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Review: Revelation by World Biblical Commentary

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submission (5:21), Hoehner seems uncertain. In one place he opines that it means "one is willing to submit to those who have authority" (p. 717). Does mutual submission mean only that the underlings submit to their superiors? Later he indicates that believers ought to demonstrate this quality "in daily life whenever and wherever they [believers] meet" (p. 719) so that it means "submission is to one another, that is, in the midst of the body of believers" (p. 733). Now does he hint that even those in authority need to submit to those under their leadership? I am not sure. Yet Hoehner is convinced of "male headship" in a marriage; a husband is never instructed to submit to his wife (nor parents to a child nor a master to a slave). Hoehner believes that Paul's explanation of the sacrificial love a husband needed to exhibit for his wife struck a countercultural blow against the Roman idea of *patria potestas*, the absolute authority of men over wives, children, and slaves. The concluding section on the full armor of God presents the believer and the church in a defensive posture—to be able to stand their ground in the face of the enemies' onslaughts.

This is a commentary for serious students of Ephesians. It presents a model of careful exegesis from which any serious reader can profit—a model both in the use of careful methods and in the judicious assessment of the evidence to arrive at likely conclusions. One may not always agree with Hoehner, but the reader will see why he came to his conclusions and be able to follow the trail of evidence and reasoning. Is it an inspiring commentary? I would have to demur. It inspires me to be a careful exegete and to work methodically and rigorously—not to accept traditional viewpoints or conclusions even if time-honored. Yet having said that, there remains a kind of sterility about this book. It is so workmanlike. I wish that Hoehner had exhibited more excitement about Paul's message. I wish he had showed us more of the theological significance of Paul's teaching in this exquisite letter. I wish we could see more of the startling implications that grow out of an epistle intent on promoting love within the church and a unity that transcends all barriers. Perhaps Hoehner would respond to this appeal with the entirely appropriate reply, "But the book is already too long." Alas, we cannot have it both ways. So when I wish to direct my students to the technical details and sources on a point of interest, I will urge they open up Hoehner or (almost as comprehensive) Best. They will be richly rewarded. However, when we wish more life and theology, I will suggest we then turn to O'Brien, Yoder Neufeld, or Snodgrass.

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Revelation. By Grant R. Osborne. BECNT. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002, xx + 869 pp., $49.99.

In his first major commentary, Grant Osborne, Professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, has taken on the challenge of the perennially controversial Apocalypse. Several aspects of Osborne's publishing background have prepared him to offer a significant work: (1) if his book *The Hermeneutical Spiral* is a fair indication, few are better prepared in regard to the knotty interpretative issues encountered in Revelation than Osborne; (2) if his controversial study of the great commission employing redaction criticism in *JETS* and his later volume *The Resurrection Narratives: A Redactional Study* are any indication, Osborne knows how to "push the envelope" in areas sensitive to evangelicals; and (3) since he is currently editor of two NT commentary series, he certainly well understands the practical necessity of writing readable, usable, and yes—at least in the case of pastors and students—reasonably affordable commentaries.

In regard to contents, it is not necessary to recount the various features of the Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament series, given the warm reception to the previous volumes, Schreiner's *Romans* and Bock's volumes on *Luke*. Suffice it to say here that Osborne's section on introductory questions is admirably measured, though crowned with a surprisingly full-orbed treatment of the theology of the Apocalypse. The commentary itself is, section-by-section, almost quasi-sermonic in its setup. Like an airplane flight, the material for each passage begins with a "take-off" introductory portion and, after the sectional commentary, "lands" with concluding summary and contextualization. The bibliography of "Works Cited" and a number of helpful indexes complete the volume.

In terms of strengths, Osborne's volume has too many to mention. Just a few of the most meaningful for one who has long taught and written on Revelation are the following: (1) It is unexpectedly clear, concise, and readable. I begin here because, sadly, this is too often not the case with major commentaries (those by Aune and Beale being recent examples of Revelation commentaries that did not make it easy on the reader). (2) Not unrelatedly, because it is not of an overly excessive length or price (compare, again, Aune and Beale), Osborne's volume will prove realistically usable and affordable for wider classroom use and the needs of the average pastor. (3) All things considered, Osborne is wise to take an eclectic hermeneutical approach to Revelation. As opposed to Beale's idealist-slanted eclecticism (which proves to be the wide-open hermeneutical front door for his amillennial conclusions), Osborne judiciously opts to allow the futurist element to have the upper hand in the mix. (4) Even if the commentary does not contain a lot of jump-off-the-page examples of fresh, highly-creative exegesis, it does provide a whole host of examples of careful, measured exegetical thinking, far too numerous to mention. Since the purpose of exegesis is simply to "read out" the meaning of the text, not to create newness, splashiness, or controversy, Osborne is to be commended for doing his job faithfully and not going for the easy sensationalism or polemicism that is far too common in volumes on Revelation. (5) Happily, Osborne chose to make available a solid middle-sized bibliography. This is a notable exception to the normal extremes of either a short (highly) "Selected Bibliography" or an exhaustive (and exhausting) bibliography (that is never needed unless you are writing a dissertation, a bibliography volume, or a major commentary yourself, and even then is outdated almost as soon as the ink is dry on the manuscript).

