

The intertextual approach assumes that Bible authors used words, themes, and structures in rich, purposeful ways. While it is certainly a mistake to view these writers as simple scribes, unaware of what they wrote or how they wrote it, how much freedom may be accorded to the reader beholding this literary wealth? It must be noted that limiting excess lies more with the individual reader than with the discipline or method itself. This type of study requires a certain type of mind that sees connections which may elude others, or may only be appreciated by a similar mind. The value of this method for individual readers will probably depend on their interest in both careful reading and its potential results for theological enterprise.

As a whole, this book demonstrates that the biblical text will yield many clues to meaning for the reader who can evaluate such features as irony, allusion, theme, and narrative and linguistic parallels, as well as the biblical authors' appreciation of their own narrative traditions. Those scholars will be amply rewarded who become progressively more discerning about the textual richness of the Bible.

I recommend *Reading Between the Texts* as a stimulus to tapping possibilities for contemporary biblical study. I recognize, however, that some readers may have reservations about interpretations that may be overstated. Most will find the book technically challenging, since the writers presume some expertise in literary and rhetorical analysis.

La Sierra University
Riverside, CA 92515

SUSAN E. JACOBSEN

Fiorenza, Elisabeth Schüssler. *Revelation: Vision of a Just World*. Proclamation Commentaries, ed. Gerhard Krodel. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991. 160 pp. \$9.95.

Most scholars interested in the Apocalypse are familiar with Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's short commentary entitled *Invitation to the Book of Revelation*, published by Image Books in 1981. When Fortress Press expressed an interest in publishing an updated version of that commentary, Fiorenza discovered that the considerable development in her thinking on the Apocalypse in the intervening period made minimal revisions an impossibility. The result is not just a new commentary in the old format, but an entirely new style of commentary.

Commentaries tend to take one of two approaches. One approach is the "historical-critical" commentary, which seeks to elucidate what the text meant in its original context with as much scientific objectivity and disinterestedness as possible. In the process, issues of theological interest and the church's need for sound biblical preaching are often marginalized or ignored. The other approach aims at the preacher or lay reader, using the text as a springboard for addressing current concerns, but usually failing to grapple meaningfully with the text in its original situation. In her commentary Fiorenza seeks to be as

objective and scholarly as ever, but to do so in a way that interacts seriously with the way Revelation impacts and should impact on society today.

The answer to her quest for a fresh approach is found in what she calls "rhetorical analysis." By her definition "rhetorical analysis" is concerned with the impact of the book's argumentation not only on the original context and the original readers, but also on the context from which the present-day interpreter reads the Apocalypse. For example, writers and readers from so-called first-world countries tend to place sexual and psychological problems in the foreground, whereas so-called third-world writers and readers tend to focus on social and political experience. Each group of readers will get something different out of Revelation.

Fiorenza has, therefore, chosen to work from two directions at once, on the one hand from the perspective of academic biblical studies, and on the other hand from the perspective of feminist theological discourse. She seeks to use her rhetorical analysis as a means to discover how biblical texts and interpretations create or sustain oppressive or liberating theo-ethical values and sociopolitical practices. She operates on the assumption that there is no such thing as value neutrality when one does biblical interpretation; what we see in the text depends on where we stand. Biblical scholars, therefore, should be up-front about the religious presuppositions and theoretical frameworks from which they view the text.

The commentary is divided into three sections. In the first section Fiorenza sets her book and reading strategy in relation to other strategies, both popular and critical. In the second section she offers a relatively brief, yet close, historical and literary-critical reading of the text of Revelation. Instead of a verse-by-verse approach, she moves section by section, tracking the main lines of the author's argumentation, rather than getting lost in the details of the text or of the text's history and development. In the third section she seeks to relate John's vision and purpose in writing the book to the issues and concerns of contemporary feminist discourse. She finds much in the Apocalypse to appreciate, but also expresses serious dismay at how the book has been used through the centuries to support oppressive ethical values and sociopolitical systems.

The significance of Fiorenza's proposals is such that an article-length review would be necessary to do justice to this profound book, which is the most important of her many contributions to date. My reactions here, however, will of necessity be brief.

As a fellow scholar of the Book of Revelation I was most enriched by the central section of her book, where she unpacks the text of Revelation section by section. Her grasp of the large movements in the text is truly phenomenal, and the reader gains a whole new vision of John's overall purpose and strategy in writing the book. Her judgments about the interrelationships within the text's structure are almost always sound and helpful. No student of the Apocalypse can afford to ignore Fiorenza's proposals, most of which appear to be solid readings of the original intention. Although details are generally left out

on account of brevity, wherever details are examined, her observations tend to be significant contributions to the understanding of Revelation.

