

Neall, Beatrice S. *The Concept of Character in the Apocalypse with Implications for Character Education*. Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, Inc., 1983. xii + 224 pp. \$21.50/\$10.75.

Pioneering work is seldom, if ever, easy—a fact that is true in biblical studies as well as in other fields. The volume here under review represents pioneering work in several ways: (1) It provides a comprehensive thematic overview and analysis of significant material from a Bible book that has largely been neglected from the standpoint of *any* thoroughgoing thematic studies; (2) it focuses attention on the Apocalypse's rich material pertaining to "character" and "character development"; and (3) it deals with the biblical data within the framework of a pedagogical perspective that endeavors to relate the material to crucial experiential concerns. Thus, amidst the numerous commentaries that keep coming forth on the book of Revelation, Neall's publication is truly a unique type of work.

Actually, this study is the published form of Neall's doctoral dissertation presented in 1981 at Andrews University in the field of Education; it deals specifically with "Religious Education." As her own literature review (chap. 2) reveals, she entered not only an unexplored field, but also undertook a type of study for which no adequate models exist. For this very endeavor, then, we are indebted to her.

At the outset, it also must be stated that Neall has performed her task exceptionally well, in view of the hazards inherent in this sort of study—by no means the least of which is the need for sufficient expertise and skills in both of the disciplines involved. Neall's earlier training in religious studies and her considerable experience as a religion teacher, coupled with her doctoral work in the field of Religious Education, have made her an ideal person to undertake this specific research; and the results reported in her book are generally competent and helpful. Persons interested in biblical studies, as well as religious educators (whether in a church or in a school setting), may derive from this volume numerous helpful and practical insights.

Having said the foregoing (and intending to say it with *considerable emphasis*), I must add that Neall's study is nonetheless flawed in some ways that deserve mention (along with notice, of course, of particularly strong points) in any review that attempts to be fair, balanced, and of genuine value to the reader. To some such negatives I shall return later in this review.

In harmony with the style of educational dissertations, Neall's first three chapters treat (1) introductory matters (purpose of the study, presuppositions, rationale, delimitations, and similar items); (2) review of literature; and (3) description of the methodology used. These chapters are very short (all three are contained within pp. 1-25), and are followed by three

further (and longer) chapters that provide the details and conclusions of the study.

Chap. 4, "Background to Character Theory" (pp. 26-47) furnishes the conceptualization and a pedagogically oriented setting for the basic data reported in the exceptionally long chap. 5, "The Concept of Character in the Apocalypse" (pp. 48-183). The extended discussion in chap. 5 provides the real "heart" of the study, and is followed by a neatly conceived and competently executed synthesis in the final chapter, "Conclusions with Implications for Character Education" (pp. 184-207). A "Selected Bibliography" (pp. 208-223) and brief note about the author (p. 224) conclude the volume.

In providing the backdrop for her study, Neall states in chap. 4 that "Western systems of thought, whether of philosophy, theology, psychology, or education, issue largely from two main streams, the Graeco-Roman and the Hebraeo-Christian. From the former comes a humanistic understanding of man and character; from the latter a religious understanding. Most theories of character development center in one or the other systems of thought" (p. 26). She goes on to point out the "two streams have markedly different epistemologies, anthropologies, and ethical systems" (*ibid.*), and devotes this chapter to an analysis of these aspects in Platonic and Aristotelian thought, on the one hand, and as represented in the biblical data of OT and NT, on the other hand.

The information which Neall presents in this chapter is appropriate and helpful, but her treatment does suffer some limitations (perhaps due, in part, to space constraints). In the discussion of Plato and Aristotle, for instance, one senses a degree of inadequacy in the primary-source references and also in the too-exclusive use of relatively few secondaries—secondary sources, moreover, that are not standard analyses of those ancient Greek philosophers (even though they may be authorities on the history of education). Moreover, one can wonder why the Stoics are not included, even in passing mention—especially in view of the closeness in appearance (though not in integral nature) of Stoicism to early Christianity with respect to certain ethical concerns and behavior (we may think, for instance, of comparisons between the Stoic philosopher/statesman Seneca and the Christian apostle Paul, who were contemporaries). Finally, why is there no discussion of the *Roman part* of the "Graeco-Roman" stream to which Neall has called attention?

