



A Congregational Charge

Ordained Servant

December 2021

# Ordained Servant Online

## A Journal for Church Officers

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### CURRENT ISSUE: CONGREGATIONAL CHARGE

December 2021

#### From the Editor

Having published Richard Gaffin's charge to a pastor in October, it seemed a nice balance to publish John Mallin's charge to a congregation in this issue. Each of these authors has finely tuned his sermon by preaching it many times to many pastors and congregations. These also serve as a good model for young pastors asked to give such charges.

I have taken the liberty to add some important news. The Tolle Lege Institute in Warsaw, Poland has produced a new Polish translation of *The Westminster Confession of Faith*. Please pray for the work of Dr. Dariusz Bryćko and his wife Brooke as they plant a church in connection with the Evangelical Reformed Church of Lithuania.

A reminder of the two resources on the Book of Revelation: Danny Olinger in *The Writings of Meredith G. Kline on the Book of Revelation: Chapter 6 – "The Apocalypse of Jesus Christ"* (1992); and Meredith G. Kline, *A Study in the Structure of the Revelation of John*, Part 4 provide an excellent place for preachers to begin preparing to preach this rich and important final book of the Bible. I have added the first three parts of Kline's *A Study in the Structure of the Revelation of John* so that readers have the entire thesis.

I continue to be impressed with Alan Strange's commentary on our Form of Government. It is destined to be of enormous help to ministers, sessions, candidates, and presbytery committees on candidates and credentials.

Robert Letham provides a review article, "Swain and Poythress on the Trinity," with a brief recommendation of Scott Swain's *The Trinity: An Introduction* and an extensive review of the comprehensive work of Vern Poythress, *The Mystery of the Trinity: A Trinitarian Approach to the Attributes of God*. This article is particularly germane to the present discussion of this long neglected and now often misunderstood doctrine. Letham emphasizes the importance of maintaining and defending the carefully crafted formulations of the ancient church. The Trinity is the foundation of worship and life.

Bryan Estelle, the author of *Echoes of Exodus*, reviews L. Michael Morales's *Exodus Old and New: A Biblical Theology of Redemption*. This book represents an important contribution to biblical theology within the Reformed tradition.

Finally, T. David Gordon reviews an important tour de force by Carl Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution*. This book represents a profound exploration of the roots of the sexual revolution that we are in the latter stages of. Trueman demonstrates the importance of biblical anthropology as the lens through which to assess the Enlightenment and Romantic movements that have attempted to reimagine, and in some cases reconstruct, the human.

Appropriately, John Donne's "Annunciation" celebrates with Mary the one true man's incarnation as "Immensity cloistered in thy dear womb." Don't miss this poetic nugget from a premier Metaphysical poet.

Blessings in the Lamb,  
Gregory Edward Reynolds

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[http://opc.org/OS/pdf/Subject\\_Index\\_Vol\\_1-29.pdf](http://opc.org/OS/pdf/Subject_Index_Vol_1-29.pdf)

- “Beza on the Trinity” (David C. Noe) 28 (2019): 65–76.
- “Developing a Trinitarian Mind.” (Robert Letham) 17 (2008): 91–93.

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*Ordained Servant* exists to help encourage, inform, and equip church officers for faithful, effective, and God-glorifying ministry in the visible church of the Lord Jesus Christ. Its primary audience is ministers, elders, and deacons of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, as well as interested officers from other Presbyterian and Reformed churches. Through high-quality editorials, articles, and book reviews, we will endeavor to stimulate clear thinking and the consistent practice of historic, confessional Presbyterianism.

# ServantChurch

## A Charge to the Congregation

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By John W. Mallin III

In twelve chapters the writer to the Hebrews displays to us the superior excellence of the person and work of Christ, and he calls us to live by faith in the perfect priest, as he brings us to worship with the church in heaven.<sup>1</sup> In chapter 13 he quickly sets before us particular practical commands for life in the church, the heavenly Jerusalem, to which he referred in chapter 12:22–24:

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

In 13:7 he directs us to “Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.” In verse 8 he roots that command in the unchanging character of Christ. He cautions against doctrines which would call us to rest in sacrifices which do not last, moving on to verse 14, where he refers again to the heavenly Jerusalem: “For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come.” So, he exhorts us to continually offer the sacrifices of praise to God and mercy toward men, which we bring, depending on the perfect sacrifice of Christ. He finishes off this section by referring again to “your leaders” in verse 17.

Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ, you have made promises tonight. Those promises make specific applications of Hebrews 13:17:

Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

The question I would like you to consider is: Now that you have installed a pastor, *what must you do?* What will it look like for you to

Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

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<sup>1</sup> This article is based on a charge addressed to a congregation upon the installation of a pastor, which charge was based on Hebrews 13:17 and the four questions addressed to the congregation in Form of Government 23.9. The name of the pastor used here is fictitious.

Let me make a few observations. First, notice what you *have* done. You have received your pastor. In response to the question, “Do you, the people of this congregation, continue to profess your readiness to receive Kurt Waterson, whom you have called to be your minister?” you have said, “Yes.” Notice that you have received him, not agreed to *examine* him. There is no test left for him to take in order to be accepted by you. There is no period of probation. You have received him, and he has begun his work.

In Philippians 2:29 Paul calls on the church at Philippi to “receive him [Epaphroditus] in the Lord with all joy . . .” That is the way you are to receive your pastor, not just on this occasion, but in the coming weeks, months, and years. The writer to the Hebrews tells us, in the middle of verse 17, to let him do his work. Rejoice in what he does on your behalf. Do not complain about what you would like him to do that he is not doing.

You and your pastor will need to grow together. He may seem flawless now, but he is not. Whether or not you have seen them, he has faults: they will stand out in time. You can be sure of that.

Epaphroditus had been near death. He was returning to Philippi, no doubt more experienced, but certainly with apparent weaknesses and limitations. So, Paul tells the Philippians to receive him in the Lord with great joy.

So, you must continue to receive your pastor with great joy, as his flaws and limitations become apparent. Continue to receive him with joy because, as you profess in your response to the question, you recognize him and receive him as your minister. He is a brother with frailties similar to your own, but he is sent to be your minister, your servant, your pastor. Jesus says in John 13:20: “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever receives the one I send receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me.” Your new pastor is a brother, a servant of God, sent by Christ to serve you. The writer to the Hebrews expresses this in verse 17 by describing “your leaders” as “keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account.” He has been sent by Christ, who is your Master. Kurt is not *your* master. He is your brother. But he is not your employee, either. You are not *his* master. Christ sent him, and Christ is his master, to whom Kurt must give an account.

The focus in the verse and in the question is not on the man. It is on the task, the ministry he has been given. You have called him to be your minister, your pastor, and you receive him as one who has been given the task to lead you, to rule over you, to govern, “keeping watch over your souls,” to be on guard for your lives, to stay awake and be on the lookout for dangers to your safety. Of course, he does not do that alone. He is joined by your elders. But he has been given the task of an under-shepherd of the flock where you are kept by the Lord Jesus Christ, that great Shepherd of the sheep.

So, continue to receive Kurt with great joy as your minister, your frail brother who has been called by your common master to serve you as governor and guardian. But now, notice what you have promised to do. You have answered three more questions, by which you promised to do specific things in your relationship to Kurt.

