2000

Review: The Book of Revelation

A. Boyd Luter
Liberty University, abluter@liberty.edu

position in the 40s on the basis that 1 Thessalonians (AD 50) appears to be familiar with its contents. Though Q^1 is an excellent source for the historical Jesus, the two later stages show signs of secondary expansion and reworking by the early Church that later led to "uninhibited creativity." Q^1, in fact, may have been the "oracles" (*ta logia*) that Papias says Matthew used.

The remaining chapters all focus on specific pericopes of Q: the Sermon on the Plain (chap. 2), four beatitudes (chap. 3), the missionary discourse (Q 10:2–16; chap. 4), the returning spirit (chap. 5), the eye as a lamp (Q 11:34–36; chap. 6), the hairs of your head as numbered (Q 12:7a; chap. 7), from east to west (Q 13:28–29; chap. 8), and the forsaken house (Q 13:34–35; chap. 9). In chap. 2 Allison attacks H. D. Betz's conclusion in his massive and learned *The Sermon on the Mount* that Matthew and Luke make use of originally separate sayings collections that were later joined to Q. Instead, he argues that the Sermon on the Mount "is thoroughly Matthean" (p. 74). He sees Luke's core as existing before Q but being greatly expanded by the addition of a beatitudes preface and the construction of a conclusion. In chap. 3 he argues that the *Gospel of Thomas* reflects knowledge of the canonical beatitudes. He rejects both minimalists and maximalists on the influence of the role of the Jesus tradition on Paul (chap. 4). The small unit on the returning spirit reflects multiple meanings, not just what Jesus originally intended (chap. 5). In a wide-ranging chapter (6), Allison marshals evidence that the eye is a lamp not by allowing light in but by shining into an otherwise dark place. Chapter 7, the briefest, suggests that the saying about the hairs of the head being numbered refers to human evil and ignorance. Those coming from east and west are, contrary to Jeremias, diaspora Jews, not Gentiles (chap. 8). The two versions about the forsaken house suggest that divine judgment is not the final word, but a conclusion to an implicit call to Jerusalem to repent (chap. 9).

The contents of this book represent NT scholarship at its very best. Those who reject the very idea of Q will, of course, probably not read it, but they will miss a lot of careful exegesis. Evangelical scholars such as N. T. Wright would legitimately question the widely held view that the early Church created as much of the Q material as Allison suggests. But along with the recent works of Catchpole and Tuckett, this book is indispensable reading for those who want to know more about the sayings of Jesus and how they were incorporated in the Gospels of Luke and Matthew. We still await an evangelical work on Q.

Leslie R. Keylock
Tyndale Theological Seminary, Amsterdam (Badhoevedorp), The Netherlands

The Book of Revelation. By G. K. Beale. NIGTC. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999, lxiv + 1245 pp., $75.00.

Biblical commentaries have increased dramatically in size recently. If Beale's massive tome had appeared a decade earlier, its little-short-of-awe-inspiring breadth and depth would likely have set it apart as "dominant" within that period (perhaps even a generation) of evangelical commentary publishing on the Apocalypse. Instead, it emerged in an environment that had already seen Thomas's two-volume (1992, '95) dispensational treatment, which is almost as long as Beale's, and Aune's critically speculative three-volume (1997, '98, '98) WBC contribution, which is about 300 pages longer. So, in a publishing arena filling with such "heavy-weights" (i.e. mega-commentaries), a few readable "bantam-weights" (e.g. Talbert [1994] and Michaels [1997]) and some varied "middle-weights" (e.g. Mounce's NICNT revision [1998] and Easley's Holman NT

Commentary offering [1999]), Beale's work must carve out whatever niche it will have (i.e. in terms of long-term staying power, after the initial publication buzz dies down) in other ways.

That should present no real problem, though, since Beale's commentary exhibits a host of strengths. Perhaps the place to start, though, is in regard to Beale's background for writing this huge commentary. I do not believe that it is an overstatement to assert that G. K. Beale is the most qualified evangelical to comment on Revelation in this generation. Appearing since 1980, including his published Cambridge dissertation on the use of Daniel in Revelation (University Press of America, 1984), has been the programmatic publication of over 20 of Beale's articles, entries, books, or significant reviews related to the Apocalypse.

The commentary has many notable strengths. First, we can highlight the extensive bibliography (36 pages, but still not as exhaustive as Aune's). It is well balanced, far more so than Aune's, which, with a few exceptions, displays but a "loud silence" with regard to evangelical scholarship on the Apocalypse, including virtually ignoring Beale's many substantial contributions; conversely, Beale's listing includes ten of Aune's works. The lone quibble here is that, by the time Beale's volume was released, the bibliography was essentially three years out of date (more below). Second, for the most part, the excellent introductory essays range wider than most commentary introductions. Some are merely workmanlike (e.g. "Date" and "Authorship"), but most are extraordinary, definitely ranking with the best treatments I have seen (e.g. "Situation, Purpose and Theme," "Genre," "Use of the OT," "Structure and Plan," and "Rev. 1:19 as an Interpretative Key"). In a couple of noteworthy cases ("Text" and "Grammar"), Beale's material is at least as accessible and insightful as Aune's, although more compact. Third, numerous and varied charts dot the introductory material and almost always visualize the relevant material well. Fourth, smaller print signals technical excursuses that often reflect Beale's strength in relation to extra-Biblical sources. Fifth, since the series editors' foreword (p. xvii) states that the NIGTC volumes are "to provide a theological understanding of the text," Beale is to be congratulated for laying out the most sustained and compelling case for amillennialism (Beale prefers the title "inaugurated millennialism," p. 973) from Revelation that I have ever read. Though it falls short of being ultimately persuasive, in my estimation, it undoubtedly will persuade quite a few readers.

