

## FACULTY BOOK REVIEW

---

# *Swimming with the Sharks: Leading the Full-Spectrum Church in a Red-and-Blue World.*

By Jack Haberer (207 p.; 2024)

**I**n *Swimming with the Sharks*, long-time Presbyterian Church (USA) pastor and church leader Jack Haberer writes for seminary students and church leaders of all ages and positions of leadership as he explores Biblical grounding for grace-based ministry with one another in the first half of the 21st century. He is convinced that, with intentionality, identifying ministry perspectives is essential, when a natural reaction can be – unhelpfully – to embrace theological, political, and sociological viewpoints with “correctness” as a standard for accepting and serving with others.

Haberer tells a family story about when his children were young and encountered a shark while wading and playing in coastline waters. He develops that story into a deliberative and encouraging conversation for 21st-century disciples of Jesus Christ. This is crucial, of course, so that “life does not scare us away” from faith-community involvement and engagement.

From the family shark-encounter story in Part I, Haberer describes the United States’ 21st-century culture’s “red-and-blue” (“right” and “left,” conservative and progressive) color-spectrum imagery. These sorts of binary characterizations too often influence faith-community life in this time period among small and large congregations and fellowships alike.

In order to be the church God intends across the years, Haberer marshals “Carmel and Caesarea” as his Biblical points of reference: (1) Mt. Carmel where – in I Kings 18 & 19 – God’s truth was revealed in the fire-from-the-clouds incineration of the altar set up for the face-off between King Ahab’s prophets and Elijah, the faithful prophet of God; and (2) Caesarea – where, in Acts 10 and 11 – the storied encounter of Cornelius and Peter occurs, then leads to the testimony at the Council of Jerusalem,

where God’s Spirit teaches and transforms, turning the tables on the habit of religious exclusivity in order for God’s inclusivity to become a prevailing faith-community value. Haberer tells readers that if faithfulness to God in Jesus Christ is our calling, choosing one or the other of “truth” or “inclusivity” is not an option. Being a church of both is essential.

Strengths of the book’s Part II and Part III examine Jesus’ life ministries, which Haberer calls “Jesus’ passions,” and the Holy Spirit’s unrelenting transformative capability, which is never “just in the past,” but which clearly relates and connects to contemporary challenges.

Readers almost certainly will complete this book convinced how, (1) yes, there are sharks in the cultural and ecclesial waters, and (2) Jesus’ passions and God’s Spirit beckon disciples still for in-water engagement which is legitimized by God’s truth prompting the practice of God’s inclusivity – neither of which can be exemplified through allegiance to “colors” or other distinctions!

Leadership and discussion groups of many faith traditions will likely be challenged by, enjoy, and benefit from this volume. ■

**The Reverend Ted V. Foote, Jr.** is Professor in the Louis H. and Katherine S. Zbinden Distinguished Chair of Pastoral Ministry and Leadership. Before joining the faculty at Austin Seminary, Rev. Foote served as a pastor in the PC(USA) for over forty years.

