

Biblical Hermeneutics. By Gerhard Maier. Translated by Robert Yarbrough. Wheaton: Crossway, 1994, xiii + 526 pp., \$22.00 paper.*

Twenty years after the publication of his provocative "Streit-," even "Kampfschrift," *The End of the Historical-Critical Method (EHCM)*, Gerhard Maier has given us a well-reasoned, much more seasoned, fleshed-out treatment of Biblical hermeneutics. His new choice of title reflects a less inflammatory stance toward his opponents while still subtly pointing toward "unbiblical" counterparts.

The radical approach taken in Maier's first book attacked historical criticism as an interpretive method unsuitable for its subject matter, i.e. Biblical revelation. The sympathetic author of the foreword even called it "a godless technique." Maier pointed to the fact that, two hundred years after Semler's separation between Scripture and the Word of God and the ensuing search for a canon within the canon, Biblical scholarship was left: in a state where the writings of Scripture were widely conceived of as a mere collection of diverse testimonies. Historical criticism, Maier stated, led scholars into a blind alley, so that conservative evangelicals were subsequently faced with the responsibility of finding a method that was more suitable for its subject than historical criticism. In contradistinction to Stuhlmacher and Hengel, who had called for a historical-theological method, Maier envisioned a *historical-Biblical* approach since, in his observation, theology often elevates itself above the conceptual framework and the terminology of Scripture itself.

What progress has Maier made toward developing such a method in the last twenty years? Unfortunately, judging by his latest book, very little. While a full third of the book is devoted to a detailed critique of historical criticism, only twenty pages are given to Maier's own constructive proposal, almost as an appendix to the book. While Maier's scholarship is considerable and his knowledge of German scholarship remarkable (especially of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries), his attitude toward the historical-critical method remains as unyielding and categorical as in his earlier work. Maier continues to call historical criticism to shed its Enlightenment presuppositions and has absolutely no room for it in his own method. He thus cuts himself off from much helpful recent work in Biblical studies. One wonders whether or not Maier has thrown out the baby (i.e. critical historical research) with the bathwater (i.e. historical criticism as a whole).

Having said this, one notes some remarkable changes between *EHCM* and the present work. To begin with, Maier changes the designation of his proposed method from "historical-Biblical" to "Biblical-historical" to focus on the *Biblical* element and to appear less reactionary to the historical-critical approach. After commenting very negatively on methods such as redaction criticism in his former volume, Maier now makes room for form, tradition, and redaction criticisms, claiming that such had been part of proper hermeneutical methodology at least since Matthias Flacius' *Clavis Scripturae* in 1567. The incorporation of these critical tools, however, appears to run counter not merely to the approach taken in Maier's earlier work but also to his wholesale rejection of historical criticism elsewhere even in the *present* volume.

It seems that much of Maier's argument takes on its particular orientation in relation to his German context where a conservative position, i.e. one that affirms

Biblical inspiration and inerrancy, is grossly underrepresented. For example, Maier opposes P. Stuhlmacher, who merely affirms the inspiration of the Biblical *writers* but not necessarily of everything they *wrote*. On the other hand, Maier's grasp of Anglo-American evangelical scholarship seems limited to some representative works (especially by J. Barr, N. Geisler, B. Ramm, J. I. Packer, and C. F. H. Henry; remarkably, he makes no reference to the work of A. Thiselton). It is thus doubtful whether or not he is aware of the full orbit of viewpoints and practical solutions developed in the conservative evangelical North American context.

What, then, is the value of Maier's work for scholars working in North America? Despite the limitations mentioned above, there is much that is of use. By his own admission, Maier focuses primarily on hermeneutics as *understanding*, rather than following the Anglo-American emphasis on hermeneutical *skills*. In the context of the North American pragmatism in hermeneutical circles (one just needs to look at the titles of some recent books, such as R. Stein's *Playing by the Rules*, or the many "how to" guides), Maier could help conservative evangelicals come to terms with many of the important issues in hermeneutical theory that are frequently assumed rather than pondered. For example, Maier's advocacy of a *theologia regenitorum* (i.e. a "theology of the regenerate") could be profitably discussed in a scholarly climate where many still feel uncomfortable in approaching their research from an explicitly believing stance. Finally, Maier's concerns regarding historical criticism, whether taken too far or not, are well worth considering. In the end, Maier successfully exposes some of the questionable philosophical underpinnings of the historical-critical method as it developed historically. It still remains, however, for him to provide a more detailed constructive proposal as a credible alternative to the method he so skillfully critiques.

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