

the words, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another, commits adultery against her," are "undoubtedly authentic" (p. 244). To defend the authenticity of the inscription placed on the cross, "The King of the Jews," however, Stanton appeals to the "criterion of embarrassment," which, unfortunately, was not included in the discussion of criteria of authenticity.

Most unsatisfactory is the way in which the author probes the "self-consciousness" and the "intentions" of Jesus. For example, after declaring that the miracle stories have been used to serve quite diverse roles, Stanton affirms that they reveal the intention of Jesus (p. 217). If, for example, Jesus used the designations "Son of God" and "Son of man" to describe a role which any human being might undertake, why expect much from them as revealing a unique "self-consciousness"?

What is sorely missing is the recognition that the Jesus presented in the Gospels is most forcibly constrained by a sense of "the time." In an unguarded moment Stanton admits: "Jesus expected that in the 'last days,' which he believed to be imminent, the temple would be destroyed and replaced by some form of alternative access to God" (p. 266). Would an expectation for "some form" of an alternative have brought about the death of Jesus? Stanton never takes account of the social context of the messianic expectations inflaming Jewish life at the time. By contrast, Paula Fredriksen's *From Jesus to Christ* (New Haven, 1988) is more satisfying.

Stanton advises that "it is all too easy for the modern scholar to make Jesus in his own image. That danger can be avoided only by assessing *all* the evidence equally rigorously—even the less congenial parts" (p. 273). While Stanton evidently has taken note of Albert Schweitzer's exposé of the dangers of drawing Jesus in the researcher's own image, he has overlooked Schweitzer's insistence that the most uncongenial, apocalyptic, first century must be taken seriously. Here Stanton fails according to his own standards. The book also fails vis-à-vis its exorbitant price!

Saint Mary's College
Notre Dame, IN 46556

HEROLD WEISS

Thompson, Leonard L. *The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990. xiv + 265 pp. \$23.96.

Leonard L. Thompson's *The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire* is refreshing for its comprehensive approach to the matter of the social and political context of life in the Roman province of Asia at the close of the first Christian century. The book is also noteworthy for its suggestions concerning the place of John's Apocalypse within, or in relationship to, that context, novel (and perhaps faulty) as some of these suggestions may be.

The book is not a commentary on Revelation, though a few “comments” of interpretational nature do occur.

In his “Introduction” (pp. 1-8), the author states explicitly that his “interest in the Book of Revelation is limited to the situation in which it was first read and written” (p. 3). He goes on to share his conviction that “original meaning” and “original context” for the book of Revelation “are not normative for all subsequent readings” and that, likewise, later readings of that book “should not control how we understand its ‘original context’” (p. 4).

The volume contains four major parts, each subdivided into chapters. The first part, “Orientation” (pp. 11-34), contains a discussion of Revelation’s “Historical Setting and Genre” (chap. 1) and “The Social Setting of Apocalypses” (chap. 2). The second, including chaps. 3-5, deals with “The Script: Wholeness and the Language of the Book of Revelation” (pp. 37-91). The third part (chaps. 6-9) discusses “The Stage: Roman Society and the Province of Asia” (pp. 95-167). The final section, “The Play: The Apocalypse and the Empire” (pp. 171-201), applies Thompson’s insights to Revelation itself (chaps. 10-12).

An appendix (pp. 202-210) reviews “Recent Theories about the Social Setting of the Book of Revelation.” The theories selected for this review are those of Colin Hemer, John Court, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, John Gager, and Adela Yarbro Collins, respectively. Extensive endnotes (pp. 213-239), a bibliography (pp. 241-253), and three indexes (pp. 255-265) complete the work.

Thompson locates the historical setting of Revelation late in the reign of Emperor Domitian. He sees the provenance as being the Roman province of Asia in western Asia Minor (pp. 11-15). As to social setting, he opts for a context of “perceived,” rather than real, crisis (pp. 27-28).

Thompson’s four chapters dealing with linguistic considerations appear to this reviewer to be the most useful in the volume. His synopsis of the book of Revelation (pp. 37-40) is, however, superficial, without any real attempt to explore the book’s literary structure and relationships. His explanation of “Boundary Situations” (in sociological terms) is particularly intriguing, especially in reference to what he designates as “blurred boundaries” and “soft boundaries” (pp. 75-86).

In chaps. 7-9 Thompson provides considerable useful information concerning many aspects of society in the ancient Roman province of Asia, including treatment of the Christian and Jewish subcultures there (pp. 116-145). His reconstruction of Domitian’s reign as being basically a good one (chap. 6) rests, however, on dubious argumentation: that noble deeds of Domitian are recorded, that writers contemporary with this emperor praised him, and that deprecatory accounts of his reign emerge later. To consider these to be evidences, as Thompson seems to do, of an attempt to enhance Trajan by discrediting Domitian overlooks or minimizes several important

considerations: (1) Bad rulers have usually acquired their reputation in spite of positive aspects of their reigns and primarily because of *spasmodic* harmful outbursts. (2) Though the ancient Roman historians gave their grim portrayal of Domitian during Trajan's time or later, this fact does not make their depictions more suspect than the favorable picture given by several poets and other writers during Domitian's reign (the latter could simply have been using flattery as a means to self-preservation!). (3) If Nerva and Trajan felt it necessary to discredit their predecessor Domitian, it seems strange that the attack was not against the whole Flavian dynasty. (4) Though the attempt of emperors to discredit forerunners is a well-known phenomenon, there is little, if any, evidence of it in the early Roman Principate. (5) Thompson's thesis has no adequate explanation for the fact that Domitian was officially execrated (the opposite of apotheosized) at death. (6) At this early time, Roman persecution of Christians was not normally by imperial decision (Nero's case was an exception), but was rather a local matter. (7) On the matter of persecution of Christians, Thompson's theory hardly fits the evidence. Revelation's evidences of *real persecution* are so weighty as to raise serious doubt regarding any reconstruction that views the persecution as merely "perceived."

In spite of Thompson's somewhat unrealistic historical reconstruction—a major thesis that flaws also his applications in part 4—this volume contains much useful material and should be read by all persons making a serious study of the book of Revelation.

Andrews University

KENNETH A. STRAND