


10-1985

Consent of the Governed

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Recommended Citation

Samson, Steven Alan, "Consent of the Governed" (1985). *Faculty Publications and Presentations*. 56.
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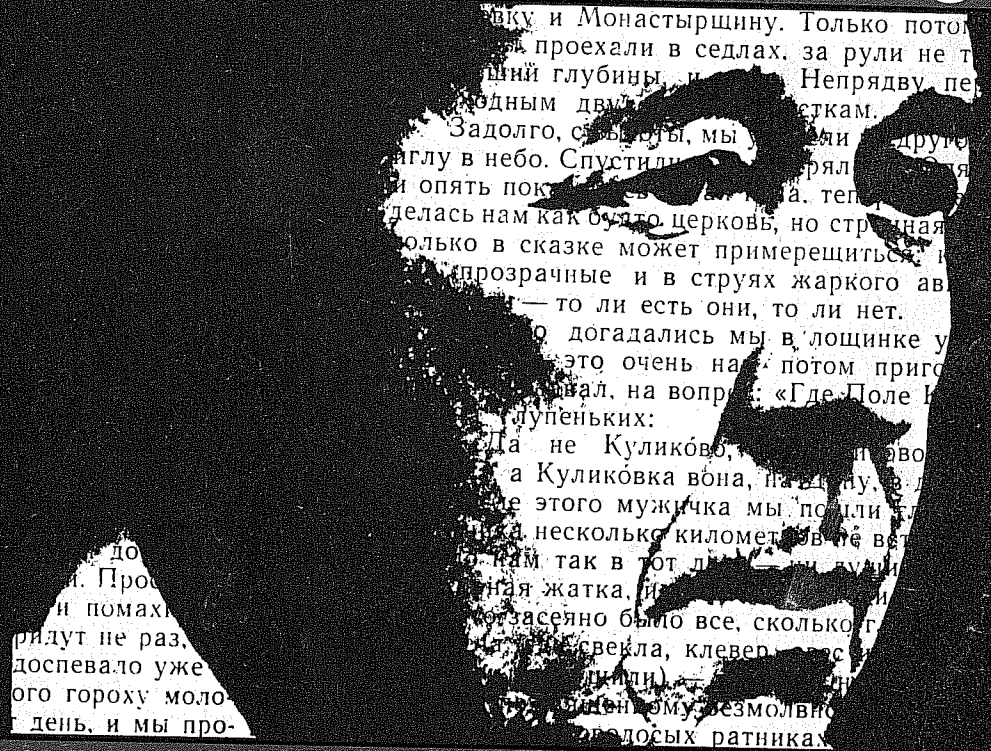
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seeks to show that the Gospel writers are gifted theologians, not merely compilers of early church tradition about Jesus, but creative editors of that tradition.

Beginning with a brief survey of previous studies of the resurrection narratives since the Enlightenment (part one), the book

divides into two major sections. Part two examines the redaction (editorial activity) present in the resurrection narratives for each of the Gospels, part three the traditional materials at the disposal of the four evangelists.

The main value of this book is its wres-

tlng with issues about which many pastors and other careful Bible students need to be more aware. The Gospels are not impartial, newspaperlike records of the life and ministry of Jesus. They are highly "prejudiced" in the sense that, through a selective handling of material, they are written to call the reader to faith in Christ. Osborne's work serves to make this unmistakably clear.

I wish, however, that the brief conclusion (part four) could have been expanded. The crucial question touched on here, the relationship between history and interpretation in the resurrection narratives, is one on which evangelicals need help in arriving at an informed consensus. Plainly, Osborne wishes to maintain both historical reliability and theological validity for the interpretation. Questionable, however, is his proposal to accomplish this by ascertaining from the narratives the event of Jesus' resurrection, as uninterpreted as possible, in order on that basis then to validate the evangelists' interpretation.

Among Osborne's particular exegetical conclusions, bound to provoke debate among evangelicals, is his view that the true ending of Mark has been lost. He finds this lost ending hinted at in Matthew 28:9-10 and possibly 28:16-20, and proposes a reconstruction that highlights the reversal of the women's fear to joy, based primarily on his assessment of Mark's editorial tendencies.

The text, a complete revision of his doctoral dissertation under the supervision of I. Howard Marshall, is still heavy with references to the views of other scholars. This sometimes makes the thread of Osborne's own argument difficult to follow. Still, serious students of the resurrection narratives will want to give this book careful attention. Ω

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Consent of the Governed

Steve Alan Samson

BEFORE THE CONVENTION by M. Susan Power
University Press of America. 1984. 268 pp. \$13.00

Steven Alan Samson is assistant professor of political science and history at Marion College, in Marion, Indiana.

The national traumas of the 1970s provoked a period of public soul-searching and renewed attention to the foundations of civil order. We now see a growing willingness among Christian leaderships to articulate and practice their faith publicly according to a consciously biblical standard of govern-

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ment. Efforts to bring all areas of life into submission to God hearken back to the earliest and best of our political traditions: namely the public Christianity that shaped the American constitutional system.

