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***Revelation: Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*** by Buist M. Fanning. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2020. 623 pp., cloth, \$54.99.

The Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament covers the entire New Testament in twenty volumes. This volume on Revelation by Buist Fanning, senior professor emeritus of New Testament studies at Dallas Theological Seminary, is the thirteenth volume to be released. Like

the other volumes in the series, *Revelation* contains a series introduction, an author's preface, a table of abbreviations, an introduction, an outline, select bibliography, commentary, the theology of the book, and Scripture, other ancient literature, subject, and author indexes. The treatment of each biblical passage in the commentary includes seven components: literary context, main idea, translation and graphical layout, structure, exegetical outline, explanation of the text, and theology in application. Numerous footnotes are provided that interact with commentators holding a wide range of views, and are well worth reading. The translation of the text is the authors' own.

Regarding this volume on Revelation in particular, there are five "in depth" shaded text boxes ranging from one to seven pages scattered throughout the explanation of the text sections: Ephesus, the number of the Beast through the centuries, the significance of Armageddon, the identity of Babylon, and the nature and purpose of the Millennium. The twenty-two chapters of Revelation are divided into twenty-eight chapters (Rev 1, 2, and 3 each have multiple chapters in the commentary). The author quoted from eight different English translations (CSB, ESV, MSG, NABR, NASB, NIV, NLT, NRSV) and referred to eleven others (ASV, CEB, GNT, KJV, NCB, NCV, NEB, NET, NJB, NTE, REB, RSV). What sets this commentary apart from other volumes in this series and from many other commentaries on Revelation is that Fanning is dispensational and premillennial. The book of Revelation is a "closed book" to commentators like David Aune and Gregory K. Beale, even though they have written massive tomes on it.

After some brief opening comments, Fanning divides his introduction into nine sections: introduction; author; date and setting; genre; imagery and symbols; hermeneutical approaches; use of the Old Testament: prophecy and typology; text; language and style; and, structure and outline. He concluded that Revelation "was written not by the apostle but by another church leader, a prophet known to the churches of Asia Minor, also named John and influenced by the apostle" (p. 28). He believes that "the external evidence" favors a late date (AD 95-98) for the book (p. 28). He sees Revelation as "an apocalyptic prophecy in epistolary form" (p. 33).

Following a good discussion of literal and symbolic interpretation, Fanning made the case for the futurist hermeneutical approach. In the longest section of his introduction, on the use of the Old Testament by the Book of Revelation, Fanning discussed several issues, and concluded with an excellent discussion of typology. He sees "parallels and allusions to various part[s] of the Old Testament" as "pervasive," and "occurring in

virtually every verse, especially in its visions,” even though “no explicit citations or formal quotations are found” (p. 40). Although Fanning recognizes the unique nature of the text of Revelation, he nevertheless believes that “strong preference” should be given to “readings found in the primary Alexandrian witnesses” while “readings found primarily in the Byzantine or Majority manuscripts should be suspect” (p. 52). What is surprising is that he did not mention Hermann Hoskier’s work *Concerning the Text of the Apocalypse* (1929) and it is disappointing that he referred to the second volume of the original German work of Josef Schmid (1955) on the text of Revelation but did not mention its recent (2018) English translation (p. 51).

Fanning sees the language of Revelation as “not standard or normal usage even compared to the simple Greek found in comparable books of the New Testament,” but not “substandard or nonnormal” (p. 53). The grammar is an “unusual” (p. 53) idiolect that “sometimes used the expected patterns of Semitized Greek familiar in other New Testament and LXX books but at other times followed patterns that have their own linguistic logic” (p. 54). John’s style is Semitic because “he used Greek as a second language” (p. 54). The structure of Revelation is “not immediately transparent” (p. 58). Fanning guides the reader through the maze of recapitulations, sequences, transitions, divisions, layers, progressions, interludes, complements, flashbacks, previews, and such. His general outline is straightforward considering “the book’s predominant chronological arrangement of its prophetic vision of the future” (p. 63) and his futurist interpretation of the book. The author’s brief and preliminary note critical of “popular writers” who “produce overly literal and overly specific accounts of the world’s future” (p. 63) is a welcome sight. While certainly recognizing that the book includes only “a select bibliography,” still the classic work of Clarence Larkin would deserve a mention. The following from Fanning’s comments are noted in particular.

- Revelation 1:7, the argument that Christ’s “‘coming’ is not to earth but to God’s heavenly presence or is Christ’s ‘coming’ in judgment against Jerusalem in AD 70, or both, fails to see how John cited a single phrase in Daniel 7 to bring with it the theological point of the larger passage” (p. 85). Revelation 1:8, the “I am” declarations are “reflective of a high Christology” (p. 87). Revelation 1:10, the “Lord’s day” expression “almost certainly refers to Sunday” (p. 96). Revelation 1:20, the angels of the seven churches “are holy angels, that is, supernatural messengers or instruments of God who serve as guardians or

representatives of the congregations" (p. 107). The popular dispensational view that the seven churches in Revelation are not only "specific churches in the first century," but represent both "patterns that apply to individual churches across the centuries," and "the world-wide church through seven ages of its existence" should be "rejected" (p. 111).