Having highlighted these positive aspects of Beale's work, there are several more-than-trifling concerns that should be registered. First, it becomes fairly clear that a number of the introductory essays link up to present a comprehensive argument for Beale's theological position. As stated above, this is generally a strength. However, the foreword assumes the theology will be "*based on* historical-critical-linguistic exegesis" (p. xvii; italics mine). Therein lies the rub. Since Beale's interwoven essays prove somewhat selective exegetically, often more topical/thematic in nature and very far-reaching in their conclusions and implications, it seems fair to say that the introductory material subtly reorients the commentary from the expected developing *inductive* methodology to closer to a *deductive* approach. This does not mean there is not verse-by-verse exegesis in the commentary proper. But, frankly, surprisingly little in any of the crucial passages is really "fresh," given the involved discussions in the introductory material. For the most part, Beale's "front-end load" theological conclusions are virtually regurgitated later with more detailed argumentation.

Second, a close reading of Beale's brief and vague apologetic for his eclectic "modified idealism" (p. 49) alongside his stimulating essay on "Interpretation of Symbolism" (pp. 50–69) raises a red flag. This is because Beale's eclectic "modification" of the historically problematic idealist approach (typically leading to free-wheeling allegorization) which supposedly shuts the traditional "front door" to allegorical interpretation

of the Apocalypse, is still at its heart idealism. And his "four levels of communication" (pp. 52–55) subtly but effectively leave open the "back door" for symbol-based semi-allegorizing. So, when the dust settles, what Beale gains hermeneutically with one hand he more or less takes away with the other.

Third, Beale's assumption that there are five "synonymously parallel visions" (p. 135) in Daniel (supposedly chaps. 2, 7, 8, 9 and 10–12), which serve as a pattern for five presumed parallel sections in Revelation (and, most significant theologically, recapitulation in Revelation 19–20, the hermeneutical basis for his "inaugurated" [amillennial] view), is, if I understand him (see his reasoning on pp. 135–41), startlingly sloppy thinking by a scholar of Beale's acumen. Though similar in surface symbolism, the visions in Daniel 2, 7, and 9 move forward with progressive clarification to events related to a *fourth* kingdom (Rome), then eschatological events, while chaps. 8 and 11–12 focus on the *third* kingdom (Greece, though the clear reference to eschatological resurrection in 12:2, if nothing else, reflects a "telescoping" to the end of the age). Hence, Beale's purported synonymous parallelism falls flat and, thus, if there *is* an implied pattern from Daniel, it would seem to be surface symbolic similarity and progressive clarification (of detail) *without* chronological recapitulation.

Fourth, the disparity in length in sectional titles is bafflingly inconsistent. Some are compressed (perhaps overly so). Several are in excess of 40 words, reading like fare from a mind-numbing German treatise. Quite a few are lengthy complex sentences, but, inexplicably, without periods.

A couple of items that are neither clearly strengths nor weaknesses, but certainly relevant observations, have to do with Beale's intriguing choices for the Greek and English texts he utilized. While the book's dust jacket proclaims that the NIGTC volumes are based on the (current) text of the UBS *Greek New Testament*, Beale decided to use the Nestle-Aland 26th edition instead. Similarly, in an era in which the NIV seems almost omnipresent in evangelical publishing, Beale chose to use the NASB for translations beyond his own renderings (p. xxii). Refreshingly, these appear to be the determinations of one unaffected by "company-man" or "politically-correct" pressures.

In conclusion, for all the strengths of Beale's commentary (which definitely far outweigh my stated aspects of concern!), it simply does not fit the mould of either a readily usable preaching resource or a classroom textbook (with the possible exception of certain multiterm upper-level or doctoral courses). This is indeed a very important work, both as a reflection of the maturing of evangelical scholarship generally, and in regard to the study of Revelation specifically. However, completely aside from its steep price, the logistical question remains: Getting beyond the small cadre of commentating idealists, how can Beale's *Revelation* realistically be "customized" for a wider audience, to be helpful for pastoral/pulpit ministry or less-than-advanced coursework use.

A. Boyd Luter
The Criswell College, Dallas, TX

Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics. By Norman L. Geisler. Baker Reference Library. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999, 841 pp., $49.99.

Unlike other volumes in the Baker Reference Library, this one has a single author. All the others are edited (mostly by Walter A. Elwell). This in itself is an astounding accomplishment, but to realize that this is only one of a long series of substantial philosophical/theological works by this author is to pause in gratitude to God for the