

über das, was Paulus dem Alten Testament verdankt.

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The thesis of this book is clear and well-expressed throughout. Stated simply it is that two important axioms or reference points (which the author calls 'lenses') have been missing from the interpretation of Paul's writings. The first such lens is that the story of the Passover and the exodus are the interpretive keys to Paul's thought and, in particular, to his interpretation of Jesus' death. Allied to this – but not one of the 'lenses' – is that, in the author's view, Paul's thought can only be properly understood when we see him to be an exegete and theologian of the Old Testament. According to Holland, it is wrong to interpret Paul's thought as containing the alloy of Hellenistic thinking. He did not, he says, 'Hellenise' the Christian message but he remained faithful both to the thought patterns and expectations of the Old Testament and also to what Jesus had proclaimed. The second lens is that the Pauline writings should be read as being implicitly corporate and covenantal in their approach. The 'rediscovery' of these two axioms, claims the author, 'bring [*sic*] a far more coherent understanding of the teaching of the apostle Paul in the areas of Christology, salvation and anthropology' (p. 291).

This is a difficult book to review because it is good in part – indeed, sometimes very good – but in other places, I am not so sure.

The strengths of the book are its robust challenge to many scholarly presuppositions and an impetus to new research on Paul's debt to the Old Testament. In addition, Holland offers an impressive restatement of much in the Pauline corpus to demonstrate that Paul's thought is paschal, new-Exodus, corporate and covenantal. For these reasons alone, this is a book that should be read by all who are interested in reading and understanding Paul. That said, I have questions about aspects of Holland's method, style and presuppositions.

Holland doubts the value of two sources for interpreting Paul: the literature of Second Temple Judaism and the pseudepigraphal writings. Rather, according to Holland, Paul stayed 'within the framework of Old Testament theology' (p. 43) – but this begs an important question: Which is Paul's Old Testament interpretive framework of that theology? Is it ancient Israel's, Paul's own (however derived) or twenty-first century? At least Second Temple literature and the pseudepigraphal writings provide some clues as to how the Old Testament were being interpreted in Paul's era within the many 'Judaisms' that Holland, acknowledging Neusner, agrees existed. Paul clearly is an exegete and theologian of the Old Testament – but, we should note, of the Septuagintal version of it. To exclude from Paul's thinking *all* other cultural influences – including the pervasive influence of Hellenistic thought – is an overstatement of a case. In my view, there is too much accumulated evidence to say otherwise, and Holland does not go much beyond asserting this point, although I acknowledge it would

take more than one book to prove his case.

I also wonder whether some of Holland's conclusions may be overstated: for example, with Holland I would say that, of course, Paul interprets Jesus' death as the fulfilment of the Passover – but, I would add, not *only* as the fulfilment of the Passover. What of II Corinthians 8:9, for example?

The author sometimes knocks down what I see to be 'straw men'. For example, he demolishes the view that in his pre-Christian days, Paul persecuted fellow Jewish Christians because they proclaimed a law-free gospel to Gentiles. Some, including me, would argue that Paul persecuted Jewish Christians because the teaching they proclaimed to *other Jews* was heterodox in the view of the Jewish party Paul represented. Holland's targets are (to mix a metaphor) more nuanced than he sometimes admits and, as a result, sometimes does not address other viewpoints.

Another example is on p. 11, the first page of Chapter One. Holland says that scholars claimed for generations that Paul changed Jesus' message to such an extent that Jesus would not have recognised what Paul taught. But a mainstream scholar such as Hooker has recently written most unexceptionally: 'Although Paul's contribution to Christianity was enormous, his understanding of the gospel was not a distortion of Jesus' own message and mission' (M D Hooker, *Paul. A Short Introduction* [2003], p. 148).

There are some wider issues that Holland does not deal with. On the narrative substructure to Paul's thought, much important work is being carried out and Holland does not engage with it. On the corporate nature of Paul's thought – and of all thought in 'the Mediterranean world' – see, for example, chapter Two of B J Malina's *The New Testament World* (2001).

There is much that is very good and stimulating in this book. My reservations aside, the book is an important contribution to the way we read Paul. Scholars will need to engage with it.

Anthony Bash, Durham, England

## Revelation

### Ben Witherington III

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, 307 pp. £15.99, pb., ISBN 0 521 00068 8

#### SUMMARY

This commentary, the first in the *New Cambridge* series, applies socio-rhetorical criticism to Revelation. There is a 50-page introduction and notes on the (mostly English) secondary literature organised by category. The commentary proper is more helpful on verses and on sections of text than in supplying book-wide insights, somewhat regrettably for a rhetorical approach and inadequately given Revelation's organic unity. A polemic in the Graeco-Roman context is overstated and Revelation's Jewish matrix cor-



respondingly neglected, with insufficient attention given to OT allusions or to inner-textual developments. Despite the author's proven stature, his work here lacks a cutting, specialist edge.

