

that only God can effect, they reinforce the general biblical narrative—perfect Torah obedience is neither expected nor required of human beings as they are” (*What’s Divine about Divine Law: Early Perspectives* [Princeton University Press, 2015], 49).

Is this what the prophets predict? As Gregory A. Boyd has emphasized, without freedom of choice it is impossible to love (Gregory A. Boyd, *Satan and the Problem of Evil: Constructing a Trinitarian Warfare Theodicy* [IVP Academic, 2001], 50–84). According to Jesus, love is the essence of God’s law (Matt 22:37–40). So how could elimination of moral freedom, which would end love, result in obedience to God’s law? It appears that Jeremiah and Ezekiel are saying that God will enable the right choices of his people to serve him, rather than making moral robots out of them. If people with free choice can’t obey God, it is difficult to explain the exhortation of Moses when he told the Israelites that his command to keep the Lord’s commandments and statutes “is not too baffling for you, nor is it beyond reach . . . No, the thing is very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart, to observe it” (Deut 30:11–14 NJPS).

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Tonstad, Sigve K. *Revelation. Paideia: Commentaries on the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019. 398 pp. Softcover. USD 35.00.

*Revelation* by Sigve Tonstad is the refreshingly original, thought-provoking, consensus challenging, and boldly out-of-the-ordinary commentary on the Apocalypse. This newest addition to the Paideia commentaries will challenge readers to reframe their perception of the book of Revelation. Built on ancient backgrounds and conversant with a modern scholarship, this commentary centers on a theological reading of the text and the extraction of practical applications for contemporary readers. Sigve Tonstad is a research professor at Loma Linda University and a well-established scholar with numerous publications on theodicy, ecological hermeneutics, and biblical ethics. In this commentary, he offers a unique non-violent, non-punitive view of God and the judgment, the view which challenges the status quo of the majority of interpretations.

Similar to other commentaries on Revelation, the author offers essential introductory material where he sets the focus of the commentary and provides interpretive lenses. Besides touching common introductory questions, the hermeneutical approaches (preterist, historicist, futurist), and relations between Roman history and Revelation’s visions, the author emphasizes the book as a revelation: the open door, the exposé, the ultimate means which unmask the works of the father of all lies, the devil. The book

conveniently follows the text of John's Apocalypse. Each chapter contains three sections: "(1) introductory matters; (2) tracing the train of thought or narrative or rhetorical flow of the argument; and (3) theological issues raised by the text that is of interest to the contemporary Christian" (x). In the theological section, Tonstad delivers practical remarks on present-time issues. Diving deep into the works of Dostoevsky, Solzhenitsyn, and others, this section reveals the author's devotional passion behind his scholarship. The book also features a lengthy bibliography with old and recent works as well as the indexes of subjects, modern authors, scriptures, and ancient resources which readers will appreciate.

Beyond the audible perception of the Revelation, which is somewhat linear, Tonstad introduces a "re-reader" approach to the book. He argues that only "a re-reader will have an awareness of the whole that is necessary for understanding the parts" (39, cf. 132, 147). Time and again the author elevates above particular passages to observe the visionary fabric of the Apocalypse from above and to connect various pieces of the revelatory puzzle. Tonstad argues that the Revelation's "hub of the wheel," chapter 12, is the key to understanding the cosmic scale of all the book's visions (37). For him, the first-century Roman background is too small and inadequate in comparison to the universal and timeless conflict the book aims to address. The author is not shy to claim that John's Apocalypse deals with greater matters than Nero: "what is not on their minds is the emperor Nero and the Roman imperial cult" (111); "nothing less than a global or cosmic stage will suffice" (166); the myth of Nero's return is questioned (189–190); "an imperial referent is too parochial" (196); "the story is compromised by a small screen, Roman frame of reference" (214); "Nero is a mismatch" (246).

Aside from critiquing popular preterist interpretations, Tonstad also stays away from all historical applications to the visions (against historicists and futurists). Instead, he offers the idealist reading of the Revelation arguing for the timeless significance of the prophecies. His commentary anchors on values, not events; it is God-centered more than time-centered (29). Tonstad's arguments for the cosmic proportions seem convincing, yet the complete avoidance of the historical meaning creates a lacuna. On the one hand, the author masterfully identifies the main characters in each scene; on the other, what does this knowledge bring to the reader? Often one may desire to go from abstract concepts to concrete realities but that information is absent. Although Tonstad admits that Revelation is built on Daniel's "historical phenomena" (188), he excludes such discussions from his commentary. He does not talk in tangible terms about any prophetic period, a discussion which readers would most likely value. Instead, he makes a courageous statement by ruling out 1,260 days and its variants (Rev 11:2–3; 12:6, 14; 13:5) as literal days (163). Besides this innovative take on the mainstream interpretation, Tonstad also challenges the status

quo in his view of Armageddon and the millennium. For him, contrary to popular views, the millennium reign is going to take place in heaven, not on earth (291), views all too familiar to Seventh-day Adventists, the affiliation of Tonstad. Similarly, the Armageddon is not a specific place in the Near East but a cosmic mount of assembly from Isa 14:12–13 (231). Although this idea is plausible, the author did not show linguistically how he arrived at “*har-mo’ed*” from “*har-magedon*.”

Yet perhaps the most unconventional but truly remarkable feature of the commentary is Tonstad’s main thesis to present God as non-violent and non-revengeful. God is represented in the Lamb which is the victim of violence (Rev 5:6) but He is non-retributive. His weapons are revelation and witness (xii, 57, 164). The word is superior to the sword (213). Jesus, the slain Lamb, is the Revealer who discloses what the other party wants to hide (128). Non-violence exposes and conquers Satan, the Deceiver (173). Tonstad questions the common view that God stands behind all actions in the Revelation (151, 213–214). Instead of accepting passive verbs as the “divine passive,” he introduces the “diabolic passive” and argues that Satan stands behind all the horrors in the Apocalypse (125; cf. 194). The key concept for Tonstad’s thesis is to view God as the Restrainer who gradually removes his protection, allowing the other side to operate without restraint. God’s wrath then is understood as the withdrawal of the divine protection (208). Satanic activity, thus, self-exposes its true nature all the way until the final battle when God’s enemies self-destroy themselves “outside of the city” (213–214).

All in all, the *Revelation* by Sigve Tonstad captivates by its originality. The commentary calls readers to a deeper analysis of the text seasoned with unconventional thinking. No doubt some may occasionally disagree with the author on particularities, yet his original thinking alone outweighs all possible shortcomings. This commentary is a valuable contribution to scholarship and it has the potential to guide its readers into new explorations. Any Bible student, be they scholars, pastors, teachers, or none of those, will benefit from its pages – it is a must-read.

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Wolter, Michael. *Der Brief an die Römer*. 2 vols. EKKNT 6. Ostfildern: Patmos; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014/2019. 559 pp./511 pp. Softcover. EUR 75.99/69.99.

Michael Wolter’s impressive professional career includes being a professor for Biblical Theology at the University of Bayreuth (Germany) from 1988–1993 and a Professor of New Testament at the University of Bonn (Germany) from 1993–2016. He also served as editor of the *Theologischen*