"Agenda for the Twenty-first Century." These chapters are followed by six Bible studies that integrate scientific and religious issues. The six appendices at the end of the book are group reports from participants representing the various continents.

This book addresses issues similar to those treated in Ian Barbour's *Religion in an Age of Science* (San Francisco, 1990), but the essays are written for less-sophisticated readers. Nevertheless, they raise pertinent questions and provide innovative directives. For instance, what is the nature of humanity; is biological death the "wages of sin?" Certainly not, argues Arthur Peacocke; "biological death was present on the earth long before human beings arrived." Death is the way God brings new life forms into existence, thus it is part of the creative process. Peacocke understands Paul to be speaking of death in a figurative sense. Compare the ancient argument between Pelagius and St. Augustine; Pelagius also thought of death as being perfectly natural, not something humans brought on themselves through the will.

Ronald Cole-Turner argues that advances in genetic engineering necessitate a change in theological attitudes to accommodate these developments. While caution is called for, humanity is to be perceived as a co-creator with God in directing the natural processes through science and technology toward ends that are compatible with the Christian theology of creation, or discernible within God's purpose for creation.

Throughout the essays there is a sense that Christian churches are fast reaching a point of irrelevance; they are losing credibility because their theology is not being informed by the rapid developments in science and technology. Robert John Russell muses that where there is no credibility, prophetic vision fails. The writers do not propose to have all the answers, but they have grasped the significance of the situation facing Christian churches due to scientific and technological advances and are moving to meet the challenge. The sincerity of their effort is evident in each essay. Conservative Christians may find it difficult to come to grips with the issues raised in this book; the question is whether they can afford to ignore them.

Andrews University   A. JOSEF GREIG

McKnight, Edgar V. *Post-Modern Use of the Bible: The Emergence of Reader-Oriented Criticism.* Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988. 304 pp. $15.95.

McKnight's book should prove to be a landmark in NT scholarship. It is not a landmark because it is the last word on the subject of method, because it will meet with universal acceptance, because it makes simple and entertaining reading, or because it breaks entirely new ground. What makes

McKnight's book a landmark is the way in which it exceeds the sum of its parts to provoke in readers a whole new way of thinking about the past, present, and future of biblical interpretation.

McKnight's title plays on that of Harry Emerson Fosdick's epic work, *The Modern Use of the Bible*, a work that popularized historical-critical assumptions in the first part of this century. McKnight himself, therefore, undoubtedly hopes that his new book will attain a similar landmark status within NT scholarship as it moves into the "post-critical" age.

McKnight offers a fresh and penetrating analysis of the history and development of biblical interpretation in the light of major literary, social, and historical trends from the dawn of recorded consciousness until the present. He surveys the past with a vision energized by recent developments in the understanding of perception and of the interaction between reader and text. While few will agree with everything he says, McKnight's analyses cannot safely be ignored.

McKnight does not argue for the abandonment of the critical approach to the text, but he does decry the way such an approach creates distance between the text and modern readers. Building on antifoundationalist philosophy, he argues for the right of each reader to make sense of the text for himself or herself while remaining in dialogue with critical assumptions and approaches. The hermeneutical circle should expand from original intent to the literary relationship of the parts to the whole of the text and to its progressive contexts in the consciousness of individual readers and in communities of readers over the centuries.

McKnight has organized the book into an hourglass. The first two chapters survey the history and development of interpretive strategies from the precritical stage to the present, including insightful commentaries on such recent developments as redaction criticism, sociological interpretation, and canonical criticism. The central (third) chapter outlines some of the new literary approaches, with particular emphasis on structuralism/formalism. The fourth and fifth chapters give a philosophical and practical outline of how reader-oriented interpretation could function to help readers make sense of the Bible while remaining faithful to both contemporary methods and each reader's needs and perspectives.

With striking clarity McKnight highlights the fact that both the dogmatic and critical approaches to the text were satisfying in their time because they offered interpretations that were consistent with the prevailing world views that first brought them into existence. Just as allegorical interpretation fit comfortably into a platonic world, so critical interpretation fit comfortably into a world that had limited truth to sense experience, thus defining God out of existence. Neither view of the world was objective; both were comfortable and popular assumptions. McKnight suggests that we have now moved into a "post-modern age," in which language again is capable of conceptualizing God, but in a different sense from the dogmatic

age. McKnight hopes that in this age biblical texts can be read without a detour through any philosophical system.

He builds on the above to argue that meaning is dynamic. Individuals and groups make sense of their world by means of a particular view of the universe. But since no humans are in direct touch with ultimate reality, a plurality of meanings and world views inevitably results. Such pluralism may be a "nightmare" to many, but McKnight sees it as the key to the future of biblical interpretation. Instead of combining into exclusive groups struggling to define *the* correct approach to the biblical text, scholars of the Bible can gain from the richness of diversity. By sharing a variety of readings, each scholar's own reading is enriched.

There are aspects of the book that this reviewer finds problematic. For one thing, the book has a certain "unfinished" quality that makes it difficult to follow at many points. Perhaps this is inevitable where one is attempting to break fresh hermeneutical ground. One wonders also whether Mac-Quarrie's assertion that "the language of the Bible is not reducible to propositions" (quoted approvingly on p. 206) is really supportable in the biblical text.

A related problem is McKnight's seemingly uncritical acceptance of antifoundationalism. It is true that considerable pluralism is inevitable and even helpful; it is also true that even biblical assertions are but faint reflections of the divine; but is not McKnight also a prisoner of his world view when he limits truth to the feeble and diverse perceptions of mere mortals? Is it fair to "Ultimate Reality" to deny "It" the possibility of meaningfully communicating that reality to those most open to that perception? Should we not remain open to the possibility that some such "channels" have already been opened to us in the Bible's own world view?

Such quibbles, however, really move beyond McKnight's intention. His intent is to plunge us in at the cutting edge of a new approach, and it may be difficult at this early stage to sort out the strengths and weaknesses of his suggestions. For his contribution he is to be commended, and his book deserves to be widely read.

Andrews University   JON PAULIEN

Nelson, C. Ellis. *How Faith Matures.* Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989. 252 pp. Paperback, $13.95.

C. Ellis Nelson contends that faith matures when a person experiences an encounter with Jesus; not necessarily as dramatic as the encounters of Moses, Elijah, and Peter (which he examines in detail), but with the same elements. These encounters he calls "theophanies" and classifies as "authentic religious experience." The three elements in theophanies are: 1) a