

Books in Review

The Language and Imagery of the Bible

by G.B. Caird

This book by G.B. Caird, late Professor of Biblical Exegesis at Oxford University, is a classic in the field of biblical studies. Though it is detailed and requires thoughtful work on the part of the reader to comprehend, whatever effort is required in reading and understanding it will be richly rewarded. Almost every page seems to be loaded with insights that are a help for the student of the Bible. Below are a few samples of the wisdom conveyed by Caird:

In dealing with the words of the Bible we are bound by evidence ... we have no access to the word of God in the Bible except through the words and minds of those who claim to speak in his name. We may disbelieve them, that is our right; but if we try, without evidence, to penetrate to a meaning more ultimate than the one the writers intended, that is our meaning, not theirs or God's. [p. 61]

It is possible to read the Bible, or indeed any other book, in a meditative fashion so that it becomes a

stimulus to our own thinking. But when that happens, the thoughts are our own and are not to be confused with the meaning of what we have read. [p. 40]

There is a world of difference between allegorization and allegory. An allegory is a story intended by an author to convey a hidden meaning, and it is correctly interpreted when that meaning is perceived. To allegorize is to impose on a story hidden meanings which the original author never intended nor envisaged; it is to treat as allegory that which was not intended as allegory. Here, as in all questions of meaning, the intention of author or speaker is paramount. [p. 165]

Hyperbole or overstatement is a figure of speech common to all languages. But among the Semitic peoples its frequent use arises out of a habitual cast of mind, which I have called absoluteness - a tendency to think in extremes without qualification, in black and white without intervening shades of gray .. It is characteristic of Semitic style to express ideas absolutely and to leave the listener to fill in for himself the implicit qualifications. [p. 110, 57]

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