M. Susan Power, a professor of political science at Arkansas State University, ably sketches in *Before the Convention* a few of the leading personalities and key elements of the covenant-making tradition that promoted local self-government, rule of law, and limited government based on consent of the governed. She underscores continuity of this tradition from the early Puritan settlements to the War of Independence with a series of studies on the interplay of religion and politics in the works of three founders: John Winthrop, Thomas Hooker, and John Dickinson, the "penman of the Revolution." These early American Christians regarded religion as a public matter inseparable from community life, and urged the idea that government exists "to support, maintain, and extend good moral behavior" and "to protect, aid, and advance religion and the church."

Separate chapters of the book are devoted to a critique of the ideological vagaries of current scholarly literature, the limited influence of John Locke's theory of resistance, and Eric Voegelin's misconception of the Puritans as "Gnostic revolutionaries" seeking to establish a millennial utopia on earth. The discussion of Governor Winthrop's theory of discretionary power suggests how far removed our concerns have become from this earlier Christian context:

The chief problem in modern times with applying Winthrop's theory is his reliance upon a Christian conscience to act within or according to the law of God as a sufficient and serious restraint upon tyrannical actions. If a ruler seriously believes in Divine punishment, this reliance would not amount to tyranny unless one is willing to argue that compliance with God's law equals tyranny. But in a modern secular state, depending upon the executive's willingness to abide by God's law as a restraint upon his power may well be impossible.

The comparison does not reflect well upon us or our modern secular state. The general absence among leaders of a Christian conscience or a willingness "to act within or according to the law of God" makes tyranny—defined as usurpation or as rule apart from God—inevitable. Professor Power concludes: "If we live in a time of decline, Winthrop's solution may not apply to us, but at least his argument forces us to see that ours is a time to be

lamented, not to be celebrated."

Although the book is not written for general consumption, it provides a needed corrective to the prevalent secular interpretations of our country's political roots, accepted in many Christian circles. We must attend to rebuilding the foundations before the pillars of government are toppled. Ω

Never Ask What is True

George M. Marsden

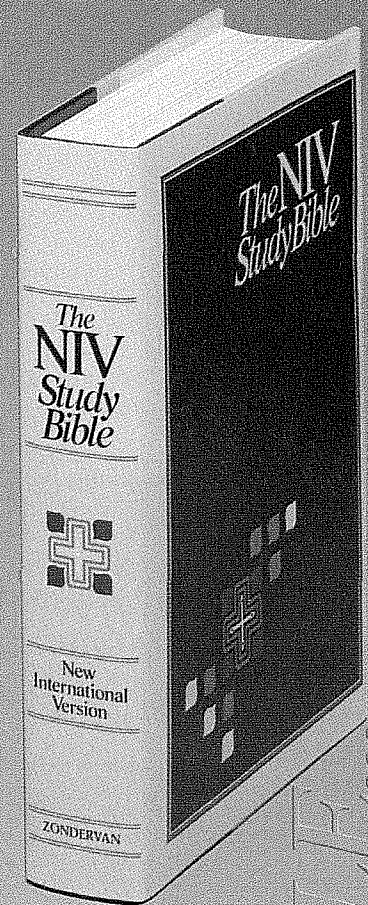
MORMONISM: THE STORY OF A NEW RELIGIOUS TRADITION by Jan Shipps
University of Illinois Press. 1985. 212 pp. \$14.50

George M. Marsden is professor of history at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and editor of *Evangelicalism and Modern America* (Eerdmans, 1984).

Jan Shipps, the leading non-Mormon (and non-ex-Mormon) expert on the topic, approaches Mormonism largely from the point of view of "history of religions" theory, a modern academic cult whose first commandment is "Thou shalt never ask whether it is true." This approach has some obvious disadvantages. For instance, Shipps makes early Christianity and early Mormonism seem like equivalents. But the history of religions method also has a few advantages which Shipps makes the best use of in the series of diverse essays that make up her important book.

Shipps's approach, however, does shed some light on the first question some of us cannot help asking about Mormonism: "Is it true?" After we look at what the Mormons are asked to believe based on the authority of Joseph Smith (and recent revelations about his involvement in folk magic, which Shipps takes into account, do not favor his credibility), our next question is likely to be, "How could the early Mormons believe such stuff?"

While avoiding this question directly, Shipps's brilliant insight provides a part of the answer. Early Mormons were part of a folk culture where the Bible was both the dominant literary force and the primary source of history. By accepting Joseph's revelations as authentic, they could begin living literally as though they were part of continuing biblical history. The roles became real, probably also for Smith himself. After Smith's death, the Reorganized Church, which headquartered in Missouri, relived largely New Testament themes and eventually became something like an eccentric evangelical Christian sect. By con-



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