### RÉSUMÉ

Ce commentaire inaugure la série *New Cambridge*, en appliquant une approche socio-rétorique à l'Apocalypse de Jean. Une introduction de 50 pages est suivie d'une annotation par catégorie de la littérature secondaire (surtout en anglais). Il est à regretter que l'approche rhétorique soit plus à même de commenter versets ou sections du texte que d'aider à comprendre le livre en tant que tel, sous-estimant ainsi son unité organique. L'importance d'une polémique anti-gréco-romaine est exagérée, au détriment de la matrice juive du livre, tandis que les allusions vétérotestamentaires ou les développements internes au texte sont négligés. Auteur de renom par ailleurs, son travail de non spécialiste ici manque un côté incisif.

### ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Dieser Kommentar, der erste in der *New Cambridge* Reihe, wendet sozio-rhetorische Kritik auf die Offenbarung an. Es gibt eine 50seitige Einleitung und Anmerkungen zur (größtenteils englischen) Sekundärliteratur, die nach Kategorien geordnet ist. Der eigentliche Kommentar ist hilfreicher zu Einzelversen und Textabschnitten als bei der Bereitstellung von Einsichten, die sich auf das ganze Buch beziehen, was ein wenig bedauerlich für einen rhetorischen Ansatz und inadäquat angesichts der organischen Einheit der Offenbarung ist. Die Polemik im griechisch-römischen Kontext ist überbewertet und die jüdische Matrix der Offenbarung wird im Gegenzug vernachlässigt; alttestamentlichen Anspielungen oder innertextlichen Entwicklungen wird zu wenig Aufmerksamkeit geschenkt. Trotz der bereits unter Beweis gestellten Fähigkeiten des Autors fehlt seiner Arbeit in diesem Falle die innovative Klasse eines Spezialisten.

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Readers may have one or more of Ben Witherington's many books, such as his *New Testament History* – recently made available in French translation – or his previous socio-rhetorical work on Acts and Galatians. The present commentary applies this latter methodology to the Book of Revelation, as the first in a new series (the *New Cambridge Bible Commentary*) aiming to update the achievements of its predecessor. The author is general editor.

The commentary is framed by a fifty-page introduction not surprisingly devoted mainly to socio-rhetorical issues and by a short appendix focussing, apparently for American readers, on Rev 20.4–6. Then the author presents by category what he considers to be significant in the huge secondary literature devoted to Revelation; not himself a Revelation specialist, unlike those to whom he declares his debt (xii), Witherington's rather idiosyncratic preference here is for works in English, with only occasional and unrepresentative note of German scholarship and hardly any French studies.

In the commentary proper, the author's comments

about individual verses or discrete sections are mainly helpful. However, few book-wide insights help the reader understand the relation of all these parts to the whole – either Witherington is not convinced of Revelation's unity or this factor does not govern interpretation. This reviewer's impression was of a disjointed approach, although socio-rhetorical issues may be said to predominate. For example, whereas the rhetorical strategies of the seven oracles (Rev 2–3) are examined, the septet is still assumed to be best elucidated not via its sevenfold literary framework but, in the tradition of Ramsey and Hemer, through our reconstructed knowledge of political, socio-economic and religious life in Asian cities. It is doubtful if this popular hermeneutical move of stepping outside the text of Revelation is justified – even supposing the extra-textual frame of reference used to be the right one. And here, Witherington neither postulates nor explores a Jewish or Jewish Christian matrix for what he agrees to be a thoroughly Jewish book, following a trend of recent American scholarship in uncritically construing Revelation as a polemic against Graeco-Roman powers-that-be in general and as an attack on the imperial cult in particular.

A device already familiar from Witherington's previous books is his use of excurses to elucidate special problems of interpretation. In this case, the approach is of limited value. Given the complexity of Revelation as literature and the intricacies of its composition, the space allotted to wider issues would have been better used for solid hermeneutical gain, helping readers explore the basic mechanics and significance of Revelation's unrelenting Old Testament allusions or charting at least some of the crucial inner-textual developments which occur as Revelation's story unfurls.

Witherington's explanation of the text of Revelation is punctuated by one or more "bridging" articles of varying length aimed at bending the horizon of John's book to yours and mine as current readers. A good idea in principle, it is compromised by Witherington's unsatisfactory understanding of the first horizon. The same sort of "mixed results" which, he says, come from Malina's inadequate "typical socio-cultural approach" to Revelation, also accrue ironically from his own reading – on the one hand, due to overestimation of how accurately modern scientific inquiry may extrapolate from the ancient text to the first readers' reconstructed life situation; and on the other, by parallel underestimation of Revelation's Jewish-messianic character related to the omnipresent Jewish Scriptures (and to the Gospels) and of the inner-Jewish polemic which, to my mind, these overlooked aspects strongly presuppose. Whether current readers' own horizons are addressed by these articles, is a more subjective question: Those influenced by or interested in populist millenarian readings of Revelation will probably appreciate them most.

