

The Book of Revelation. By Robert H. Mounce. Grand Rapids, Michigan:

William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977. 426 pp. \$10.95.

Measuring the worth of a book involves many criteria: its purpose, the research, style of writing, faithfulness of the meaning of God's Word, etc. Part of the New International Commentary on the New Testament, this work is by many standards an important contribution to the literature on the last book of the Bible. It is certainly comprehensive; the style is lucid, and the research thorough (almost to a fault when one sometimes reads more comments by others on the meaning of a passage than by the author). But the extent to which the author has made a helpful contribution to interpreting the text will, not unexpectedly, be a matter of disagreement.

The jacket blurb announces that the author takes a position between literalism (which the blurb pontificates as "indefensible") and "highly imaginative subjectivism." Thus the interpretive stance of the book is "semi-literal" (or "semi-subjective," as you wish), a combination of the historical and futuristic approach, and (by the author's own statement) similar to the viewpoint expressed in the commentaries on Revelation by Bruce, Ladd, and Morris. The work is also posttribulational and mildly premillennial.

How can an interpreter be mildly premillennial? By acknowledging that the 1000 years of chapter 20 are actual 1000 years, but then by blunting the import of that by declaring that the millennium "is not, for John, the messianic age foretold by the prophets of the OT" (p. 359).

No distinction is made between the church and Israel. This coupled

with the author's posttribulationism results in the 144,000 being a symbolic number representing the generation of faithful believers who enter the tribulation period (p. 168). Yet, he declares, this will be a spiritual protection of the church, not a physical one on the basis of his interpretation of the promise in 3:10 (p. 119; cf. p. 216). Oddly, the martyrs of chapter 6 are not the church in the future but victims of Nero's persecution who were about to be joined by those who were to be killed by Domitian (p. 160).

The symbolism of numbers receives a surprising amount of attention. The number 144,000 is twelve "both squared and multiplied by a thousand-- a twofold way of emphasizing completeness" (p. 169). The 1600 furlongs of chapter 16 squares the number of the earth, four, and multiplies it by the square of the number of completeness, ten (p. 283).

The events of Armageddon are to be taken seriously, but not literally (p. 349). The judgment of the Great White Throne is the general judgment of all the world.

While readers of this work will learn what many commentators have said about the Revelation, they will fail to receive a consistent and harmonious interpretation of the book, an inevitable result of the author's defective hermeneutics.

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