On the other hand, there simply are no obvious problems or glaring weaknesses in Osborne's *Revelation*. However, in my considered opinion, the following areas are worthy of being registered as stated concerns: (1) Osborne's eclectic approach becomes a two-edged sword at points. Though he states that the futurist element is the most prominent in the mix, it appears that the idealist element is in control at certain key junctures. (2) Osborne unwisely dismisses all larger chiastic structurings related to Revelation as being untenable. While it is certainly true that many purported chiastic structures are forced, Osborne's own affirmation that meaning is being communicated in different ways, and on different levels, in the Apocalypse should have caused him to proceed with less dogmatism. Since so many different chiastic understandings (of parts and the whole) of Revelation continue to be propounded by so many reputable scholars, it would seem that, where there is that much smoke, it is likely that there is some fire. (3) As well done as Osborne's overall essay on the theology of Revelation is generally, it, oddly, largely dodges a formal treatment of eschatology, one of the (if not *the*) paramount theological aspects of the book. In addition, given the views expressed at a number of points in regard to God's people, it is strange that Osborne did not develop a direct ecclesiology. (4) At certain points, Osborne's normally commendable exegetical-theological restraint is too restrained. He fails to follow certain prominent exegetical-theological threads far enough (e.g. the interaction of fairly clear parallel structural elements at

many points, the interactive nature of the seven blessings, and the wider significance of the relationship of the "earth-dwellers" and Babylon the Great, on the one hand, versus the "heaven-dwellers," on the other).

Before my conclusion, and directly related to my recommendation in regard to Osborne's commentary, some theological perspective on how it fits within, and contributes to, a perceptible trend among selected recent wider evangelical volumes on Revelation may prove helpful. While Thomas was staunchly dispensational premillennial, Beale was staunchly amillennial, and Aune largely avoided the issue, Michaels and Mounce both opted for what could be called an "agnostic premillennial" position. What this means is their understanding of the sequence of events surrounding the second advent is a conventional premillennial one, but they hold that it is not possible to know whether "1,000 years" means an actual 1,000 years or is symbolic of a long period of time. What is worth noting here is that Osborne generally follows Michaels and Mounce in this approach and, in my opinion, argues his case more plausibly. While I do not concur with certain aspects of Osborne's understanding at this point, it is highly likely that the way he has expressed his view will, so to speak, send exegetically-based theological ripples across the expanse of the premillennial pond.

From a "wider-lens" theological vantage point, Osborne's approach appears to be yet another instance of a mediating ("eclectic" in most respects) mood in certain sectors of evangelicalism. For example, the progressive dispensational understanding of Blaising, Bock, and others blunts the perceived vulnerability of more traditional dispensational approaches through positions carefully adjusted into "middle-ground." The resulting views maintain dispensationalism's strengths and minimize its weaknesses. Similarly, Osborne's hybrid premillennialism maintains what he considers the strength of the premillennial *sequence* and essentially jettisons what he considers the weakness of its understanding of the focal *symbolism* (i.e. how to understand "1,000 years").

The bottom line is: If you have any significant exegetical or theological interest in the Apocalypse at all, you should have Osborne's *Revelation* on your shelf. Because it has the feel of being long enough without being too long (i.e. covering everything that needs to be addressed without going on *ad infinitum*) and because it is not as unabridgedly self-absorbed as Aune or as "in-your-face" theologically as Thomas or Beale, this is the most balanced and, in a number of ways, the best of the generally quite helpful spate of Revelation commentaries of the last decade. Although I disagree with Osborne at quite a number of points, I highly recommend his volume both as an excellent commentary in its own right and for what will likely prove to be its wider ongoing theological significance within evangelicalism.

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Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible: The Social and Literary Context. By David Instone-Brewer. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002, xi + 355 pp., $26.00.

Apart from Craig Keener's . . . *And Marries Another* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), David Instone-Brewer's book is the most paradigm-challenging study of the NT divorce texts that I have encountered. Since the whole book is available at his website (http://www.instone-brewer.com/), my goal here is merely to entice the reader to wrestle with the implications Instone-Brewer's interpretive grid has not only for the immediate topic, but for our approach to other NT subjects as well.

Instone-Brewer's goal is to overturn the highly impractical "traditional Church interpretation" (pp. ix, 304) of the NT divorce texts. This no remarriage, but two-grounds-