- Revelation 2:7, the "one who overcomes" is "the one who genuinely believes in Christ and who by virtue of God's new birth finds the ability to endure in that faith against idolatry and persecution," not "those who suffer martyrdom for their faith" or "a group of more committed or obedient Christians over against over believers who are less spiritual" (p. 121).
- Revelation 4:1, the "come up here" summons to John is not symbolic of the rapture of the church (p. 197).
- Revelation 7:4, "it is likely that the 144,000 represents ideas of fullness and completeness whether or not it intends to give an actual or approximate count" (p. 261). Very important here is the assertion that ethnic Israel has not been "set aside" with the church assuming her "spiritual privileges" (p. 263).
- Revelation 11:1-2, the "temple of God" is literal and earthly. Revelation 11:5-6, the "two witnesses" are not "Elijah and Moses" (p. 333).
- Revelation 12:1-2, the "woman" represents "ethnic Israel" (p. 349). Revelation 13:1, "the beast" refers "to a specific human ruler and the empire he rules in the last days (p. 370).
- Revelation 13:16-17, the mark of the beast "is always cited together with 'worship' of him" (p. 378). Revelation 13:18, "the number 666 as a reference to Nero" is "the most likely interpretation" (p. 380). The Antichrist is the final Nero (p. 380).
- Revelation 14:4, "virgins" are "those who have refrained from all sexual relations" (p. 390-91). Revelation 14:8, "John uses 'Babylon' here and later in Revelation not to refer literally to the city in Mesopotamia but as a typology of evil drawn from the ancient an prominent imperial enemy of God's people in the Old Testament that destroyed Jerusalem and its temple and exiled its population" (p. 393). Revelation 14:20, "blood will not

be five or six feet deep for two hundred miles at Christ's second coming" (p. 400).

- Revelation 16:13, to declare that "specific modern nations are the 'fulfillment' of what John speaks of has invariably been an embarrassment to prophetic interpretation in subsequent generations" (p. 420).
- Revelation 17:5, Babylon "refers to Rome and its empire in the first century as a pattern of godless rule exemplified in ancient Babylon in the Old Testament and in Rome in John's day and anticipates the extreme manifestation of the pattern in the end times" (p. 440).
- Revelation 19:6-7, "the beginning of God's rule on earth and the wedding of the Lamb are linked together as parallel reasons for heavenly celebration, so it is more likely that they occur together in time" (p. 482). Revelation 19:9, "the bride (v. 7) and the guests (v. 9)" do not "represent different groups among the redeemed" (p. 483). "It makes more sense to see the image referring to the same group, the redeemed who are chosen in God's great love to be his people" (p. 483). "There is no rationale to see the church as distinct from Israel in this picture of redemption's consummation, even though other distinctions should be made" (p. 483). Revelation 19:14, the armies in heaven include "resurrected early followers of Christ already present in heaven" as well as "angelic warriors" (p. 488). Revelation 19:19, "the heavenly armies that accompany Christ" do not "appear to play an active role in this great battle" (p. 491); yet, it is a literal battle. Old Testament prophetic images have not been "reborn, reimagined, or 'Christianized' by John into something purely spiritual" (p. 492).
- Revelation 20:4, "martyrdom is never said to be the universal fate of God's people" or "cited as a condition for co-ruling with Christ" (p. 502). Revelation 20:5-6, "the physical, bodily resurrection of the dead is in view in both verses" (p. 506). The "first resurrection" denotes "the eventual raising of all the faithful (viewed as one group) along with Christ" and the "rest of the dead" refers to "a resurrection of the unjust for judgment" (p. 506). The number "thousand" is "essentially literal (a round number to be sure, not a precise count, and

- with connotative value as well as a literal sense" (p. 508). Revelation 20:8, "Gog and Magog" are not "specific kingdoms or peoples" (p. 514). They are "reminders" of the prophecy of Ezekiel 38—39 and "of the pattern of attack and deliverance that Israel has seen throughout her history" (p. 514). Revelation 20:12-13, "the dead" are "the unrighteous now raised to face God's evaluation" (p. 518). "The sea" represents "the dead who did not receive a normal burial" (p. 519).
- Revelation 21:3, "believing Israel will continue to be God's channel of blessing to all the nations of the world as always intended" (p. 533). Revelation 21:9-10, the symbols of "the bride, the wife of the Lamb" and "the holy city Jerusalem" represent "both a people and a place" (p. 538). Revelation 21:22, the Temple of Ezekiel "is the millennial temple to be restored when God regathers Israel in its land at the time of Christ's second coming and his reign from the earthly Jerusalem for a thousand years" (p. 544). Revelation 21:24-26, "many longstanding (and somewhat off-putting) impressions of what 'heaven' and eternal life will be like are not informed sufficiently by the picture John has given here" (p. 546).
  - Revelation 22:1, "the river of the water of life" parallels the river of Eden (p. 553) as "the tree of life" does the same tree in Eden (p. 554). Revelation 22:3, the absence of "any curse" contrasts with the curse in Eden (p. 555). Revelation 22:16, "the 'you' seems to refer to the seven specific churches originally addressed, while 'the churches' is the larger group of Christians to whom the Spirit also speaks through this book" (p. 562).

Fanning is not afraid to challenge widely held interpretations of dispensationalists and premillennialists, although he certainly fits in both categories. He is also not afraid to say or imply that something is unclear, difficult, puzzling, or open to a variety of interpretations. Fanning's commentary on Revelation is highly recommend.

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