Chap. 5 treats the following major topics: "The Apocalyptic View of Man" (origin, nature, and destiny of man); "The Norm of Character" (the character of God, and Jesus and the commandments as norms of character); "Evil Character in the Apocalypse" (reference is made to evil in the world and also evil character in the church, such as spiritual declension); "Righteous Character: Its Distinctive Marks" (here note is taken of virtues

or qualities, such as "patient endurance" and "love," and of the descriptive adjectives "faithful," "holy," and "righteous"); "Righteous Character as Expressed in the Life" ("royal priesthood," "mission," "witness," "teaching," and a number of other matters, including some of a devotional nature, are here given due attention); "The Development of Righteous Character" ("motivation" and "means" are among the various significant considerations dealt with); "The Eschatological Test of Character" (here considered are the "issues" in the test, such as rival claims to worship; the "goal," whether perfection or loyalty; and "character requisites"); and "Judgment: The Evaluation of Character" ("the principals" in the judgment, the "criterion of judgment," "judgment on the churches," "judgment of the wicked," etc., are treated).

The foregoing overview of the contents of chap. 5 indicates the broad scope of the coverage. However, this very fact that the coverage is so broad leaves the treatment more superficial than what would be expected in a biblical-studies doctoral dissertation. The redeeming factor for Neall's dissertation is that it was presented as an *education* dissertation, not a biblical-studies or theological one. This is a consideration that the reader would do well to bear in mind. Indeed, the surprising thing is that Neall has been able to treat such a mass of biblical material as carefully as she has done, and in so cohesive and well-organized a fashion.

At this juncture, it may be well to call attention to several weaknesses in the presentation: (1) In chap. 5, as well as in chap. 4, the author's treatment is of rather sweeping nature, as already suggested above; it therefore lacks the in-depth coverage that a study of narrower scope could have achieved. (2) Perhaps deriving from this weakness is the fact that in commenting on some passages in Revelation where interpretations are extremely controversial, Neall fails to dialogue with the sources and does not always base her judgments on the best secondaries or, more appropriately, on her own in-depth analysis of the primary materials. (3) The footnote citations in both chaps. 4 and 5 do not indicate as thorough an acquaintance with the secondary literature as might be desirable. (4) Even though in chap. 5 Neall uses a vast number of biblical references (for this study, certainly the proper and crucial primary source material), she fails too frequently to utilize the Bible texts as well as she could in order to substantiate her points.

The first and third of these shortcomings have been touched upon earlier and need no further comment here. But a word is in order concerning the second and fourth weaknesses. As for Neall's use of secondary sources, one matter wherein there exists considerable diversity of opinion is the identity of the "two witnesses" of Rev 11, but here Neall has opted for one viewpoint on p. 96 ("saints"; see no. 3 in the list toward the bottom of the page, and the topic statement preceding the list), and apparently the

same or a similar one on p. 99 ("Christian church" as a "prophetic community"), while indicating in n. 3 on p. 99 that it is "more likely" that the "two witnesses" apply to the "two-fold 'Word of God and testimony of Jesus,'" equated with OT and NT witness (her footnote reference is to my article in *AUSS* 19 [1981]: 131-134). But nowhere in this treatment has she given the reader any awareness that she is cognizant of the truly *vast amount* of discussion on the subject. (It should be stated, however, that *most of the time* she does much better than this in recognizing varying viewpoints where they exist.)

