

**Fanning, Buist. *Revelation. ZECNT. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020. 575 pp. + 46 pp. (back matter).***

Buist Fanning's commentary on Revelation is the most significant futurist, premillennial commentary since Grant Osborne's commentary in the Baker Exegetical Commentary series and the most significant Revelation commentary from a dispensational perspective since Robert Thomas's two-volume set.

In the introduction Fanning discusses authorship, date, interpretive matters (genre, symbolism, use of the OT, etc.), text, style, and structure. Placing more weight on internal rather than external evidence, Fanning concludes that Revelation was written by "a prophet known to the churches of Asia Minor" rather than the Apostle John, though he is careful to emphasize that this conclusion does not detract in any way from the book's status as inspired Scripture (28). In his brief discussion of the book's date, Fanning does not take a hard position between a date in the late sixties or a date in the late nineties, though he leans toward the latter.

Fanning includes an up-to-date discussion of the state of textual criticism in Revelation, including the unique challenges that textual critics face with Revelation as well as a discussion of the unique style of Greek in Revelation. Fanning proposes that Revelation's Greek is idiosyncratic because Greek is John's second language, though he is quick to clarify that John remains a competent writer in this second language. Fanning grants that John's allusions to OT texts account for some of his Semitic style—a point made by G. K. Beale. However, Fanning thinks that Beale presses this observation beyond the evidence when he claims that John was trying to evoke the feel of the OT Scriptures throughout. Fanning also thinks that some of John's style can be accounted for by changes occurring in Hellenistic Greek.

The most helpful parts of the introduction are the discussion of literal and symbolic language and the discussion of typology and OT allusions. Fanning recognizes the problem of insisting on "literal" interpretations that are insensitive to intentional metaphor and symbolism while also critiquing those interpreters who think that the symbolism in Revelation itself indicates that the judgments in view are spiritual rather than physical. In his discussion of typology Fanning observes that Beale and McDonough (representative of many recent interpreters) create a false dichotomy when they propose that the OT promises and predictions are either understood "in a pedantically 'literal' fashion" or in light of the progressive revelation of the NT (44, citing CNTUOT, 1088). Fanning argues that it is possible to read OT texts in way that takes into account both their original setting and progressive revelation.

Fanning's discussion of typology includes five helpful guiding principles (47–48):

- (1) Typology is not just a matter of Old Testament to New Testament relationships. . . .
- (2) Typology is not limited to features of Christology and soteriology, although these are common topics. . . .
- (3) Typology does not necessitate a metaphysical shift from physical, geographic, or historic entities in the Old Testament type to spiritual and eternal realities in the New Testament antitype. Sometimes the typological escalation works this way, but it is not necessary for it to do so. . . .
- (4) Typology does not

necessitate the abrogation of the type in favor of the antitype. . . . (5) The future counterpart or antitype may not be limited to a single, climactic exemplar, although this is often the case. It is also possible for an Old Testament pattern to find more than one future replication on the way to its ultimate fulfillment.

Finally, the introduction deals with the structure of Revelation. Fanning follows Merrill Tenney, Richard Bauckham, and others in identifying a prologue (1:1–8) and epilogue (22:10–11) that bookend four major sections (1:9–3:22; 4:1–16:21; 17:1–19:10; 19:11–21:8; 21:9–22:9), marked by the repetition of key phrases. Within chapters 6–16, Fanning argues for a chronological sequence (as opposed to recapitulation) interspersed with “interludes or digressions,” which “pause the chronological progression” (62). Fanning recognizes that the third major section (17:1–19:10) overlaps in time with some of the events described in the second major section (4:1–16:21).

The commentary proper unfolds according to the format of the Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament series. The commentary contains twenty-eight chapters, each of which include the following sections: Literary Context, Main Idea, Translation, Structure, Exegetical Outline, Explanation of the Text, Theology in Application.

“Literary Context” is typically a paragraph that describes how the verses under consideration fit into the larger structure of Revelation and what they contribute to the book’s development. The “Main Idea” summarizes the verses under consideration in a single sentence. The “Translation” provides Fanning’s own translation laid out as a clause display so that the logical flow of the passage is evident. The “Structure” describes the flow of the passage under consideration in paragraph form. The “Exegetical Outline” presents the structure of the passage in outline format.

The “Explanation of the Text” section is the heart of the commentary. Fanning’s translation of a verse or two is followed by the verse or verses in Greek. Pastors will appreciate that Greek terms appear in Greek characters throughout (not in transliteration), and those without the knowledge of Greek will appreciate that Greek words are accompanied by English translation, making the commentary accessible to all serious students of Scripture.

The heart of the “Explanation” section consists of Fanning’s summary of the meaning of the text under consideration. On key points of dispute, he will summarize and evaluate alternate interpretations. In the footnotes Fanning deals with text-critical issues and matters of Greek grammar. Fanning is a recognized expert in Greek grammar, and his numerous grammatical footnotes have great value for the student of Greek while not obscuring the commentator for other readers. Fanning’s comments in the “Explanation” section are concise but full of good sense. Some futurist commentators develop idiosyncratic interpretations by interpreting symbolic language “literally” contrary to authorial intent. Idealist commentators similarly write themselves into oddities by wrongly insisting that *all* the language in Revelation is symbolic. Fanning avoids both these errors.

A sample of Fanning’s interpretive choices will give a sense of his approach to the book. Fanning understands the angels of the seven churches as “supernatural messengers or instruments of God, who serve as guardians or representatives of the congregation” (107). He persuasively argues that Revelation 3:10 supports a Rapture that precedes the Day of the Lord judgments described in the book. He understands the white horse and rider to symbolize a “destructive conquest” that begins the

judgments of the tribulation period; he does not identify the rider with an individual since the riders of the following three horses do not represent specific individuals (240). He understands the 144,000 in chapter 7 to refer to ethnic Israelites who are distinct from the numberless multitude from every nation mentioned later in the chapter. He understands the seal, trumpet, and bowl judgments to unleash physical calamities upon the earth. Even the demons released in the later trumpets bring about physical torment. Fanning understands the temple in Revelation 11 to refer to a physical temple structure in Jerusalem, and he understands the two witnesses to be two latter-day prophets whose work is described in terms of the ministries of Moses and Elijah. He does not understand the prophets to *be* Moses and Elijah or Enoch and Elijah. He interprets the woman clothed with the sun to be ethnic Israel. He links the number 666 to Nero, whom he takes to be a type of the eschatological Antichrist. He understands Babylon in Revelation to be a type of evil opposition that was manifested in Rome in John's day and that will also have a last-days manifestation. Fanning interprets Revelation 20 in a premillennial fashion, and he understands the Millennium in continuity with the new creation described in chapters 21 and 22.

Following the "Explanation of the Text" is the section "Theology in Application." In this section Fanning develops two theological ideas from the preceding exegetical material and applies them to Christians today. This section addresses in practice the objection that futurist interpretations of Revelation have no applicatory value to Christians today.

The lucid brevity of this commentary will make it a helpful resource for pastors who are preaching through or from the book of Revelation. It is also a commentary that idealist and preterist commentators should reckon with. Too often those opposed to futurist readings of Revelation or pretribulational, premillennial eschatology use Hal Lindsey or Tim LaHaye as their foils rather than interacting with pretribulational, premillennial, futurist scholars. This should not be. The greatest fault with this volume (leaving aside the inevitable interpretive disagreement) is that Fanning is sometimes too brief.

### **Brian Collins**

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