

READING THE BIBLE AROUND THE WORLD: A STUDENT'S GUIDE TO GLOBAL HERMENEUTICS, by Federico Alfredo Roth, et al, Westmont, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2022. 168 pages. \$22.

The world in which we live is becoming increasingly global. As a result, it feels smaller as “we encounter people with perspectives, experiences, and cultures different from our own” (3). How does such a context inform the ways we read and interpret Scripture? In this brief book, the five authors of *Reading the Bible Around the World: A Student's Guide to Global Hermeneutics* set out to provide an introduction to global hermeneutics. The essays pay special attention to three core values from such a particular approach: self-awareness, other-awareness, and true dialogue. In other words, this volume undertakes a type of contextual-theological project. It weaves together multiple voices and diverse perspectives in order to paint a picture of what reading Scripture contextually might look like.

Concerning the features of the book, *Reading the Bible Around the World* provides several types of discussion questions (“Stop and Think,” “Considering the Whole,” and “Reflecting on the Texts”) in each chapter of the book. This thoughtful arrangement makes the book ideal for intentional personal reflection and communal conversations. At the end of each main chapter, a section titled “Suggestions for Further Reading” also offers additional study resources if the reader wishes to continue the conversation. As such, the book is well-positioned to help form the reader to become a true practitioner of global hermeneutics.

In terms of content, the initial chapter written by Justin Marc Smith engages in a bit of methodological ground-clearing. It introduces various methodologies (historical-critical and literary approaches) that are insufficient for today's global context and opts for cross-cultural frameworks. Smith contends that the aim of global hermeneutics is to “enlarge the scope of the interpretive process in order to see the world ‘in front’ of the text” (11). In doing so, it celebrates the “social awareness and commitments” of the contextual reader, along with the community to which s/he belongs. As a result, the reader who adopts global approaches of biblical interpretation may “encounter new opportunities for deeper engagement and understanding of the living and breathing biblical text” (12). The ensuing chapters, therefore, provide five examples of contextual reading from their social-cultural locations: Latin American (Federico Alfredo Roth), African (Alice Yafeh-Deigh), Euro-American (Justin Marc Smith), Asian (Kirsten Sonkyo Oh), and Cultural Diasporic (Kay Hoguera Smith)

approaches. Each contributor starts by presenting a broad overview of the social-cultural location or context, then moves theory to practice by interpreting the same passage of the Lukan Good Samaritan parable along with an Old Testament of choice.

The aim of the book, as the subtitle suggests, is to provide a basic guide to global hermeneutics suitable for (undergraduate) students. Thus, it is understandable—and perhaps even an intentional choice on the part of the authors—to outline the contextual frameworks in each chapter in a concise manner. The drawback of such an approach, however, is that the chapters may seem uneven in research and depth. Indeed, some authors seem to prefer a lengthier description of the development of the historical-critical method, while others place greater emphasis on the history of (de)colonialization of the region. Thus, instead of having some or more clarity about certain contextual interpretive models, I feel more perplexed about some approaches as a result of reading the book. A second criticism I offer here relates to the viewpoints of global hermeneutics included in the volume. I understand that in hoping to provide the reader with an accessible, short guidebook on cross-cultural interpretations of Scripture, the authors need to incorporate main approaches and perspectives in the world. Consequently, in this volume broad comprehensiveness takes precedence over robust classification of contextual backgrounds, beliefs, norms, and theologies. This choice, in my judgment, is sometimes at risk of presenting a stereotypical and oversimplifying view of the models in the book, which the book readily acknowledges (14). For example, chapter 5 is titled “Asian Approaches.” Kristen Sonkyo Oh acknowledges that Asia is not a monolithic, homogeneous entity, similar to that of the African continent. In such an attempt to produce an oversimplified “Asian” lens of biblical interpretation, it fails to account for the variegated forms of voices and perspectives in all its complexities. As an ethnic Chinese who was born and grew up in mainland China, and now spends my adult life in America, I often differentiate my own theological view (“Chinese Immigrant”) from those forms of “American-Born-Chinese,” “Taiwanese,” “Protestant Chinese,” and “Catholic Chinese” theologies, etc. While some may argue that this illustration may be too specific, my point here is to demonstrate the underlying vast diversities of each global hermeneutical approach. That being said, the reader who wishes to have an in-depth study of the subject—especially the specific forms of one global hermeneutics—may want to look at the “Suggestions for Further Reading” section in each chapter for further studies. For Christian ministers, particularly those who serve in the pastorate and campus outreach

programs, this book will serve as a valuable—introductory though not comprehensive—asset. As one recent study conducted by Baylor University has shown, ethnically diverse churches have tripled numerically in the past two decades. As a nation, the United States is diversifying and will continue to grow in ethnic diversity in the coming decades, a trend that will inevitably change the overall outlook of congregational life. In order to love and serve well the diverse body of Christ, pastoral ministry practitioners need resources such as this one to understand those who come to the churches, thus being conscious of their social locations and cultural backgrounds. Despite the shortcomings aforementioned, I will recommend this text to those who seek to understand the basics of global hermeneutics, both undergraduate students and beginning ministers alike.

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