In the first of those three questions you really promised to use the benefits of his ministry. Listen again to the question: “Do you promise to receive the word of truth from his mouth with meekness and love, and to submit to him in the due exercise of discipline?” The first part of that question asks you “to receive the word of truth.” It is by the word of truth that those who rule—and particularly those who are devoted to the

ministry of the Word—govern and guard your lives in the service of the great Shepherd of the sheep.

So, you receive the Word from your pastor's mouth, but you do so because it is not simply his word but the Word of the Lord who sent Kurt to you. So, you receive that word with meekness and love, you "obey" and "submit," as the writer to the Hebrews puts it. You will be like the Thessalonians to whom Paul wrote: "And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers" (1 Thess. 2:13). You will be obedient to the command of James 1:21–22: "Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and *receive* with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves."

Notice that receiving the word can save you. But receiving the word means doing it, not just hearing it. Do not deceive yourselves. Receive from Kurt's mouth the word of truth with love for the Lord, who is the Word of God incarnate, who is the truth. That is the first aspect of the question's call to use the benefits of Kurt's ministry.

The second aspect of this question's call to use the benefits of Kurt's ministry is in the words, "Do you promise to . . . submit to him in the due exercise of discipline?" This appears in Hebrews 13:17 in the words "obey" and "submit." "Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account."

Those are dirty words in our culture, which is so sensitive to protecting every individual's right to be his or her own god. But they are also misunderstood words. These words may conjure up in your mind an image of groveling at the feet of a mean master. But that is not what they mean. The word translated "obey" here means to "be persuaded by those who lead you." You are commanded to "be persuaded." That does not mean you should give up intellectual exercise. It means you should listen to their discernment and judgment. Heed their wisdom, which is not really theirs in the first place. Let your conscience and thinking be instructed by your pastor's leadership, so that you will be persuaded to follow. The word translated "submit" means to "defer" to your brother, not to grovel at his feet.

You will do that as you heed the words of the writer to the Hebrews in verse 7 of this chapter, where he calls you to "Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of *their* way of life, and imitate *their* faith" (emphasis added). Again, Paul gives the Thessalonians a picture of what this will look like: "We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work" (1 Thess. 5:12–13a). Paul writes in I Corinthians 16:16: ". . . be subject [that is, submit] to such as these [who have devoted themselves to the service of the saints] and to every fellow worker and laborer." And in Ephesians 5:21 he writes that we should be: "submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ." The opposite of submitting, in the biblical sense, is not being respected and treated with dignity. It is disorderly rebellion and mob rule. And in this case, it means rebellion against King Jesus in the person of his appointed governors and messengers.

The call to submit to your pastor in the due exercise of discipline simply means following godly leadership, even when you think it is mistaken, and willingly giving heed

to instruction and correction when it is given within the bounds of biblical authority. Your conscience cannot be bound beyond the boundaries of God's Word, and you cannot be compelled to do what God forbids or faith does not allow. Having said that, submission to Kurt in the due exercise of discipline simply means heeding biblical instruction as it applies to your life, which is your reasonable use of the benefits of Kurt's ministry of the Word. So, "receive the word of truth from your pastor's mouth with meekness and love, and submit to him in the due exercise of discipline."

The next two promises follow almost inevitably from the first. The second question is a call to join in the work of your pastor's ministry: "Do you promise to encourage him in his arduous labor and to assist his endeavors for your instruction and spiritual edification?"

Kurt is not your hired gun. His work is really the work of the church. He is devoted to that work in a more continual way than the rest of you, always on the front lines. You join in the work, first, by encouraging Kurt. The temptation to quit, just give up on the work, is real and powerful at times. It is work that sometimes seems impossible and hopeless—a battle that cannot be won, with no end in sight. Living by faith is not easier because you are a pastor, a seminary graduate, constantly working in the Word. In fact, it may be harder because of all those. At least, sometimes it *seems* harder. Ministers of the Word need to be encouraged.

"Do you promise to encourage him in his arduous labor . . .?" Paul commands the Colossians in Colossians 4:17 of his letter to them to encourage Archippus: "say to Archippus: 'See that you fulfill the ministry that you have received in the Lord.'" Archippus must have been in danger of quitting out of discouragement or weariness. The aim in your obedience and submission, according to the second half of Hebrews 13:17, is that the pastor's work will be with joy and not with groaning . . ." Literally, "that they may do this [work] with joy and not with groans of grief."

Kurt will encounter grief in his work, and he will groan with those who groan. But that work should be a joy to him as well, even in grief. His work should be a joy, rather than grief that he has to minister the mercy of God to people who will have none of it. Kurt should not be like the prophet Jeremiah, whose task was to warn the people of God, although he knew they would ignore him.

So, encourage Kurt in his labors, not just to make him feel good, but to remind him that the One he serves accomplishes his purposes and makes his strength perfect in weak, flawed servants—sinners like Kurt—and like you and me.

The second aspect of this second question as you join in the work by assisting Kurt is: to "assist his endeavors for your instruction and spiritual edification?"

It is, after all, your work. Paul says, in Ephesians 4:11–12, 16:

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ . . . from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

You are the parts, the joints, the workers that are growing and being built, prepared, equipped for work. It is your work, because his endeavors are for your instruction

and building in the faith by the Spirit. That kind of growth will be advantageous to you.

So, assist Kurt's endeavors by laboring with him, studying what he teaches, following where he leads, without complaining or making his work grievous. As the writer to the Hebrews puts it, if his work is not joyous, but grievous, it will be "of no advantage to you," literally, "not worth the price." The value of his work is enhanced by your encouragement and assistance as investments in the construction project whose chief architect and builder is Christ, and the price of which is Christ's blood.

The third and last question is a call to support his ministry, to run interference for him: "And do you promise to continue to him, while he is your pastor, that worldly maintenance which you have promised, and whatever else you may see needful for the honor of religion and his comfort among you?" Paul writes in 1 Timothy 5:17-18: "Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, 'You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,' and 'The Laborer deserves his wages.'" It will not be profitable for you to make it *unprofitable* for him.

Free him from the distraction of wondering whether his family will enjoy the fruit of his labor when they sit at table and get dressed and take shelter. Wages are not a weapon you can use to push your agenda or move him. Enable Kurt to focus his energy on faithful ministry, caring for you while you care for him. The price you pay will be less than the value of his governing and guarding work, because his work is made worthy by the government and guard-work of Christ, who rules and defends you, who preserves you perfectly, and who uses his appointed servants to do so. So, provide for Kurt, "while he is your pastor, that worldly maintenance which you have promised, and whatever else you may see needful for the *honor* of religion and his *comfort* among you."

Finally, what will you do when you fail in these duties of yours, which you have promised today to keep? You will fail, just as he will fail in *his* duties, because you are all sinners. As always, go to Jesus, seeking forgiveness and cleansing by his sacrifice, and give praise to him, giving thanks to his name, who makes us complete in every good work to do his will, working in us what is well pleasing in his sight. Go to Jesus as you repent, and go to Kurt to do good and share in the Lord's work.

Also, seek help from others in that repentance, if necessary. But at all costs, be sure to see your duties and your failures, as well as Kurt's duties and failures, in the light of the perfect work of Christ, the great Shepherd of the sheep, who rules you and watches out for your souls, having given an account for you, rejoicing to bear your grief and your sin. In other words, as always, trust Jesus in your relationship to Kurt. I charge you, be faithful to do that.

**John W. Mallin III** is a minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and serves as a Teacher in the Presbytery of Connecticut and Southern New York. He is a biblical counselor.