The third section, likewise, offers serious food for contemplation. I particularly appreciated her emphasis that Revelation looks at the issue of power and control in the world from the viewpoint of those who are out of power. As a result, the book will probably be best understood by those who are oppressed and marginalized within their own contemporary context. Another important insight is that the primary purpose of Revelation's depiction of cosmic destruction and holy war is not a sterile description of first-century, historical, or future realities, but rather the impact of the book's vision on the personal and spiritual experience of the reader. Revelation was not written to satisfy the reader's curiosity about present or future realities; it was written to affect the way the reader lives and the way the reader responds to the oppressive realities of a disordered world.

As appreciative as I am of this book, and as much as I find myself in agreement with its observations, I must confess a certain amount of disquiet as I read it. Fiorenza's approach to the book makes considerable use (perhaps unintentionally) of Troeltsch's principle of criticism. She feels free to stand in judgment over some of the ideas presented in Revelation and the way in which these ideas are portrayed. As a result, the reader of Fiorenza's book senses a somewhat skeptical stance over against the biblical material. For instance, she suggests that by likening God's power to Roman imperial power and by portraying Christ as a "divine warrior" John leaves his work open to the understanding that God's power is "power over" or oppressive power. Fiorenza suggests, therefore, the need for Christian theology to replace Revelation's symbolism of imperial might and destructive warfare with language and metaphors for God that foster democratic responsibility and resistance to all political powers that dehumanize, oppress, and destroy.

I cannot deny a certain validity in this and similar observations. The writers of scripture were human beings who used contemporary ways of expression to articulate their messages. Their choices of language and metaphor were often far from ideal. But the language and metaphors of this world are never ideal. I fear that in reading Revelation from a more skeptical and disinterested stance we may lose touch with something of the soul of the work itself.

God's sovereignty in Revelation is not inherently oppressive; rather, it highlights the huge difference between the infinite and the finite. As such, all finite powers, such as Rome and modern oppressors, are relativized. Because all humans are equally subject to God's absolute rule, no one has the right to assert power over another. A skeptical reading of Revelation misreads the description of God's power as seeking to offer a model for how humans should relate to each other. But John would assert that no human has the right to rule in the way that God rules over a finite creation.

A profound example of a scholarly, yet faith-oriented, reading of Revelation is Richard Bauckham's more recent work, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*. Bauckham, Fiorenza, and I are generally seeing the same things

when we look at Revelation. The structural and theological insights generally cohere. But I am more comfortable with Bauckham's sympathetic and positive approach to John's rhetoric, and I believe that there are academic advantages to such an approach.

Recent studies of human perception suggest that it is impossible to treat any document fairly unless you can generate some sympathy for the author's perspective. The best reading of a text will arise out of a kind of soul communion with the world of the author. We live at a time when skepticism and disbelief are increasingly called into question. A reading of the Apocalypse that is sympathetic to the faith and basic honesty of the original author's presentation should no longer be considered out of harmony with good scholarship.

In offering this concern about the approach of Fiorenza's book, I do not intend to diminish her achievement or disparage her character. I am simply answering her call for scholars to be honest about the stance from which they prefer to read the text. Her book opens the way for more honest and authentic discussion of the personal and spiritual dynamics that affect academic readings of the biblical texts. She herself has practiced what she preaches in this book. All readers and critics of her book would do well to follow her example.

Andrews University

JON PAULIEN

Grenz, Stanley J. *The Millennial Maze: Sorting Out Evangelical Options*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992. 239 pp. Paperback, \$12.99.

In a bid to lead readers through the bewildering maze of evangelical views of the millennium, Stanley J. Grenz, Professor of Theology and Ethics at Carey/Regent College, calls for an appreciation of each of the major perspectives: postmillennialism, dispensational premillennialism, historic premillennialism and amillennialism. He describes his own understanding as "amillennialism sympathetic to postmillennialism."

The author provides a fresh, readable survey of millenarianism in Christian history and accents the tragic results that have sometimes followed on millennial thought gone awry. (One wonders, though, whether William Miller's misjudgment with regard to October 22, 1844, was "catastrophic" in the same sense that that adjective is deserved by, say, Thomas Münster's millennial thought. Succeeding chapters examine the main features, biblical bases, and criticisms of each view.

Postmillennialism is described as "probably the most maligned and misunderstood" position. Attention is focused on a modern iteration, "Evangelical Postmillennialism," which features a belief in a future era that begins imperceptibly, may last more than a literal one thousand years, and during which the gospel is proclaimed. The view finds in Rev 19:11-21 a presentation of church-age conquest. It provides a reminder that God's reign is