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Keener's "Spirit hermeneutics: Reading scripture in the light of Pentecost" (Book Review)

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Small matters is thought provoking. Nettle and Mellado ask the reader to rethink their actions and approach to the growth and nurturing of children into disciples of Christ.

Reviewer

Paul Drake, Pacific Islands University

Keener, C. S. (2016). *Spirit hermeneutics: Reading scripture in the light of Pentecost*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans. 522 pp. ISBN 9780802874399

I have heard it claimed many times by students, faculty and theologians alike that there just is not much written about a Holy Spirit hermeneutic. So when I noticed that Craig Keener had recently written this book, I wanted to read what he had to say. Maybe it would suffice to say that Keener is regarded as one the premier theologians today but no matter, this is a must read book for anyone wanting to gain a fuller understanding of what God's Word says.

Keener writes from the basic understanding that originally, Christians who experienced the infilling of the Holy Spirit did not intend to start a new church or branch of Christianity – much the same as Luther never meant to leave the Catholic Church but rather to reform some of the church's practices of his day.

So the claim that there is not much written by theologians about a Spirit hermeneutic are incorrect indeed because much has been written by theologians who do not identify themselves as “Charismatic or Pentecostal” but who are truly Spirit filled and write from within the broader context of Christianity as a whole.

Keener takes the reader back to Pentecost, walks through time exploring global readings, digs deep into cultural issues, majority world insights, ancient meanings of texts, literary and historical approaches and why this is all necessary to understanding the truth of the Word and the Spirit's role in assisting us with that understanding.

Keener explores the traditional approaches to Bible reading, both Old and New Testaments as well as how he believes Jesus invites us to hear the Bible. He then dives deep into an explanation of what a truly Charismatic or Pentecostal reading of Holy Scripture is. He makes a bold declaration that not all that gets lumped in with Pentecostal or Charismatic theology is truly that. Keener takes pains to describe the unethical approaches to theology that some television preachers or other popular preacher/teachers use and contrasts that with genuine, proven methods of interpreting scripture.

The author warns that spontaneity is not identical to inspiration but unfortunately many today do not find careful study of God's Word exciting enough. Keener states that "the Bible urges us to labor for wisdom" (p. 113) and not seek shortcuts. Our culture is "sound bite" oriented and instant gratification is expected, but Keener reminds us that this is not the process needed to understand what God is telling us in His Word. "Scripture is meant to function as a measuring stick – not just a place where, when we get a revelation, we can look up verses to support our experience" (p. 115).

Keener reiterates that those who truly want to know what the scriptures say should:

1. read a passage in light of its immediate context
2. read a passage for its function as part of the larger book to which it belongs
3. read a passage in light of the cultural context that its language, assumptions and often allusions take for granted (p. 117)

In other words, we must consider how the ancient audience would have understood the message. "Once we understand what biblical texts communicated in their first context, we must hear their challenge or comfort in our own settings as well. Only then do we truly enter the text rather than merely examining it" (p. 151).

Keener includes three appendixes, the last of which is a fairly inclusive although not exhaustive list of the global Charismatic scholarly community. This list is meant by the author to support his thesis that there is a very large Pentecostal or Charismatic community who have in the past and are currently contributing to biblical scholarship.

The first 303 pages of this 522 page book are text, the additional 219 pages are notes, bibliography, indices of authors, subjects, and scripture references.

This is not a book that is to be quickly perused but to be read thoughtfully and carefully. I would compare reading this book to taking a drink from a fire hydrant, unless one takes the time necessary to truly listen to what author is sharing and asking the Holy Spirit to give insight as you read.

Reviewer

Dale R. Jensen, Evangel University