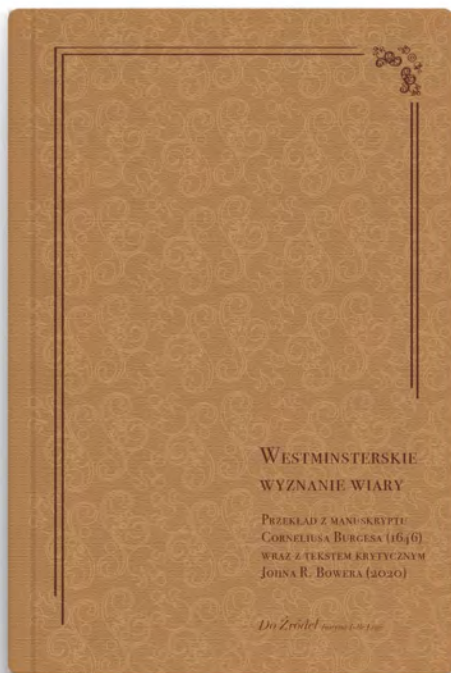
# ServantNews

## New Polish translation of *The Westminster Confession of Faith*

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Since Poland has fewer evangelical Christians than even Saudi Arabia, many Protestant primary sources from critical moments in church history – such as the Westminster Assembly—simply don't exist in the Polish language. But as of November, a reliable Polish translation of *The Westminster Confession of Faith* is now available. Tolle Lege Institute in Warsaw, Poland, has just published this groundbreaking volume to introduce Polish speakers all over the world to the theology of the Westminster divines.

The Warsaw-based mission of Tolle Lege (from a Latin phrase in Augustine's *Confessions* meaning "take and read") is to offer friendly access to Reformed/Presbyterian theology, reintroduce Poland to its own forgotten Reformers, and translate classic Reformed works to Polish. The Tolle Lege study center is located on a Christian college campus and houses 8,000+ print and electronic resources. TLI's president is Dr. Dariusz Bryćko (a native of Warsaw, former OPC member, and current mission-church planter of the Evangelical Reformed Church of Lithuania). The *WCF* text is translated by Mateusz Kupiec, a student of theology and director of development at Tolle Lege. It is based upon John F. Bower's critical text published by Reformation Heritage Books in 2020. Tolle Lege is raising funds to translate the Westminster Shorter Catechism next.



# Servant Truth

## *The Writings of Meredith G. Kline on the Book of Revelation: Chapter 6 – “The Apocalypse of Jesus Christ” (1992)*

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by Danny E. Olinger

Nearly a half century after his Westminster Seminary thesis on the structure in the book of Revelation,<sup>1</sup> Meredith Kline returned to an examination of the same topic in a June 1992 Sunday school class at the then First Presbyterian Church (OPC) in Ipswich, Massachusetts. In the 1946 thesis, Kline put forth the following structure for Revelation:

Rev. 1:1–8	Introduction
Rev. 1:9–3:22	The Church Imperfect in the World
Rev. 4:1–8:1	The Seven Seals
Rev. 8:2–11:19	The Seven Trumpets
Rev. 12:1–14:20	The Deeper Conflict
Rev. 15:1–16:21	The Seven Bowls
Rev. 17:1–21:8	The Final Judgments
Rev. 21:9–22:5	The Church Perfect in Glory
Rev. 22:6–21	Conclusion

In presenting the lesson to the class in 1992, he handed out the following outline:<sup>2</sup>

### THE APOCALYPSE OF JESUS CHRIST

Rev. 1:1–20	INTRODUCTION Prefatory parousia of the faithful Witness, the Son of Man, with covenant sanctions
Rev. 2:1–3:22	A. CHURCH IN THE WORLD 2:1–3:22 Vision: Letters sent to seven lampstand-churches
Rev. 4:1–8:1	B. JUDGMENTS OF SEVEN-SEALED BOOK ON WORLD 4:1–5:14 Prelude: The Lamb-lion on the throne of heaven 6:1–17 (8:1) Vision: Opening of the book and horsemen

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<sup>1</sup> Meredith G. Kline, “A Study in the Structure of the Revelation of John” (Master’s thesis, Westminster Theological Seminary, 1946), published in *Ordained Servant Online* (Dec. 2021), [www.opc.org/os.html](http://www.opc.org/os.html).

<sup>2</sup> Outline courtesy of Meredith M. Kline. The outline format—A, B, C, D, C, B, A—displays a chiastic pattern, which is explained further below.

	7:1-17	Interlude: Redeemed of the Lamb arrayed in white robes
Rev. 8:2–11:18		C. JUDGMENTS OF SEVEN TRUMPETS ON WORLD AND GREAT CITY
	8:2–6	Prelude: Heavenly commissioning of seven angels
	8:7–9:21 (11:14–18)	Vision: Sounding of the trumpets
	10:1–11:13	Interlude: Witness-church and apostate church
Rev. 11:19–14:20		D. WAR OF THE AGES
	11:19	Prelude: Ark of the covenant in heaven
	2:1–13:18 (14:14–20)	Vision: Dragon and beasts vs. the woman and Son of Man
	14:1–13	Interlude: Covenant sanctions
Rev. 15:1–19:10		C. JUDGMENTS OF SEVEN VIALS ON WORLD AND GREAT CITY
	15:1–8	Prelude: Heavenly commissioning of seven angels
	16:1–21	Vision: Pouring out of vials of wrath
	17:1–19:10	Interlude: Harlot-church and bride-church
Rev. 19:11–21:8		B. FINAL JUDGMENTS ON WORLD
	19:11–16	Prelude: The warrior-Word with the armies of heaven
	19:17–20:15	Vision: Horsemen and the opening of the books
	21:1–8	Interlude: Bride of the Lamb adorned for her husband
Rev. 21:9–22:5		A. CHURCH IN GLORY
	21:9–22:5	Vision: The Lamb's wife: New Jerusalem
Rev. 22:6–21		CONCLUSION
		Promised parousia attested by the faithful Witness, with covenant sanctions

A comparison of Kline's 1992 outline of Revelation with his previous student outline reveals both continuity and discontinuity. Kline still affirmed that the contrast that is central to understanding Revelation is found in the two terminal sections that bookend the interior scheme, The Church Imperfect in the World / Church in the World and The Church Perfect in Glory / Church in Glory. What Kline changed was where the first of these terminal sections started. In the 1946 outline, he placed the start of the first terminal section at Rev. 1:9 with the end at Rev. 3:22. In the 1992 outline, he saw the first terminal section starting at Rev. 2:1 and ending at Rev. 3:22.

Another change came in The Final Judgments / Final Judgments on World section immediately prior to Rev. 21:9–22:5. In the earlier outline, he proposed Rev. 17:1–21:8. In the later outline, he added Rev. 17:1–19:10 to the preceding section, Judgments of

Seven Vials on World and Great City so that the Final Judgments on World section was now Rev. 19:11–21:8.

