

age. McKnight hopes that in this age biblical texts can be read without a detour through any philosophical system.

He builds on the above to argue that meaning is dynamic. Individuals and groups make sense of their world by means of a particular view of the universe. But since no humans are in direct touch with ultimate reality, a plurality of meanings and world views inevitably results. Such pluralism may be a "nightmare" to many, but McKnight sees it as the key to the future of biblical interpretation. Instead of combining into exclusive groups struggling to define *the* correct approach to the biblical text, scholars of the Bible can gain from the richness of diversity. By sharing a variety of readings, each scholar's own reading is enriched.

There are aspects of the book that this reviewer finds problematic. For one thing, the book has a certain "unfinished" quality that makes it difficult to follow at many points. Perhaps this is inevitable where one is attempting to break fresh hermeneutical ground. One wonders also whether MacQuarrie's assertion that "the language of the Bible is not reducible to propositions" (quoted approvingly on p. 206) is really supportable in the biblical text.

A related problem is McKnight's seemingly uncritical acceptance of antifoundationalism. It is true that considerable pluralism is inevitable and even helpful; it is also true that even biblical assertions are but faint reflections of the divine; but is not McKnight also a prisoner of his world view when he limits truth to the feeble and diverse perceptions of mere mortals? Is it fair to "Ultimate Reality" to deny "It" the possibility of meaningfully communicating that reality to those most open to that perception? Should we not remain open to the possibility that some such "channels" have already been opened to us in the Bible's own world view?

Such quibbles, however, really move beyond McKnight's intention. His intent is to plunge us in at the cutting edge of a new approach, and it may be difficult at this early stage to sort out the strengths and weaknesses of his suggestions. For his contribution he is to be commended, and his book deserves to be widely read.

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Nelson, C. Ellis. *How Faith Matures*. Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989. 252 pp. Paperback, \$13.95.

C. Ellis Nelson contends that faith matures when a person experiences an encounter with Jesus; not necessarily as dramatic as the encounters of Moses, Elijah, and Peter (which he examines in detail), but with the same elements. These encounters he calls "theophanies" and classifies as "authentic religious experience." The three elements in theophanies are: 1) a

situation in which the divine will needs to be known (chap. 5), 2) a person or group that has become engaged with the Spirit of God (chap. 6), and 3) a charge, mission, or work assignment concerning what must be done for the welfare of the community of believers (chap. 7).

How Faith Matures was published eight years after Fowler's *Stages of Faith*, a book that took the developmental models of Piaget, Erickson, and Kohlberg and created a spiritual developmental model. We would expect some references to the earlier pioneering work, but Nelson refers to Fowler's construct only once, and then without mentioning the originator by name.

While Fowler proposed a "developmental" model, Nelson suggests an "experiential" model. In comparing the two, they do not appear to be antagonistic or mutually exclusive. Nelson's discussion focuses on the necessity of an individual rather than a congregational experience with the Lord, and Fowler describes the changing ways we view the divine relationship during the process of personal maturation. Both are equally valid.

Nelson clearly identifies the audience for which he wrote and from which he himself comes as mainstream Protestantism, whose congregations need "to distinguish themselves in the world on the basis of their belief in God" (p. 180). Interestingly, he then invites anyone who wants to observe "the educational power of life together" to spend some time "in a fundamentalist congregation or a sect group." He is confident that anyone who follows such advice will see a community governed by vision, a clear-cut value system, and a certain lifestyle. "All these things are communicated (and learned) so consistently and constantly that there is hardly any need for separate classes for the young. There will probably be such classes, taught by one of the more zealous members, but what happens in class will be only a formal explanation of what the children have already accepted in the depth of their being" (p. 181).

Nelson has been associated with Christian education for 40 years, and in *How Faith Matures* he shows his familiarity with the writings of religious educators such as Bushnell, Westerhoff, Edwards, and Sherrill. The work is written in highly readable prose. With its numerous headings and sub-headings, introductions and summaries, at no time is the reader in any doubt about the issue under discussion or where each issue precisely fits in the overall thesis.

Part 1 of the book examines the secular individualism of America, a view Nelson bases to some extent on Bellah's popular *Habits of the Heart*. Part 3 is an overview of religious education from its Sooty Lane birthplace in the work of Robert Raikes in the late eighteenth century to the present. For many readers, however, part 2, with its development of "authentic religious experience" through theophanies and its outstanding view of "how faith matures," will be of the greatest value.