

Russell Pregeant. *Encounter with the New Testament: An Interdisciplinary Approach*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009. Pp. 369. ISBN 978-0-8006-6348-3. \$30.00 paper.

This volume is an update of the author's previously published, much larger work, appearing initially in 1995. Pregeant intends his work to be used in academic settings where faith commitments may be quite varied. That is, he does not write from a dogmatic perspective, but has designed his work to be an engagement with the New Testament as a religious text without any attempt at indoctrination (pp. 17–18). Pregeant forthrightly sets the study of the New Testament amidst a variety of pressing global issues of justice, noting that the biblical text is properly read when it speaks to these contemporary issues and when such matters are brought to bear when encountering the text. He notes that this sort of “subjectivity” paradoxically works to ensure “objectivity,” because identifying the range of perspectives at the outset helps to identify and marginalize dogmatic perspectives and allows the voice(s) of the text to be heard clearly. It seems that this is what is meant by “interdisciplinary,” though

one wonders if perhaps the plurality of hermeneutical approaches is better noted through some other term.

The book is divided into four parts. In the first section, he covers the history behind the New Testament. Helpfully, he begins with our contemporary culture and a brief history of the thought-forms in which most readers of his book are situated. That is, our Western culture and its heritage. He then devotes a significant amount of space to the various cultures in which the New Testament era was set, including the background of the Hebrew Scriptures, Hellenism, and the Roman Imperial ambitions from the west.

In the second major section, Pregeant discusses the Gospels and Acts. Each large narrative work receives a separate treatment, and no two of them are alike. Pregeant gives an overview and summary of each book but then initiates discussions of how the text has been utilized in the history of interpretation. So, for example, after discussing the Gospel of Matthew, Pregeant introduces brief discussions of how Matthew has been brought to bear on Jewish-Christian relations, the place of Matthew in feminist interpretation, and the issue of postcolonialism and related readings (pp. 140–44). These, and discussions like them, fulfill Pregeant's aim of reading a purportedly religious text for its ethical import apart from doing so in dogmatic contexts. The two remaining sections introduce the Pauline literature and, finally, the later epistolary literature.

Pregeant notes in his introduction that he removed about one-third of the material from his previous edition. This makes for a highly readable introduction for students. Pregeant's writing clips along and keeps discussions moving without mistreating passages or skimming over complex discussions. What's more, sprinkled throughout are striking images from Palestine and Asia Minor, along with contemporary works of art that draw on and reinterpret biblical scenes. Like a few other recent introductions, all of this makes for a handsome and very attractive volume. In addition to the text itself, Pregeant has included material on the publisher's Web site, to which he directs readers in the introduction. He provides two sample syllabi along with a number of video discussions.

In a market increasingly flooded with textbooks and other materials for teachers and students, Pregeant has provided an excellent introduction. It will be most useful for nonconfessional public university contexts, but this is not to say that the ethical components of the New Testament text are ever lost from view. Pregeant does well to bring this aspect of the New Testament to bear on various global issues and other pressing ethical matters.