## G. K. Beale

Kline’s tweaking of the outline was during the same time that his then Gordon-Conwell colleague Gregory Beale was putting together what would become the New International Greek Testament Commentary on the book of Revelation. In the chapter dealing with “The Structure and Plan of John’s Apocalypse,” Beale acknowledges Kline’s “A Study in the Structure of the Revelation of John.”<sup>3</sup> He agrees with Kline that it is possible that Revelation 17:1–21:8 is intended as a broader, distinct section. This is because in this section all the main figures introduced earlier in the book either undergo final judgment or receive a final reward—Babylon and the beasts, 17:1–19:21; Satan, 20:1–10; unbelievers, 20:11–15; believers, 21:1–8.<sup>4</sup>

In the end, independent of any consultation with Kline, what Beale maintains are the two most plausible outlines for the book of Revelation chiefly match what Kline had proposed in his 1946 and 1992 outlines. For Beale, the book divides credibly into either seven sections—1–3; 4–7; 8:1–11:14; 11:15–14:20; 15–16; 17:1–21:8; 21:9–22:21, or eight sections—1–3; 4–7; 8:1–11:14; 11:15–14:20; 15–16; 17:1–19:10; 19:11–21:8; 21:9–22:21.<sup>5</sup> Beale then adds, “It is hard to know which is better. Possibly, John intends that both outlines be discerned.”<sup>6</sup>

Beale also notes that Kline in his “A Study in the Structure of the Revelation of John,” like Hendriksen before him in *More Than Conquerors*, made no attempt to enumerate any subdivisions. In the 1992 outline, Kline not only provided subdivisions, but also showed how the subdivisions fit into a chiasmic pattern.

## Introduction and Conclusion of Revelation—Covenant Sanctions

Kline first noted the parallels that exist in the Introduction, Revelation 1, and Conclusion, Revelation 22:6–21. Both point to the coming of the faithful Witness with covenant sanctions. For Kline, the appearance of the covenant sanctions testifies to the covenantal character of the kingdom order that God had established from creation and was bringing to completion with the coming of Jesus Christ.

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<sup>3</sup> Beale’s awareness of Kline’s thesis on the structure of Revelation did not come through personal interaction with Kline at Gordon-Conwell, but earlier through interaction with Peter Steen when Beale was teaching at Grove City College from 1980 to 1984 in Western Pennsylvania. Steen, a lifelong Orthodox Presbyterian, had taught at Geneva College in the mid-1970s. At the beginning of the 1980s he was active in evangelism on the campuses of Westminster and Grove City colleges as he pursued gospel ministry in the OPC. Shortly after his being licensed to preach by the Presbytery of Ohio in 1983, he died of lymphoma. Gregory Beale, email to author, April 21, 2021.

<sup>4</sup> G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 110–111.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 114. The differences in Beale’s seven-section outline and Kline’s 1946 outline are Beale’s inclusion of Kline’s Introduction (Rev. 1) and Conclusion (Rev. 22:6–21) into the opening and closing sections, Beale’s placing of Rev. 8:1 in the Seven Trumpets section, and his starting of the middle section at Rev. 11:15 instead of Rev. 12:1. The differences in Beale’s eight-section outline and Kline’s 1992 outline include the same three points.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

Kline's argument exegetically for covenant sanctions can be found in every book he published but is most clearly articulated in his *Kingdom Prologue*. There he argued that God's creating man in his image meant that the creating of the world was a covenant-making process. He stated, "There was no original non-covenantal order of mere nature on which the covenant was superimposed."<sup>7</sup> Rather, God's creation of man in his image, and God's bringing about the pre-fall kingdom order through his divine speech and deeds and making it subject to the sanctions of divine blessing and curse—all characteristic of the substance of *berith*—affirm that the kingdom order described in Genesis 1–3 was a covenantal affair from the beginning.<sup>8</sup> Further, Kline argued that the divine sanctioning of blessing and cursing—the curse of death threatened against any breach of fealty and the blessing of life promised for loyal obedience—are integral not only to the covenant of creation (works) in Genesis 2:16–17, but also to all biblical covenants.<sup>9</sup>

In language reminiscent of Geerhardus Vos's comments upon pre-redemptive special revelation and the eschatological goal of full communion with God set before Adam at creation,<sup>10</sup> Kline wrote regarding the blessing sanction:

Blessing sanction promising a consummation of man's original glory as image of God was thus built into man's very nature as image of God. This eschatological prospect was in-created. It was an aspiration implanted in man's heart with his existence as God's image. That being so, to restrict man to the mere continuation of his original state of beatitude would be no blessing at all, but a curse.<sup>11</sup>

Kline concluded that the blessing sanction of the covenant of creation ("our equivalent of the customary Covenant of Works"<sup>12</sup>) was "no artificial addition to the covenant but already involved in man's God-like eschatological-sabbatical nature and essentially nothing other than the perfecting of that nature."<sup>13</sup>

In the Genesis account, Kline maintained that the blessing sanction promising a consummation of man's original glory as image of God was symbolized by the Tree of Life. The Tree of Life did not hold out to Adam the prospect of a continuation of the life that was his at creation, but life consummated through eschatological transformation. In Genesis 3:22 after the fall into sin, the Tree of Life is mentioned in connection with the consequences of failing the probation. In that verse, the Tree of Life is regarded as a seal of everlasting life.

Kline observed how the Tree of Life reappears at both the beginning and end of Revelation. In Revelation 2:7, the Spirit declares to the one who conquers that the Spirit

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<sup>7</sup> Meredith G. Kline, *Kingdom Prologue* (South Hamilton, MA: M. G. Kline, 1991), 57. In *Images of the Spirit*, Kline declared, "Discovery of the biblical nexus between the concepts of image of God and divine covenant validates Covenant Theology's identification of the Creator's relation to man at the beginning as a covenantal arrangement." Meredith G. Kline, *Images of the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 55. Interestingly, Kline footnotes this statement with a reference to pages 26 and following in his *By Oath Consigned* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), which is arguably the most Geerhardus Vos-indebted section in the Klinian corpus.

<sup>8</sup> *Kingdom Prologue*, 10.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>10</sup> See Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 22–23.

<sup>11</sup> *Kingdom Prologue*, 57.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

will grant to eat of the Tree of Life, which is in the paradise of God. In Revelation 22:2, in the middle of the heavenly city with the river of the water of life flowing from the throne of God, there the Tree of Life is also.

But, Kline also noted that there was a sanction of curse to the covenant of creation and to the symbolism of the Tree of Life. He explained:

Blessing belonged properly to the Covenant of Creation. In its created condition that covenantal order was one of beatitude and the eschatological perfecting of that beatitude was its proper goal. Nevertheless, a threat of curse was included within the total disclosure of the terms of this covenant. “But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat thereof you will surely die” (Gen 2:17).<sup>14</sup>

Death was threatened for disobedience. Death was failure to realize the eschatological potential of the image of God; it was frustration of the hope of completion of man’s mission signaled by the Sabbath ordinance; and it was denial of the consummation of life signaled by the Tree of Life.

According to Kline, such curse sanctions continue throughout the Scriptures. To prove his point, he turned to the imprecation that appears climactically in Revelation 22:18–19 (Kline’s trans.):

I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If any one adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if any one takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.<sup>15</sup>

In the parenthesis following the citation of Revelation 22:18–19, Kline indicated that the reader should also see Revelation 1:3 (NASB), “Blessed is the one who reads, and those who hear the words of the prophecy and keep the things which are written in it, for the time is near.” He concluded that there was an appropriateness of the sanctions of blessing and curse not only to the book of Revelation, but to canonical Scripture as a whole.

