

Book Reviews

Hoekema, Andrew Anthony. *The Bible and the Future*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1994. 354 pages, softcopy, \$31.57.

Anthony Andrew Hoekema was a Calvinist minister and theologian who served as professor of Systematic theology at Calvin Theological Seminary, for twenty-one years. In his twenty-chapter book titled: *The Bible and the Future*, Hoekema makes a significant and substantive contribution to the discipline of Christian eschatology. Hoekema presents a succinct analysis of the eschaton in his roles as a pastor, theologian, and an academic. From an amillennial viewpoint, Hoekema makes the case within a Reformed tradition, though his arguments for his belief are not satisfactory. Before his death in 1988, Hoekema published *The Four Major Cults*, *Holy Spirit Baptism*, *What about Tongue-Speaking?* and *The Bible and the Future*.

Hoekema outlines his dialogue under two major sections, namely, “Inaugurated Eschatology,” and “Future Eschatology.” He leads the reader on a 20-chapter eschatological journey by first establishing the protoevangelium as the foundation for end-time prophecies, then engages in a lively discussion of subsequent Old Testament prophecies, and finally outlining the Messianic age and future age as the New Testament’s thematic two-stage eschatological focus. Hoekema essentially advocates a theology of hope based on a fundamentally amillennial eschatology. By expressing the optimistic dynamics of the already but not yet kingdom component, he systematically emphasizes the liminality of the kingdom of God.

Hoekema also demonstrates how a Christian perspective of history is irreconcilable with an atheistic existential view of history and a never-ending cyclical philosophy. According to Hoekema, the plans of God, which are grounded in God’s sovereignty, are carried out in both people’s lives and the histories of the many nations around the world. Thus, the establishment of God’s kingdom is the eschatological purpose. The kingdom of God is to be understood “as the reign of God dynamically active in human history through Jesus Christ,” with “the purpose of which is the redemption of

God's people from sin and from demonic powers, and the final establishment of the new heavens and the new earth" (45).

Hoekema places a premium on the kingdom's entry into the modern era. The inaugurated kingdom occurs via the in-breaking of the deposit of the Holy Spirit, thereby guaranteeing the blessings and power of the future age, which shall be realized in the consummated kingdom. Consequently, he offers a persuasive explanation of the conflict between the already and the yet to come in the kingdom. He notes that during this period believers grapple with things like the "signs of the times," a theology of suffering, and how to engage life both within the Church and with culture.

In the second half of his book, Hoekema goes on to give more details about the topic of "Future Eschatology." By concentrating first on human eschatology and then on universal eschatology, he further subdivides this heading. Hoekema makes a useful analysis of physical death, immortality, and the transitional stage between death and the resurrection with regard to an individual eschatology. Hoekema offers a strong biblical and Christian theological anthropology, stating that humankind is an embodied existence, in contrast to Greek philosophy and ultimately Eastern ideas of transmigration and/or rebirth. He states, "thought the body is not a tomb for the soul but a temple of the Holy Spirit; man is not complete apart from the body" (91). He also gives a dialectic in opposition to soul sleep. He accomplishes this by basing his findings on Philippians 1:21-23.

In the remaining part, Hoekema devotes his dissertation to cosmic eschatology. Hoekema discusses the expectation and character of the second coming in four chapters while also examining the specificity of the signs of the times. He interacts with theologians from both the past and the present as he builds a case against a "consistent eschatology" perspective. Amillennialism, post-millennialism, historic premillennialism, and dispensational millennialism are the four main millennial viewpoints that he additionally surveys. Hoekema is an advocate of amillennialism. His matrix for interpreting the book of Revelation uses a progressive parallelism. According to him, "the book Revelation consists of seven sections

which run parallel to each other, each of which depicts the Church and the world from the time of Christ's first coming to the time of his second coming" (223).

In the final four chapters, Hoekema addresses the resurrection of the body, the last judgment, eternal punishment, and the new world. The author makes a case for both believers and non-believers to be generally raised. In the first few chapters of his book, Hoekema supports his prior claim in his dialectic on the Day of Judgment. He acknowledges that judgment demonstrates that global history is more complex than just a collection of cycles taking place in pointless temporal warps. In the end, the world and humanity are engaged in a forward movement toward the destination of judgment. The coming of judgment will signal God's inescapable victory, the establishment of his kingdom, and the joy of his atoning work. The salvation of the elect and the accomplishment of these goals will be revealed through redemption of a new heaven and new earth.

In contrast to the theological viewpoints of universalism and annihilationism, Hoekema postulates a convincing case in his examination of eternal punishment. Hoekema acknowledges, citing Mark 9:43 and Isaiah 66:24, that if the passages allusions to the worm not dying and the fire not being put out "do not mean unending suffering, they mean nothing at all" (268). The author also adds an appendix titled "Recent Trends in Eschatology" at the end. 'What will people say about the main religious trends of the 20th century in 100 years?' is his initial question. The tone of his question suggests that the study of the eschaton will continue to advance as long as mankind exists in the interstitial period.

