

BOOK REVIEWS

Erickson, Millard J. *Evangelical Interpretation: Perspectives on Hermeneutical Issues*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1993. 132 pp. Paper, \$9.99.

The rise of postmodern evangelical theology has created a tension in regard to its understanding of hermeneutics. Millard Erickson's book, *Evangelical Interpretation*, presents a suggestive alternative to modernist hermeneutics which has previously held sway but which is now itself under intense scrutiny.

Erickson's thesis is that a truly postmodern hermeneutic must be fully global and fully multicultural (125). In other words, one's personal or cultural view of the text is not the only possible way to determine its meaning. He attempts to support his thesis through an inductive study of the question of philosophical bases for hermeneutics, posing a series of answers to issues which are at the forefront of the discussion. For this reason, he deals first with authorial intent, a term that means the text has an independent meaning, or "absolute truth" which the interpreter tries to discover and apply to the contemporary situation. Erickson insists that in order to rightly interpret scripture at this point, one must allow it to interpret itself. Second, he reminds evangelical theology that the role of the Holy Spirit in interpreting the Bible is not to give new information about the text but insight and understanding which cannot be seen when doing "purely scientific exegesis" (exegesis which is done without the interpreter necessarily being a believer). Erickson then deals with the issue of the contemporization of the message of the passage under consideration, indicating that the primary purpose of interpretation is not to reproduce the biblical statement and simply apply it to the present, but to decontextualize it and then find the appropriate form to express it to today's world in order that its implications might be grasped and lived (69). In the fourth chapter, the reader is reminded that church history, theological, and cross-cultural studies are important to a post-modern hermeneutic since these help evangelical theology to recognize and identify its presuppositions when approaching the text. The purpose of this endeavor is that the interpreter may take account of them when attempting to understand the passage. Finally, Erickson offers what he terms "a new paradigm" for doing hermeneutics. Here he posits that differing times/contexts in our world call for a differing global/multicultural approach to Biblical interpretation in order to construct a contemporary evangelical hermeneutic.

Erickson has most certainly touched the nerve center of the postmodern mindset when he emphasizes the fact that the key question in today's theological and nontheological world is that of meaning, or "How do we know?" This means that any approach to hermeneutics, or even theology itself, must take into consideration the epistemological questions, not only of knowing but also of metaphysics, in order to be able to speak to postmodernity.

His stress on the role of cross-cultural studies (the global and multicultural system of hermeneutics) is to be commended. He attempts to make the point that the foundations of hermeneutics must take into consideration a "broader

view" of the task of interpretation rather than understanding meaning from the perspective of parochial concerns and thinking. There is here, however, an inherent danger that one could have such a global, multicultural hermeneutic that the uniqueness of the Christian message could be compromised or undermined. The degree to which Erickson's proposal for an evangelical hermeneutic avoids this pitfall will determine to a large extent how valid his alternative is.

Erickson reminds evangelicals, in a note of caution, that one need not be a trained professional to understand the Bible. He argues that the revelation of God's Word and its intended message appeals to all people at all times because it is itself truth. His stress on the fact that Scripture can be fully understood only by the illumination of the Holy Spirit is combined, however, with a recognition of the need for scientific methods of interpretation, which helps him avoid a purely subjective interpretation of the text.

In sum, Erickson's proposal that hermeneutics in the post-modern world needs to be fully global and multicultural is something that should help evangelicals to take seriously the task of conveying the meaning of the Scriptures to today's mindset. In this, he has fulfilled his intended purpose of helping each one to become more able and accurate interpreters of the incomparable word (114). It is in this process of thinking about guidelines for a post-modern evangelical hermeneutic that Erickson makes his greatest contribution to the ongoing discussion of what the text of Scripture says and means to contemporary society.

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Hamilton, Victor P. *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 18-50*, NICOT. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995. xx + 774 pp. \$40.00.

Wenham, Gordon. *Genesis 16-50*, WBC 2. Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1994. xxxviii + 517 pp. \$29.00.

These two volumes complete the two most recent and comprehensive evangelical commentaries on the book of Genesis. The simple fact that both commentaries required two volumes to cover the book of Genesis indicates the mass of scholarship which has grown around the first book of the Bible.

Consequently, both commentaries have extensive bibliographies and continuously reference other commentary series and studies on the various passages in Genesis. As with other volumes in the Word commentaries, each section of Wenham's commentary is headed by its own bibliography which supplements the main bibliography. Hamilton's main bibliography is located in the first volume of his commentary (*The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1-17*). Wenham's clearly has the more extensive bibliography, though only a portion of it is referenced in the text. Both commentaries make extensive use of rabbinic exegesis throughout the text.