Kline had already come to this conclusion regarding covenant sanctions extending throughout the Bible in his first published book in 1963, *Treaty of the Great King*. In his exegesis of Deuteronomy 29:20 (Kline’s trans.), “Then the anger of the Lord and his jealousy shall smoke against that man,” Kline wrote,

As for the root of the trouble, the individual who hypocritically mouthed the self-maledictory oath of the covenant (v. 19b), Yahweh would not hold him guiltless for having taken his name in vain. Though the individual think himself hidden in the assembled host of Israel and suppose his hypocrisy concealed within his own heart, Yahweh, avenging divine Witness of the oath, would single him out and mercilessly pour on him all the curses he had idly invoked. On verse 20b, *cf.* Revelation 22:18, 19.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>15</sup> Meredith G. Kline, *Structure of Biblical Authority* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1972), 36–37.

<sup>16</sup> Meredith G. Kline, *Treaty of the Great King* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1963), 131.

In his next book, his 1968 *By Oath Consigned*, Kline took up again the theme of covenant sanctions and the book of Revelation. He said:

The decisive and clear historical fact is that both blessing and curse are included in the administration of the true New Covenant. The Christ who stands like the theophanic ordeal pillar of fire in the midst of the seven churches addresses to them threats as well as promises, curses as well as blessings.<sup>17</sup>

In the accompanying footnote referencing Revelation 2 and 3, Kline asked rhetorically, “Do we see in the figures of the messengers (angels) of the churches the messengers of the covenant lawsuit?”<sup>18</sup>

It was in the first chapter of Revelation, however, that Kline saw a connection between the covenant judgment in the exodus, whereby Israel was vindicated and Egypt doomed, and the covenant judgment brought forth by the exalted Christ. In the exodus, Yahweh, himself a consuming fire, was present in the judgment in his theophanic embodiment in the pillar of smoke and fire. In Revelation 1:15, the exalted Christ, a veritable incarnation of the theophanic glory pillar of the exodus, is present for judgment (Rev. 1:13) accompanied by the ordeal elements of the water and the sword.<sup>19</sup>

Kline pressed the covenant sanctions of the exodus and Revelation in detail even further in Revelation 15. He suggested that the imagery in Revelation 15:2, which seemingly draws upon the Red Sea triumph, combines elements of sea and fire with the flashing glory of the theophanic smoke-cloud in Revelation 15:8 to the end of introducing the mission of seven angels who pour out the divine wrath in Revelation 16:1. The result is that the earth is brought to its final ordeal in which Babylon, the harlot-city is destroyed and the bride-city Jerusalem is exalted. The angel-messengers announce the outcome of the judicial ordeal upon the harlot-city in Revelation 17:1 (“Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, ‘Come, I will show you the judgment of the great prostitute who is seated on many waters’) and upon the bride-city in Revelation 21:9 (“Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues and spoke to me, saying, ‘Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb.’”).

Kline’s analysis of this theme of sanctions in the book of Revelation continued in his 1980 *Images of the Spirit*. In it, he observed that in Revelation 1 the faithful Witness is the Lord of the covenant, the one who comes “to pronounce judgment on the work of his servants in words replete with echoes of the scene in Eden and identified as what the Spirit says to the churches.”<sup>20</sup> Revelation 1:14 and its description of the exalted Christ as the Glory-Spirit incarnate, his eyes search-beams that penetrate the darkness with light, further identify the sanctions with the judicial exposure of Genesis 3:8.

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<sup>17</sup> Meredith G. Kline, *By Oath Consigned*, 77.

<sup>18</sup> Kline, *By Oath Consigned*, 77.

<sup>19</sup> In *Kingdom Prologue*, Kline connected the Glory-cloud of the Exodus with the covenant sanctions. He wrote, “God’s Glory-Presence was the executor of both the dual sanctions. Thus, in Israel’s exodus history, the same Glory that functioned to bless Israel was the divine Agent to inflict God’s curses on the Egyptians. The Glory-cloud was a protective shade to one, a bewildering darkness to the other. The Glory-fire was a guiding light to one, but to the other a blinding, consuming blaze” (64).

<sup>20</sup> Meredith G. Kline, *Images of the Spirit*, 123.

In *Kingdom Prologue*, Kline also noted the connection between Revelation 1 and the Glory-Spirit of Genesis. He said,

The Book of Revelation pictures the consummation of creation's history as involving a reappearance of the Glory-Spirit of Genesis 1:2, now enveloping the incarnate Son, his hand lifted in oath to heaven as he swears by himself, the Creator, that the mystery of God was to be completed (Rev. 10:1, 5–7; cf. Rev. 1:15; 2:18).<sup>21</sup>

### **Prelude, Vision, Interlude**

The other unique feature of Kline's 1992 outline of Revelation is his detailed expansion of the five inner sections identifying a prelude to the vision of the section, the vision itself, and interlude for each. The shared theme of each prelude is that of heaven. The Lamb-lion of Revelation 4:1–5:14 is on the throne of heaven; the seven angels of Revelation 8:2–6 receive a heavenly commissioning; heaven is opened in Revelation 11:19 and the ark of the covenant is seen; the seven angels of Revelation 15:1–8 receive a heavenly commissioning; Revelation 19:11–16 presents the warrior-Word with the armies of heaven.

The focus of the interludes is primarily on the blood-purchased bride-church that the Spirit recreates for life in heaven. In chiasmic fashion, working out from the central section, Revelation 11:19–14:20, the interludes resemble the story of the history of redemption.

Revelation 7:1–17—Redeemed of the Lamb arrayed in white robes  
Revelation 10:1–11:13—Witness-church and apostate church  
Revelation 14:1–13—Covenant sanctions  
Revelation 17:1–19:10—Harlot-church and bride-church  
Revelation 21:1–8—Bride of the Lamb adorned for her husband

The interludes resemble the history of redemption because they cannot be separated from the redemptive-historical significance of the center section of the visions, Revelation 12:1–14:20.<sup>22</sup> Kline argued in *Glory in Our Midst* that it is in this “center-section of the Apocalypse that the conflict of the ages is directly and dramatically revealed as the contention of Christ with Satan over the church.”<sup>23</sup> In *Glory in Our Midst*, this meant showing how the prophecy of Zechariah 3 foretold the victory over the accuser and the deliverance of the people of God by the Suffering Servant.

But, Kline did not stop there with the identification of Revelation 12:1–14:20 to redemptive-history. He also believed that Revelation 12 was related to the events of Genesis 3. In *Kingdom Prologue*, he explained:

The portrayal of the mission of Christ in Revelation 12 may be singled out as rich in clear allusions to Genesis 3:15. In this vision a great dragon appears, identified as the

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<sup>21</sup> Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 11.

<sup>22</sup> In *Glory in Our Midst: A Biblical Theological Reading of Zechariah's Night Visions* (Overland Park, KS: Two Age Press, 2001), 97, Kline stated that it is in this section that “the depths of the redemptive-historical process are explored and exposed.”

