

Wainwright, Arthur W. *Mysterious Apocalypse: Interpreting the Book of Revelation*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1993. 288 pp. Paper, \$19.95.

The subtitle of Arthur W. Wainwright's *Mysterious Apocalypse* could well have been "A Comprehensive Survey of Interpretations." The author does not explain how to interpret the book of Revelation nor does he give his own interpretation of it. What he does provide is a broad survey of an almost overwhelming array of interpreters and interpretations of the Apocalypse (or portions of it) throughout Christian history.

Mysterious Apocalypse has three main subdivisions. Part I, "The Millennium and History" (21-103), treats millennial views from the early-church period onward. Its five chapters touch upon important or representative exponents of chiliasm, amillennialism, postmillennialism, modern premillennialism, historicism, preterism, and futurism (some of these schools of interpretation overlap, of course; e.g., premillennialists may be either historicists or futurists). The main outline of the history of these various views emerges quite clearly, but the author's apparent attempt to be as exhaustive as possible also leads to occasional overburdening with details of relatively minor significance.

Part 2, "Critical Approaches to the Apocalypse" (107-158), contains three chapters covering "Authority, Authorship, Date, and Sources"; "Contemporary-historical Criticism and Mythology," and the kinds of treatment given when emphasis is on "Literary Criticism, the Social Sciences, and Theology." These chapters, too, are packed with interesting information and will reward the reader with a good overview of some of the newer approaches to the book of Revelation. The only clarification I would make is that Wainwright's treatment of "Sources" (119-122) is not a discussion of literary sources or historical backgrounds utilized in the text of the Apocalypse (such as the intensive use of the OT), but instead deals exclusively with the text-critical question of how the book came into its present form. Three general views and the variations within them are surveyed: single authorship at a given time (such as during Domitian's reign), single authorship of separate segments over a period of years or decades, and multiple authorship involving different documents brought together by a redactor or redactors.

Part 3, "The Apocalypse and Human Experience" (161-230), has four chapters dealing with political interpretations, societal concerns, the cultural heritage of the Apocalypse, and the use of Revelation for "inner life" and public worship. This third major portion of the book will undoubtedly be, for many readers, the most interesting. Whereas Parts 1 and 2 traverse ground fairly well covered by church historians and NT scholars, respectively, Part 3 brings us into some areas that either are less frequented or come to the fore more selectively in works on art history, music, drama, and literature in general.

A volume so "packed full" of information could hardly escape random typographical errors and other lapses. I note the following few: "Seventh-day Adventism" and "Seventh-day Adventist" (99) should have a lower-case "d" in the word "day"; the middle name of J. N. Andrews was "Nevins," not "Nevis" (100); and the scholars who, later than the "seventeenth-century scholar Grotius"

developed "similar theories" should be designated as "recent" (or "more recent") rather than "modern"(119), inasmuch as the modern era of history began with the century prior to Grotius. Also, there is confusion in dealing first with the views of Joachim of Fiore (49-53), and then, in the immediately following section (53-55), to use an individual who died some three decades before Joachim's death to exemplify "a new method" of interpretation which became popular some years "after Joachim's death"(53).

All things considered, there are relatively few errors in Wainwright's publication, and those that do occur are usually not overly serious. Even in places where this reviewer could have wished for further amplification and where the text displays unavoidable superficiality because of the vast scope of interpretations covered, serious readers need not be at a loss, for they can "round out" their knowledge by looking up the ample background source materials cited in the extensive endnotes (231-266).

Although our author has for the most part avoided evaluation of the interpretations he has surveyed, he has furnished in his "Conclusion" (223-230) a number of valuable insights concerning the way in which the book of Revelation has been viewed and handled. He has pointed out, for example, various reasons for the Revelation's attraction, including its appeal to persons in crisis settings, its status as Christian Scripture, and its role as part of cultural heritage. After calling attention to the "mystery" of the book, he notes that mystery "involves ambiguity, and ambiguity has its dangers," and then sets forth some pertinent and ever-timely advice: "A purely polemical use of the Apocalypse is destructive. A use of it for self-examination is creative" (229).

Wainwright's observations about the "openness" or "open-endedness" of the Apocalypse and to its being "a book of hidden meaning" (to use the title of his introductory chapter) are worth noting. However, the book of Revelation may, in fact, be much less amenable to varying interpretations and "hiddenness" than he conjectures. After all, as he himself notes, "Some explanations are obviously wrong" (228). But beyond this, I question (as one example) the validity of his remark that "John does not make it clear whether the thousand years have already begun or lie entirely in the future" (227). A proper hermeneutic, including due regard for literary structure, can eliminate much of the ambiguity that we may *think* the Apocalypse has.

This insightful volume, which I consider well worth reading (but with due caution against being overawed by the plethora of interpretations), concludes with an extensive "Select Bibliography" (267-277), a "Scripture Index" (279-282), and a "General Index" (283-293). The volume also contains eight pictorial plates (six in color) from the Cambridge Apocalypse, Douce Apocalypse, Flemish Apocalypse, and other sources (inserted between pp. 192 and 193).