

Book review

Darrel Toews

Seeing the Text: Exegesis for Students of Greek and Hebrew, by Mary H. Schertz and Perry B. Yoder. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001.

An ambiguous phrase spoken/heard or written/read in multiple socioreligious contexts lends itself to a variety of possible interpretations. If in certain contexts “it’s so bad” may express admiration, then obviously a foundational knowledge in hermeneutics is required in order to read and interpret the biblical text.

Mary Schertz and Perry Yoder provide readers with a fine milieu in which to move toward developing greater spiritual maturity in both the science and the art of biblical interpretation.

Their method is text-centric and promotes an expanding appre-

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ciation of the biblical languages: “The primary goal of this book is to enable students to progress from their ability to read a biblical language to making considered judgments about the meaning of the texts and their significance then and now” (13).

The authors diligently pursue this aim. Seeing the text means precisely that: half the book is dedicated to guiding students through a carefully stepped process meant to reveal visually the dynamic life of the material.

Having provided tools for establishing the most likely semantic sense of a biblical text, the second half of the book illumines how such texts function in their contexts, which moves students toward appropriate interpretive applications in multiple contexts.

Even if readers fall short in appropriating basic skills in the biblical languages, the second half of this volume provides a solid rehearsal of foundational principles of interpretation. *Seeing the*

Text is an excellent resource for pastors, preachers, and teachers—leaders who have been granted communal authority to guide readings of the canon. The authors encourage students of the Bible to constantly and consistently inquire, search, ask, propose, examine, and evaluate as they develop a topography of the canon, its peaks and valleys.

The authors explore and analyze centripetal versus centrifugal readings and the implications of these approaches. Using the imagery of dominate threads, minor threads, bundles of threads, dangling threads, and background threads, Schertz and Yoder weave a wonderful tapestry in which the big picture informs the individual passage, thus placing the smaller unit in proper perspective. Seeing the text appropriately buttresses our ability to take our place in the world as a people of faith.

The major practical suggestion proposed and illustrated throughout is the ongoing development of a study journal, an expanding set of notes, which forms a rich resource, an honest attempt to own and be owned by the text. By developing a textual-contextual portrayal of and commentary on the text, biblical students will undoubtedly deepen their personal theological outlook and spiritual development toward wholeness.

Despite a couple of explicit concessions to the broader community of scholars, a significant oversight is lack of attention to communal aspects of reading. The multitude of possibilities presented may seem overwhelming at first, but veteran biblical interpreters will recognize that they already practice many of the basic skills, and will surely gain fresh encouragement to build their reading repertory. Furthermore, the authors' joyous and committed involvement with the biblical material is infectious.

Illustrative samples of Hebrew and Greek are consistently provided, and numerous references to a wide variety of extra-biblical resources, including computer software, facilitate continued learning. Two excurses (on the structure of clauses and on Greek and Hebrew word order), interesting notes, a helpful bibliography, and scriptural and subject indices round out *Seeing the Text*.

About the reviewer

Darrel Toews is Pastor of Breslau (Ontario) Mennonite Church.