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*



ancient serpent, the devil (v.9). There is also a woman who gives birth to a son, and the passage speaks too about the rest of the “seed” of the woman (v.11). The history of the child born to the woman is described in messianic terms: he attains to the world-rule of the anointed Son foretold in Psalm 2 and fulfills the Daniel 7 vision of the Son of Man, for his encounter with the dragon culminates in his ascension to the throne of God (v.5), a victory celebrated as a coming of the salvation and kingdom and authority of the Christ of God (v.10). As for the dragon-serpent, though he sets himself to devour the child (v.4), he is doomed to defeat. When the messianic son is caught up to heaven in triumph, Satan is cast down out of heaven into the prison of the abyss and at last into the lake of second death (v.9; Rev 20).<sup>24</sup>

Kline further noted in *Kingdom Prologue* that the sequence of the visions in Revelation 12 is significant in understanding the prophecy. It is only after the son born to the woman suffers in the conflict with the dragon that issues into his ascension to glory (Rev. 12:1–5) that Michael may wage war and prevail against Satan (Rev. 12:7ff.). The brethren overcome their accuser only through the blood of the Lamb (Rev. 12:11).<sup>25</sup>

The interludes that surround the center section, Revelation 10:1–11:13 and Revelation 17:1–19:11, present the co-existence of the harlot-church and bride-church prior to the consummate life of heaven. But, as the outer two interludes testify, the day of no more tears is coming for the white-robed redeemed of the Lamb, Revelation 7:1–17, the bride of the Lamb adorned for her husband, Revelation 21:1–8.

Lastly, Revelation 14:13, the concluding verse of the center section of the interludes, held special value to Kline. He declared that

so complete is the triumph of the stronger One over the draconic foe, he who has the power of death, that dying, for the Christian martyr-witness, is transformed into a ‘first resurrection,’ an entrance into a sabbatical resting (cf. Rev. 14:13) and reigning with their Savior-Victor.

Much like the enclosure of the ark in Noah’s day, the experience of death for God’s people is a sanctuary from the wrath of God abroad in the world.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 89.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 91. Kline was acutely aware that the movement from humiliation to exaltation for the child born to the woman in Rev. 12 was the pattern for the people of God in all ages. As an example, in his commentary on Genesis, he referenced Rev. 12:1–5 in regard to the events surrounding Moses and Joseph. “From slave to vizier of Egypt—astonishing, but a trifle to the God who brings the promised seed from barren wombs and life from the dead. The Lord would later repeat such triumphs in the days of Israel’s slavery in the land of Ham—in the rescue of the infant Moses from the Nile to be adopted into Pharaoh’s household and in the subsequent prevailing of Moses in ordeals of wisdom and power against the court magicians. These were early intimations of the ultimate triumph of the messianic man child caught up from the cross and his ordeal with the dragon to the throne of God to rule all nations (cf. Rev. 12:1–5).” See, Meredith G. Kline, *Genesis: A New Commentary*, ed. J. Kline (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2017), 126–127.

<sup>26</sup> The scriptural citation of Isa. 16:20 on page 38 in Kline’s *Genesis* in connection with Rev. 14:13 is erroneous. The correct citation should be Isa. 26:20.

# Servant Truth

## A Study in the Structure of the Revelation of John, Parts 1–4 (complete)

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by Meredith G. Kline<sup>1</sup>

### Part 1

#### Thesis Statement

One of the structural principles of the Apocalypse is to set before us different series of pictures relating not so much to successive events as to the same events under different aspects, each series complete in itself and inviting us to think less of its temporal relations to those which precede and follow it, than of the new and different light in which it presents an idea common to itself and them.<sup>2</sup>

This statement represents fairly the synchronous structure of Revelation to be defended in this paper (provided that “the same events” is understood in a very broad sense, as indeed William Milligan does, and not as specific events recorded in history books). The danger is particularly strong in the case of the recapitulationist that the natural desire to find symmetry in the structure will betray him into sacrificing the thought, at least as to proper emphasis, for the sake of establishing a certain formally symmetrical arrangement of the visions. For instance, William Hendriksen, in dealing with the latter chapters, is consistent with his main principle that there are seven parallel sections and “each of them spans the entire dispensation from the first to the second coming of Christ.”<sup>3</sup> In finding indications of the beginning of the Christian dispensation here he is correct; however, the overwhelmingly predominant thought of final judgment pervading the entirety of this section is not sufficiently evident in Hendriksen’s exposition. This is symptomatic of his general fault in not applying adequately his principle that “there is progress in eschatological emphasis.”<sup>4</sup> Whatever may be its dangers of being abused, however, this structural principle of synchronism or parallelism or recapitulation is valid and necessary to a proper interpretation of Revelation. This thesis is here developed by dealing with certain introductory questions, by the exegesis of the climaxes of the main divisions and the consideration of related problems, and by a more direct refutation of the successive-judgment view.

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<sup>1</sup> This text is the ThM thesis of Meredith G. Kline for Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, PA, 1946.

<sup>2</sup> William Milligan, *Lectures on the Apocalypse* (London: Macmillan, 1892), 100.

<sup>3</sup> William Hendriksen, *More than Conquerors* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1944), 25.

<sup>4</sup> Hendriksen, 47.

## Objections to Recapitulation Refuted

To clear the way for the study of the text and to ground the Revelation of John in biblical apocalyptic, we evaluate three objections of a general hermeneutical character elaborated by David Brown<sup>5</sup> from Marcus Dods's *Introduction to the New Testament* against the understanding of Revelation as a presentation largely of ideas rather than events, which historically, and not naturally exegetically, has gone hand in hand with recapitulation.

1. It is "out of keeping with the general purpose of apocalyptic literature," which is to treat of the "the Kingdom of God oppressed by hostile worldly powers; in both books (i.e., Daniel and Revelation) successive periods in the history of this struggle are definitely though symbolically predicted."<sup>6</sup>

The idea of the world's hostility is true enough, as is that of the final triumph of God's kingdom, which he later adds; but that "successive periods in history" need be involved as of the essence of true apocalyptic is erroneous. Undeniably there are four successive historical empires before the founding of God's kingdom in Daniel, but far from Revelation being required to share this trait, it would be in direct contradiction to Daniel if it did so. For in Daniel, the coming of God's kingdom in Christ—the stone smiting the image—does away with world powers. We do not—cannot—interpret this literally, but we do insist that the Old Testament prophet's spiritual outlook on the state of affairs introduced by the establishment of the messianic kingdom be shared by his New Testament successor. Daniel considered all kingdoms as in principle, or as to the decisive issue, destroyed by Christ's coming and unworthy of being specifically designated as world empires once the one and only true world Empire of Messiah had been founded. In accord with this is Daniel 7 where the latter issue of the fourth beast, during whose sway Christ's kingdom is established, is represented by ten horns—ten, the symbolic number of completeness—designating the opposition to Messiah's people that would develop after the decline of Rome, everywhere throughout the earth, and down through all the centuries to the Judgment—but in no wise describing successive, specific, historical periods. The only exception to this is the detailed emphasis on Antiochus Epiphanes's anti-type, the little horn which appears among the ten. To this eschatological outlook Revelation is true, for it deals only with the general principles of the world's opposition to the now established kingdom of God, with the one exception of the final stage of the beast's activity. For a fuller discussion, see below: *The Eschatological Perspective of Revelation*.

2. It "fails to present a sufficient motive for its composition."<sup>7</sup>

First, it is close to presumption to judge what constitutes a proper motive for God's including any specific form of revelation in his Word. Second, such a consideration is highly subjective, and this is aggravated by Brown's unjustly limiting the "ideas" to God's sovereignty, providence, goodness, and final triumph in the vaguest of senses.<sup>8</sup> Third, many

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<sup>5</sup> David Brown, *The Structure of the Apocalypse* (New York: Christian Literature Co., 1891), 31ff. The source of Brown's three objections is a quote from Marcus Dods, *Introduction to the New Testament* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1888), 243–44.

<sup>6</sup> Brown, 31–32.

<sup>7</sup> Brown, 31.