Hoekema draws from a wide range of sources, including biblical texts, theological literature, and historical sources. The author's engagement with primary sources, such as the Bible and early Christian writings, demonstrates his commitment to grounding his arguments in the biblical and theological tradition. Moreover, Hoekema draws on the work of prominent theologians and scholars, such as Karl Barth, N.T. Wright, and George Eldon Ladd, to support his arguments and to provide a broader context for his analysis. The book also includes a comprehensive bibliography, which lists a

diverse range of scholarly works, including books and articles from various theological perspectives.

However, it is worth noting that the book's sources are primarily Christian, and Hoekema's interpretation of biblical prophecy reflects his particular theological perspective. Thus, the book may not offer a comprehensive or representative view of eschatological thought across different religious traditions or theological perspectives. Additionally, some readers may find the book's reliance on proof-texting and a literalistic reading of certain passages limiting or problematic, especially when it comes to interpreting complex and contested biblical texts. Overall, while Hoekema's book draws on a wide range of sources, its theological framework and interpretive approach may limit its appeal and usefulness to certain readers.

Hoekema's book presents acceptable exegesis of the biblical text, reflecting the title of the book. In the opening pages, Hoekema grounds his eschatology in the protoevangelium. In the concluding pages, he supports his eschatology in an exposition of the last two chapters of Revelation. From beginning to end, Hoekema appeals to the authority of Scripture to present a biblically grounded eschatology. His systematic approach of exegeting the Scriptures occasions this volume as an invaluable resource. This is true both for the inquiring nascent student and veteran scholar of eschatology exploring a biblical exposition of the eschaton.

Additionally, regardless of one's position on the millennium, Hoekema's high regard for the Bible helps the reader to develop a cogent eschatology, founded in a biblical framework. Despite being a premillennialist, for example, I did not find Hoekema's biblical explanation to be merely a list of prooftexts to support his amillennial stance, rather, Hoekema vigorously argues for amillennialism. He does it, though, in a way that makes his perspective clear. While he properly criticizes dispensational premillennialism and identifies its weaknesses, he starts by finding areas of agreement and systematically detailing them.

However, there are several instances where Hoekema seems to be attempting to squeeze the interpretation of a verse into his

amillennialist framework. He consistently criticizes premillennialists, for instance, for their literal interpretation of the Bible, particularly when it comes to Old Testament prophecy. He contends that the fulfillment of prophecy from the Old Testament could be literal, symbolic, or antitypical. Hoekema appears to prefer a symbolic or figurative interpretation of numerous biblical passages. Conversely, because it supports an amillennial stance, at times his reading seems arbitrary.

In an effort to support his case for a general resurrection, he invokes a literal interpretation of John's usage of the word "hour," which weakened his critique of premillennial, particularly dispensationalist literal reading of the text. Hoekema is aware that dispensationalists view the term "hour" as covering the entire gospel era. Hoekema asserts that the hour should be understood literally in an effort to refute premillennialists' symbolic/figurative interpretation of John's usage of the hour and their ensuing dialectic of two resurrections separated by a millennium. He goes to tremendous lengths to make this hour-long argument. In an effort to support his claim of a universal resurrection, his argument looks to be arbitrarily chosen as a result.

Hoekema's conviction that the bound of Satan in Revelation 20 is taking place between the first and second comings of Jesus Christ is another weakness in his eschatology (174). He does, however, acknowledge that the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan shall coexist until the end of time. Using phrases like "thrown into the abyss," "sealed up for a thousand years," and "unable to deceive the nations until the end of the thousand years," Revelation 20's wording suggests that Satan is restrained. As a result, it becomes challenging to explain how these limitations placed on the wicked one fit with the interval between Jesus' first and second comings. Furthermore, Hoekema draws the conclusion that since the phrase "a thousand years" appears only in Revelation 20, it should be read figuratively. His justification is weak. Again, this is particularly true given that he engaged in such a heated discussion for literally one hour in John's gospel.

In his concluding statement, Hoekema claims that “the resurrection of the body, therefore, is a uniquely Christian doctrine.” I firmly think that the Bible declares humans to be corporeal beings, and that only Jesus Christ’s death, burial, and physical resurrection can bring about the resurrection of the body. Hoekema’s claim needs to be explained, though. Of course, the Eastern doctrine of Buddhism and Hinduism, which promote samsara, transmigration, and unending cycles of reincarnation, contrasts with the Christian expectation of a physical resurrection (1Cor. 15; 1Thess. 4:13–18). Islam, on the other hand, affirms that on the Day of Judgment, the corpse will be raised.

Similar to Christian amillennialism, Islam proposes a universal resurrection. Undoubtedly, a strong case can be made that much of the eschatological of Islam is influenced by a Christian eschatology. Islam may have rejected the corporeal resurrection of Jesus Christ while appropriating the notion of the resurrection of the body from a pre-Islamic Christian influence. However, Hoekema’s assertion suggests that Christianity is the only religion to teach the bodily resurrection.

I found Hoekema’s book insightful and helpful. His chapters are brief but in-depth. His writing is clear, and the material is organized well. He provides a pneumatologically alive eschatology. The presentation of the book centers on the Bible. The many mentions of the liminality of the kingdom of God by Hoekema are welcome. On this note, regardless of one’s millennial stance, I recommend this book. The work by Hoekema makes a significant contribution to the current discussion of millennial eschatology.

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