A somewhat more "mixed" situation appears in her treatment of the term "faith of Jesus" on pp. 81-82. Here she notes the alternative interpretations offered in some commentaries—either "faith in Christ" or "doctrine about Christ." But these do not really exhaust the range and nuances of the interpretational suggestions made in the literature. She herself adds a third possible meaning, which, she declares "no commentary suggests" (an assessment that is perhaps a bit too sweeping): namely, "the faith which Jesus exercised" (p. 82). She goes on to mention the possibility of "double entendre" (correctly so, in my judgment), but unfortunately fails to give her own third alternative the in-depth treatment it deserves. *It*, in fact, is the *basic one* in Revelation, from which others derive their ultimate meaning; and it is also the one which would have provided the most substantial undergirding for the view of character and character education that she herself espouses. One would be well reminded, in this connection, of the thematic linkage to the Gospel of John (cf. the "vine-and-branches" pericope in John 15:1-8, and also the significance of 15:20, 17:18-21, and similar texts).

As for the incongruence at times in Neall's use of Bible texts, we may note, for instance, the concluding paragraph on p. 56, where she speaks of "divine love" as being "extended to the hostile world"—a group then described through several terminologies, including (as the first descriptive term) "those who dwell on the earth" in Rev 6:10, 11:10, 13:8, 13:14, and 17:8; but she fails to realize that this is *not* the same group of "those who dwell upon the earth" to whom "the gospel is proclaimed" in 14:6 (here she has inadvertently omitted the reference, but has quoted directly from that text). The former "earth-dwellers" are κατοικοῦντες ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, the kind that are "settled" or "imbedded"; the latter are καθήμενοι ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, those "seated" or "sitting" (and thus, movable). Again, in her last sentence on p. 56, she uses Rev 9:20 and 16:9 to support her declaration, "Even God's judgments on the wicked world have a redemptive effect"; but *both* of these texts (the only two she uses in this connection) refer to *non*-repentance, and the second one is actually in conjunction with judgments in the eschatological consummation.

Notwithstanding difficulties of the foregoing type, Neall's book is most

valuable indeed, with chap. 5, in particular, being rich in helpful insights. The vast majority of her illustrations and elucidations are both accurate and appropriate. Also, especially noteworthy are the many instances where she provides, in exceptionally clear and well-organized fashion, lists of explications, conclusions, and the like—e.g., the three correspondences between Jesus' and the saints' faithfulness (p. 84), six evidences that the "bride-city" symbolism of Revelation represents the Christian church (pp. 138-139), seven character requisites for passing the "great eschatological test" (pp. 166-167), and many, many other useful and insightful listings.

With regard to the organization of material in this volume, it should be noted that Neall's two main "thesis" or "content-development" chapters—chaps. 4 and 5—contain at the end of each main section a "summary" (in chap. 4, three such summaries; in chap. 5, seven summaries of this kind, plus a concluding statement of "Summary and Conclusions"). Generally speaking, these summaries are not only of value to the reader from an organizational standpoint, but are succinct, clear, and incisive—and therefore are most helpful indeed in putting into focus the main points from the author's preceding discussion.

This brings us to a word about chap. 6, the final chapter, which, to my mind, is superb. Here Neall not only effectively summarizes the material she has presented earlier, but also places her whole study in the context of an evaluation relating to the two contrasting types of philosophical underpinning that she has brought to attention in chap. 4. Her basic analysis is amplified by portraying, in a sort of case-study form, her concept of the potential outworkings of the two philosophies in real life. For this purpose, she analyzes step-by-step the type of "character development" that might be anticipated for an individual under each philosophy and its pedagogy; and in doing so, she provides much food for thought and an excellent apologetic for the Christian approach to education and character development. In closing chap. 6, she also suggests some further fruitful areas for study that her own research has opened up.

In summing up Neall's *The Concept of Character in the Apocalypse*, I would say that despite certain hazards to which the book's broad coverage gives rise, the volume is outstanding—a pioneer work that is penetrating and competent. It is a worthwhile and helpful production for consideration by those who are interested in the book of Revelation, as well as being a major contribution for any and all who are interested in the essentials of character education. In the field of educational theory, I would venture to say that this book will likely become a standard work in the area of its subspecialty.