<sup>8</sup> Brown, 28.

of those holding the view Brown disparages find in Revelation thus understood the fairest gem in Scripture, uniting in a fitting consummation of the divine Word the most precious themes of the Bible, illuminating the prophetic element of the Old Testament, elaborating and unifying the eschatological outlines inherent in the teaching of Jesus, Paul, and the rest of the New Testament, and providing an inspiration by its solemn majesty that is not afforded so impressively anywhere else. Fourth, it is a poor substitute for such to offer, as Brown does, a system of historical events—often of the most obscure, trivial, and irrelevant nature—which but vaguely illustrate major Bible themes and would provide scarcely any practical comfort to the afflicted church.

3. It “fails to present a sufficiently definite guide through its intricacies,” wavering as it does between predictive and more general contents.<sup>9</sup>

Quite on the contrary, grounding the symbolism in other scriptural symbolism is the only legitimate guide. If some portions are more specific predictions than others, no problem is presented, for the more specific portions are always at the beginning and the close of the gospel age where the really epoch-making, eschatological inbreaking of God’s redemptive acts in the world’s history transpires. The long intermediate period is similar enough throughout to describe by the general principles or ideas unfolding therein. Again, Brown’s system of historical events is no improvement, to say the least, for the events move in a narrow rut altogether out of keeping with the universalism of the New Testament and are so hopelessly without demonstrable scriptural relation to the symbols of Revelation that there are as many sets of events as there are proponents of this system of interpretation.

## Outline of Revelation

If we are to speak of the beginnings and endings of various series or cycles of visions within the Apocalypse, it is necessary to have the outline of the book in mind. The divisions which commend themselves to me are these:

Introduction 1:1–8  
The Church Imperfect in the World 1:9–3:22  
The Seven Seals 4:1–8:1  
The Seven Trumpets 8:2–11:19  
The Deeper Conflict 12:1–14:20  
The Seven Bowls 15:1–16:21  
The Final Judgments 17:1–21:8  
The Church Perfect in Glory 21:9–22:5  
Conclusion 22:6–21

The only division of which the bounds are at variance with the usual ones adopted by recapitulationists<sup>10</sup> is that of ‘The Final Judgments’ (17:1–21:8). Some demonstration seems required:

1. Within these bounds all the main characters previously introduced are dealt with in respect to their final destinies: Babylon and the Beasts in 17:1–19:21; Satan in 20:1–10; unbelievers in 20:11–15; and overcomers in 21:1–8. This unity of theme is much disregarded but appears to me decisive and is confirmed by the following considerations:

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<sup>9</sup> Brown, 31.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Hendriksen, 42–43.

2. This section begins with one of the seven angels that had the seven bowls coming to John and saying, “Come hither,” promising to show the judgment on the harlot-Babylon with whom are associated the kings of the earth and earth-dwellers who sinned with her. So, the next section, if divided as here suggested, begins (21:9) with the angel of the seven bowls series coming to John with the invitation, “Come hither,” promising now to show him the bride, the wife of the Lamb. The objection cannot be pressed that the material in 17:1–21:8 exceeds the statement in 17:1–2 of what is to be shown the Seer. For although nothing is said in 17:1–2 of the Beast, the harlot appears at once (17:3) in relation to the Scarlet-colored Beast, and this is undeniably within the proper bounds of this division. The various characters are so closely related that in the discussion of this theme of final judgments they all of necessity appear in relation to Babylon and become legitimate subjects to develop in this section.

3. “Their (i.e., sinners’) part shall be in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone; which is the second death,” (21:8), supplies a fitting climax to the theme of judgment, especially since judgment on evil ones predominates in this section. Its appropriateness as the closing verse of this division appears also in that this is the last statement in the Revelation dealing in a positive fashion with the destruction of the wicked. It is true that 21:27a mentions sinners as not entering into the Holy City, but the obvious intention of this is to describe the perfection of the city (compare 21:26 and 21:27b) in a negative way, not the destiny of sinners.

4. If the division is made at 20:1, as by the majority of recapitulationists, the resultant division would be the only major one in Revelation not marked by obvious formal boundaries, if not in the first verse, at least in those immediately following (compare 8:3ff). The amillennialist is wont to do this thinking, perhaps, to strengthen the case for his interpretation of 20:1–10 thereby, whereas the premillennialist is more likely to point to the series of “And I saw” phrases (19:11, 17, 19; 20:1, 4, 11; 21:1) and insist that to make a major division at 20:1 is to fly in the face of the obvious formal indications which become impressive by their very accumulation. The latter is correct—on this point. It does not avail to claim that the introduction of a new character, Satan, in 20:1–10, constitutes a new major theme. Just because a red horse gallops forth at the opening of the second seal, nobody will claim the second seal is a new theme since the preceding and following seals introduce different horses! The seals unify all. So, Satan is introduced to develop the same theme of Final Judgment which both precedes and follows 20:1–10 and unifies all.

As a matter of fact, however, I think this strengthens the amillennial view of 20:1–10 since it makes these verses of one piece with what has preceded. Then just as the discussion of the Beast’s final judgment took us back to the beginning of the Christian era (17:8, 10), so the binding of Satan (20:2–3) may readily be understood as going back to the same point before his final judgment is presented (20:10). On this basis, the newness of the main character in 20:1–10 *can* be appealed to, to show how unlikely it would be for these verses to follow chapter nineteen in chronological succession.

## **Climaxes of the Major Divisions of Revelation**

The most conclusive feature in the proof that the major divisions of the Apocalypse are parallel in their temporal scope rather than chronologically successive is that the climax of each formal division is the end of the gospel age. Further confirmation arises from the observation of the same phenomenon at the climax of certain parenthetical visions contained within the boundaries of the major divisions. The seven letters to the churches

precede the visions proper—see below on progression in the Apocalypse—and do not close with a picture of the end of this age. Futurists who claim that 4:1 on deals with the final segment of this age only, usually torture the seven letters into the form of a historical succession leading up to the end, but to no avail.

**SEALS:** The seals reach the end of the age already in their *sixth* member (6:12–17).

(a) The vision is beyond doubt based on Jesus’s Olivet Discourse.<sup>11</sup> There these astronomical phenomena and the terror of the unbelieving accompany “the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.” The cataclysm of the sixth seal is, therefore, also the end.

(b) “The great day of their wrath is come”—ἡλθεν (*ēlthen*) (6:17). This “great day” in Scripture is the consummation of all things. (Compare 1 Thess. 5:2–3; Mal. 4:1; Joel 2:10–11). Swete takes the language as symbolical of national-social changes and decay toward the end, and therefore at this verse, though recognizing that the language refers to the end itself, he is forced to makeshift, “fear anticipates the actual event—there have been epochs in history when the conscience of mankind has antedated the judgment and believed it imminent.”<sup>12</sup> Fatal to this is the obvious fact that 6:17 is no longer in the first person as 6:16’s “Fall on us, and hide us.” This is the inspired comment of the Seer on what has preceded and cannot possibly be construed as the mistaken notion of the terror or conscience-stricken. The only reason for so construing it is that an anti-recapitulation view demands such. I believe this is the most vulnerable spot in the entire book for the opponents of our view who can elsewhere present a somewhat plausible interpretation by calling all the climaxes anticipations or interludes and by appealing to their telescopic-structure concept. None of these escapes works here. The case for the non-recapitulationist absolutely breaks on 6:17.

