

## Book Reviews

By The Faculty of Dallas Theological Seminary

Matthew S. DeMoss, Editor

*Three Central Issues in Contemporary Dispensationalism: A Comparison of Traditional and Progressive Views*. Edited by Herbert W. Bateman IV. Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1999. 345 pp. \$15.99.

This volume discusses three issues central to dispensationalism and biblical theology as a whole: hermeneutics, the biblical covenants, and the relationship of the church to Israel. Each issue is covered in two chapters. The traditional dispensational view is presented, followed by a response from the progressive dispensational side, and vice versa. All the contributors are faculty members of Dallas Theological Seminary. Elliott Johnson and Stanley Toussaint represent the traditional side, and Darrell Bock and Lanier Burns represent the progressive view. Bateman, associate professor of New Testament studies at Grace Theological Seminary, earned degrees from Dallas Seminary. He introduces the issues in a historical sketch.

The first essay, by Johnson, advocates "consistent, literal interpretation," which seeks the author's intended meaning within the text. Johnson concurs with earlier dispensational writings, which are replete with statements like "when the plain sense is found, seek no other sense." However, this prompts several questions. Did the author intend that "plain" sense? Whose plain sense is right? How would one know it? The answer for traditionalists boils down to an appeal to common sense, a connection Johnson makes explicit (p. 65).

Johnson rejects the hermeneutical principle of "already-not-yet," since he feels it "introduces instability into the interpretation of texts" (p. 75). Johnson's opinion is that a text's meaning remains stable "even though a reader's understanding may be enriched and deepened by subsequent revelation" (p. 67). But according to Johnson the already-not-yet principle, evident in progressive dispensational interpretation, alters or loses the meaning of Bible passages, which, he writes, "resembles the loss of meaning in historic documents as read by postmodern reconstructionists" (p. 75). Bock demonstrates that he is not abandoning the quest to find meaning in the text, and he says that he too looks for authorial intent (pp. 76, 80-81, 90-91). Bock replies that rather than abandoning text-centered meaning, he is seeking to be sensitive to multiple layers of meaning in a text, which is in fact part and parcel of the study of intertextuality from a *premodern* standpoint.

In his article on hermeneutics Bock attempts to clarify his position, now that some traditional dispensationalists have reacted in

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