Should you buy this book? It lacks the quality, reliability and flair of recent American commentaries by Beale, Keener or Koester (for example), or of European studies



written by such as Bauckham, Giesen or Prigent. In all these, the authors show hard-won expertise in handling an extraordinarily sophisticated, and therefore demanding, piece of ancient literature. Witherington's stature as a New Testament specialist is amply confirmed by other published work, but in this commentary he relies on his mentors at almost every significant point, referring to them frequently and with nearly six hundred footnotes, mostly acknowledgements.

When viewed from the standpoint of specialised work on Revelation, the scholarly perspective and academic rigour of the back cover's hype are not especially in evidence. At a time of too many commentaries, this one resembles a sort of digest. By the end of my read, I still had no clear answers concerning what was so "innovative" about this contribution, what its author – as a non specialist – had added to the sum of Revelation scholarship to date, or what he had said better than the many who have recently gone before.

*Gordon Campbell, Aix-en-Provence, France*

***God and History in the Book of Revelation:  
New Testament Studies in Dialogue with  
Pannenberg and Moltmann  
(Society for New Testament Studies Monograph  
Series 124)***

**Michael Gilbertson**

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, xiii +  
235 pp., £ 47.50, hb, ISBN 0-521-82466-4

**SUMMARY**

*God and History in the book of Revelation*, one of the fruits of the recent surge of interest in the relationship between biblical studies and systematic theology, places Jürgen Moltmann's and Wolfhart Pannenberg's respective views of history into a constructive dialogue with the way in which the Book of Revelation uses spatial and temporal categories to account for God's relationship to the world. The book is highly recommended, especially for its deft analysis of how John the Seer places the ambivalent situation of his audience within God's ultimate purposes for both heaven and earth.

**RÉSUMÉ**

Ce livre est l'un des fruits de l'intérêt que l'on porte ces temps-ci à la relation entre les études bibliques et la théologie systématique. Il considère la pensée de Moltmann et de Pannenberg sur l'histoire à la lumière de l'usage, dans le livre de l'Apocalypse, de catégories spatiales et temporelles pour présenter la relation de Dieu au monde. Nous avons trouvée profonde l'analyse de la manière dont Jean le visionnaire situe la condition ambivalente de ses lecteurs dans le cadre des desseins ultimes de Dieu pour le ciel et la terre.

**ZUSAMMENFASSUNG**

*God and History in the book of Revelation* ist eine Frucht

des gegenwärtigen Anstiegs des Interesses an der Beziehung zwischen Bibelwissenschaften und systematischer Theologie und bringt die jeweiligen Ansichten über Geschichte von Jürgen Moltmann und Wolfhart Pannenberg in einen konstruktiven Dialog mit der Art und Weise, auf der die Offenbarung räumliche und zeitliche Kategorien benutzt, um Gottes Beziehung zur Welt zu begründen. Das Buch ist sehr zu empfehlen, besonders wegen seiner geschickten Analyse des Weges, auf dem der Seher Johannes die ambivalente Situation seiner Adressaten mit Gottes letztendlichen Absichten mit Himmel und Erde verbindet.

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In *God and History in the Book of Revelation* Michael Gilbertson constructs a dialogue between the Book of Revelation and Wolfhart Pannenberg's and Jürgen Moltmann's respective views of history. In addition to this theological concern, a methodological question runs throughout the book: how can we relate biblical studies and systematic theology, which have usually been held at arms length in modern academia? The heart of Gilbertson's methodological argument is set out in the second chapter of the book, where he first clearly and concisely analyses a variety of attempts to account for the purpose of and relationship between the two disciplines, and then proposes a dynamic relationship where both the contemporary concerns of modern theology and the historical particularity of the text are given their due weight. Gilbertson justifies his method with an appeal to Alister McGrath's defence of a modified propositional approach to theology in which dogmatics is seen as an elaboration of what is found in Scripture, where "Christian doctrine is...concerned with the unfolding and uncovering of the history of Jesus of Nazareth, in the belief that this gives insight into the nature of reality." (McGrath, as quoted, 44) Apart from a not uncommon but unfortunate neglect of the church's tradition of reading and interpreting Scripture, Gilbertson approach is sensible; he neither diminishes the concerns for the historical contingencies which has been the emphasis of biblical studies nor downplays the role of theological construction within the social, cultural and philosophical circumstances in which we find ourselves. In Christian theology, biblical studies and systematic theology need one another because the former always draws us back to the particularity of the biblical texts that the latter is based upon while the latter seeks to articulate a Scriptural view of reality within which we ought to read the text. One may add, which Gilbertson does not state explicitly, that it is perhaps time for Christian scholars to stop viewing the two as distinct disciplines but see them as the exegetical and conceptual aspect of the one theological task—to speak the truth as informed by Scripture within and for the world in which we find ourselves.

Gilbertson concern to give biblical studies and systematics their due concern shapes the structure of the book's positive theological argument. In the first chapter Gilbertson sets out the modern philosophical and theo-