

Fr. Giblin is well known among NT scholars for his expertise in the wide area of apocalyptic; in this book he offers a highly condensed but comprehensive interpretation of the NT book of *Revelation*; he modestly disclaims certainty. 'The interpreter's task is to read the text aright and, at the same time, to enable his audience to assimilate and savor the text which John has laid out before us.' As interpreter he succeeds admirably, even though 'any interpretation remains always asymptotic' (i.e. like a line which continually approaches a curve but does not meet it). And it is to interpretation of the text that he devotes himself, offering only 'minimal treatment of author, date, and place of composition.' In the Introduction he chooses (no doubt correctly) the date of c. A.D. 95, giving the usual and probably correct explanation of the allusion to Roman Emperors in 17: 9–11. As an example of Giblin's comparative indifference to the question of the exact identity of the author, a statement distinguishing John of Patmos from John the Evangelist is decisive in tone, but appears only in a footnote (p. 182 n. 128).

On the relation of world-history to apocalyptic: 'The world-reign of God, which was the quintessence of apocalyptic concern, could in John's day find no better counter-image than caricature of Rome.' However, '...John's apocalyptic prophecy should not be taken as a detailed allegory of historical occurrences. The Roman Empire stands in John's view of the world as a type of any self-indulgent, self-glorifying power that is opposed to God and his people, and therefore faces disaster.'

Giblin emphasises the cardinal importance of the Holy War (understood as a war of liberation) seeing it as the key to the substance of the book, especially of 4–22, deriving from the promise of Exod. 19: 3–6, 'the only O.T. text which John employs more than once.' The idea of the theme may be pervasive but it is perhaps less prominent than Giblin represents it. For example, in expounding the material about the Messiah in 19: 11–21 he does not mention that the term is not used here, although as he says, the Messiah does appear here as a warrior. The passage certainly emphasises an unexpected element in early Christian expectation, in which the punitive destination of the enemies of God is vividly envisioned. Here the Word of God executes God's wrath with great severity (cf. Isa. 11: 4). Perhaps this is due to the fact that apocalyptic is expressed in what Giblin calls 'relatively "pre-conceptual" images'. Such a view perhaps mitigates the violent effect of *Revelation's* vivid depiction of the destruction of the wicked. Indeed, to envisage such destruction is not necessarily a function of revenge, for it is God who is implored to act; it may be rather a natural reaction of the servant of God in any age or culture to observing the wicked's unpunished enjoyment of prosperity. It is a sense of the rightness of things not revenge which prompts Psalm 139 (in a modern translation) to ask, 'Wilt thou not slay the wicked, O God?' For, 'they affront you by their evil.'

Giblin emphasises that 'No apocalyptic writing ... can fail to be eschatological in some real sense.' Eschatology is 'the understanding of the final and definitive stage of religious experience and ... of religious history.' Further on the matter of literary forms Giblin makes the interesting and fruitful observation that the 'genre' of gospel in the NT is not limited to the four story-form gospels, although there is only one Gospel. John's contribution to the genre of "apocalypse" is innovatively to include in its very fabric another "genre", the Gospel of Jesus Christ.' (The reader may reflect that the story-gospels for their part include both 'little apocalypses' and wisdom sayings cast in apocalyptic form.)

It is remarkable that in so condensed a book so many insights occur. They are so numerous that for any further comment we must be content to choose the observation that 'Apocalyptic writing makes much of *series of visions*.' This is indeed the case, and of these visions there is a merging, a dissolution and re-presenting of pictures: cinematic technique is as it were anticipated. As Giblin says, 'John's clarifications are progressive.' The same might be said of his own work. In devoting himself to making *Revelation* intelligible he has unobtrusively given to the reader real insight also into the whole NT and its Gospel.

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TERESA OF AVILA by Rowan Williams. 'Outstanding Christian Thinkers' *Geoffrey Chapman* 1991 Pp. xiii + 177 £16.95 (hbk), £7.95 (pbk)

There have been rather a lot of books of late on St Teresa of Avila, but this one is rather different. It takes Teresa seriously as a thinker, and provides a justification for the title bestowed on her in 1970 of 'Doctor of the Church'. Teresa herself would be surprised: she never thought of herself as much of a thinker. It is not, of course, as any kind of academic theologian that Professor Rowan Williams presents her: rather he draws attention to her attempts to understand, both for her own sake and for others', what it means to be drawn to God in prayer and to surrender to that drawing. In this Williams detects a fearless questioning and a talent for making a great deal of a very little formal theology, that reminds one of Julian of Norwich, and indeed of a quality of intelligence not infrequently found behind convent walls.

This is not a life: after the briefest of biographical chapters, we embark on a study of Teresa's theology. It is a contextual study: the first chapter paints Teresa's social world and places her 'in' it, as a 'displaced person', a woman, the granddaughter of a *converso*, with a fragile—and marginal—place in society. Williams brings out the importance of racial purity and honour in that society, and sees Teresa's emphasis on friendship with God as the basis of her understanding of the Christian life, and therefore the religious life, as undermining the concept of honour. The Carmelite reform, initiated by Teresa, is thus seen as a risky venture, calling in question the cherished principles of 16th-century

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