirs of her final journey. And those were also the qualities she saw in others who were helping her along the way.

Cella died and had a beautiful funeral, triumphant and sad. This book helps us feel secure in that hope, on which she patiently rested. I recommend her book to all people who need to hear the voice of God in an encouraging way. That describes many people, perhaps you. As the journey ends, Cella is able to say,

God is good! [. . .] But I really mean it. Once again I’m thrown into a time where I really have to rely on

God. Many of you know our life history and how it seems that if it can happen, it will happen to the Bosmas.... God isn't the one who creates pain and suffering. But He is the one who comforts.... All

I can say is "Thank you, God. Thank you for your abiding love."
And thank you, God, for Cella "holy and dearly loved."

Kraybill, J. Nelson. *Apocalypse and Allegiance: Worship, Politics and Devotion in the Book of Revelation*. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2010. 224 pages. ISBN: Reviewed by Dr. Syd Hielema, Chaplain and Associate Professor of Religion at Redeemer University College, Ancaster, ON.

Opinion polls have long confirmed that the final book of the Bible, Revelation, is one of the most popular works in the entire canon. After the establishment of the state of Israel after the Second World War and the subsequent rise of tensions in the Middle East, end-times fever and the accompanying interest in St. John's Revelation have increased dramatically. Attempts to correlate specific events of our time with the visions that John received, most notably in the wildly successful *Left Behind* series, written by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins, spread with each new outbreak of violence or natural disaster. But such schools of interpretation have a long history, so that more than a century ago G. K. Chesterton could write in *Orthodoxy*, "though St. John the Evangelist saw many wild monsters in his vision, he saw no creature so wild as one of his own commentators" (qtd. in Peterson, *Reversed Thunder, The Revelation of John and the Praying Imagination*, xiii).

It's a pleasure to welcome J. Nelson Kraybill's *Apocalypse and Allegiance: Worship, Politics and Devotion in the Book of Revelation* into the speculative cacophony of commentaries and end-times analyses. Dr. Kraybill, president emeritus of Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary and author of *Imperial Cult and Commerce in John's Apocalypse* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), quickly distances himself from these schools of interpretation at the outset:

The last book of the Bible is not a catalog of predictions about events that would take place two thousand years later. Rather, it is a projector that casts archetypal images of good and evil onto a cosmic screen. These images speak first of all to realities of the author's era. But Revelation also serves as a primer on how good and evil interact in every generation. (15)

Kraybill's mission is to describe the "realities of the author's era" by means of the semiotic theory of Charles Sanders Peirce, which distinguishes among the communicative properties of icon, index and symbol (34). Complicated? Not really. After a very brief summary of Peirce's work, Kraybill focuses on the task at hand, which is to correlate the symbolism in Revelation with cultural symbols of the late first century. He does so because "symbols are signs that communicate simply because users in a given group or culture have agreed to give them an arbitrary meaning" (34). In his view, Revelation is filled with hundreds of

symbols, which, in order to be understood, must be seen as polemic reclaimings of idolatrous symbols from the Roman Empire.

Apocalypse and Allegiance functions like an encyclopedia of symbol correlation: according to Kraybill, the risen Christ in Rev. 1 responds to a Roman coin that features the infant son of emperor Domitian (37). The worship of the earth-beast in Rev. 13 correlates with various kinds of emperor worship (Ch. 3). The kingdom and priesthood established by the risen Lamb counters the "*augustales*, the priests of emperor worship" (100). The uncountable worshipers of Rev. 7 reduce the celebrating crowds at the Circus Maximus to a pitiful parody (114). I could continue, but you get the picture: Kraybill understands the dynamics of late-first-century Roman culture very well, and though the number of correlations with John's writing in Revelation are almost uncountable, their conclusion is consistent: Revelation unmasks the idolatries of Rome incisively and reveals the risen Lamb on the throne as the true and only Lord of all.

Kraybill's method becomes both a strength and a weakness. It is a strength because his vast historical knowledge illumines many confusing images and phrases in Revelation by situating them within the contrast between worship of the true King and idolatry in the first century. Anyone who completes this volume will find it very difficult to argue that John's primary audience was intended to be a church in the far-distant future anticipating the traumas of the end times. Instead, Kraybill's goal of describing first-century spiritual warfare so that it clarifies the warfare we are still engaged in today succeeds remarkably well. He follows the implications of his findings to difficult places and tackles these head-on, including dealing with the book's anger, violence, and desire for vengeance (133-137) and its economic implications (141-154).

But his approach also has weaknesses. At points the almost overwhelming correlation of passages in Revelation with first-century cultural artifacts begins to feel reductionist. St. John's writing is so multi-dimensionally rich, operating on several levels simultaneously, that Kraybill's heavy emphasis on this one dimension diminishes and even ignores other significant dimensions. St. John's literary artistry is such that intra-textual allusions abound playfully