(c) The lists of natural catastrophes and varieties of unbelieving men affected by this judgment is in each case seven, the number of divine completeness, especially in dealing with the world; this is emphasized by the πᾶς (*pas*) before the last two members of each list.

(d) The characteristic of wrath is not appropriate to the Lamb during the time when the sincere offer of salvation is being made based on the Lamb that was slain. Such is appropriate only when the day of salvation is past, and those who have rejected him receive their due.

(e) The removal of the “heaven” (6:14) corresponds to the heavens fleeing away in connection with the Great White Throne Judgment (20:11), which is admittedly the end.

Since the sixth seal has introduced the great day of God’s wrath, what are we to expect in the *seventh* seal? There is much dispute as to what constitutes the contents of this seal. The answers range from one verse, 8:1, to the whole of the Apocalypse from 8:1 on. This is probably the most crucial single point in the book for an understanding of the structure.

Düsterdieck presents a telescopic structure of the Apocalypse whereby each of the seals, trumpets, and bowls-series evolves out of the preceding one. He argues at length against recapitulation and in favor of temporal succession, largely on the basis of the seventh seal.<sup>13</sup> We are led to expect by the crisis to which things have come at the sixth seal, the climactic effect of which is heightened by the visions of chapter seven, that the opening of the

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<sup>11</sup> Matthew 24:29–30; Mark 13:24–26; Luke 21:25–27; cf. 2 Peter 3:10–12.

<sup>12</sup> Henry Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, 2nd ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1907), 95. So also Isbon Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1919), 266.

<sup>13</sup> Friedrich Düsterdieck, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Revelation of John* (Meyer’s Commentary on the New Testament), (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1887), 260–63.

seventh seal will reveal the extreme end and final catastrophe, and that with “a certain fulness of significant contents.”<sup>14</sup> This expectation is not at all met if we limit the contents of the seventh seal to “there followed a silence in heaven about the space of half an hour” (8:1). It is fully met if we accept the view that the trumpets and all the rest of Revelation evolve out of this seventh seal and form its contents.

In answer to these remarks of Düsterdieck we advance the following considerations:

1. The sixth seal does *not* lead us to expect a final catastrophe for the simple reason that it is itself the final catastrophe that befalls this fallen world. Beyond the cosmic cataclysm and the unspeakable terror of eternally lost souls in the presence of the wrathful Lamb and the throne of God revealed in the sixth seal, what final catastrophe is there that needs to be considered with any fulness of contents? Only the lake of fire remains, and Revelation nowhere elaborates with fulness upon that state. Furthermore, the blessed estate of the righteous in glory has already been dwelt upon at length in the second parenthetical vision of chapter 7 by the time we reach 8:1. We conclude, therefore, that a brief summary statement only should be expected at the opening of the seventh seal. This is exactly what we have. It takes the form of an impressive period of silence; the fact that the duration of this period is described in approximate terminology— $\omega\varsigma$  (*ōs*)—indicates that this was the impression made on the Seer and that the half-hour is not meant as a symbolic number. Surely if we put ourselves in the Seer’s place in the midst of these tremendous visions and especially at this point when the air has just been filled with the shrieks of the lost and praises of the saints, we must acknowledge that a period that seemed like a half-hour of purest silence would make and leave an indelible impression.

Granting that silence itself is a legitimate symbol, what better way could be found to present this symbol?—in fact, what other way? A priori, silence seems as legitimate a symbol as its opposite, a thundering noise. If the latter stands for God’s judgments going forth, why should not the former symbolize God’s judgments completed? This meaning is confirmed when we answer the question, “What is the connotation of silence in the prophetic language of Scripture?” In Isaiah 47:5 and 1 Samuel 2:9 the wicked are assigned to the silence of darkness, consequent upon the vengeance of God. In Zechariah 2:13 silence prevails because God has delivered his people and dwells in their midst.

Düsterdieck’s puerile objection<sup>15</sup> against the silence obtaining on earth since it is said to be in heaven, is flatly contradicted by Zechariah 2:13 which relates “before Jehovah” with the silence on earth! This would leave the way open also to find Revelation 8:1 at least partially fulfilled in the silence of the lost in their eternal abode, or for a view like Fairbairn’s (see below).

Habakkuk 2:20 associates silence with God’s being in his holy temple. All of these ideas fit admirably into the final, eternal state which the seventh seal is required to symbolize. In the light of prophetic usage, this silence of Revelation 8:1 is a rich and comprehensive symbol, indeed. Fairbairn interprets: “The struggle of conflict is over, the noise and tumult of war have ceased, and the whole field lies prostrate before the one sovereign and undisputed Lord.”<sup>16</sup>

2. Still another possible view which has at least as much to recommend it as Düsterdieck’s is that the silence represents a withholding of revelation. Revelation 7:13–17 corresponds very closely to Revelation 21:1–8. Now since the only revelation in the entire

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<sup>14</sup> Düsterdieck, 260–63.

<sup>15</sup> Düsterdieck, 262.

<sup>16</sup> Patrick Fairbairn, *Prophecy, Viewed in Respect to its Distinctive Nature, its Special Function, and Proper Interpretation* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1865), 407.

book that marks a material advance beyond what is related in the sixth seal and 7:13–17 is the final vision of the holy city immediately after 21:1–8, it may be that immediately after 7:13–17, in 8:1, we have silence because the time had not yet come to present this last crowning vision, even though the preceding material leads to that point.

3. There are grave flaws in Düsterdieck's interpretation both materially and formally:

(a) He is forced to read into silence—with no semblance of biblical warrant—the idea of hushed, still excitement in anticipation of the coming trumpet judgments. But where is the information on the part of the heavenly host concerning coming judgments? To ground the anticipations of the heaven-dwellers, he must drag the vision of the seven angels with the trumpets forcibly into the half-hour period of silence and thus willfully ignore the fact that these angels are clearly separated as a distinct vision by the phrase “And I saw,” which is a common manner of dividing visions in Revelation.

Quite similar is the view of A. Pieters. Concerning the sixth seal he says: “In Scene 3 of this Act (see program) men begin to be aware of the gathering storm”<sup>17</sup> (the removal of the heaven as a scroll, Pieters apparently considers a gentle spring zephyr). Then of the seventh seal, “So the hosts of heaven stand silent, in breathless expectancy, waiting for the solemn pageant to proceed. Notice that this silence is, again, a purely dramatic touch, having no prophetic or doctrinal significance in itself, but placed here because the principles of dramatic art require it.”<sup>18</sup> Such extreme insistence on the resemblance of the Revelation to a drama cheapens the divine Word as much, if not more, than classifying biblical apocalyptic on a mere par with and as of one cloth with other early apocalypses which Pieters is careful to guard against.<sup>19</sup> It is asking too much of us, to require us to cease comparing Scripture with Scripture to determine Scripture's meaning, in favor of comparing Scriptures with the devices of the Greek stage!

(b) From a formal viewpoint it does not seem warranted to consider the cycle of trumpets as evolving from the cycle of seals. The trumpet cycle is clearly marked off as a formal unit by the phenomena of 8:5 which are repeated at the close of the cycle (11:19). Also, the seven-sealed book does not appear again, though—if the remainder of the visions constituted the contents of the seventh seal—we should expect that when its revelations were exhausted there would be a final reference to it, at least.

Furthermore, the ease with which 8:1 might seem to blend into 8:2 is altogether in keeping with other transitional passages in Revelation, which is simply an evidence of a good literary style. The transition from the trumpets to the next cycle is so smooth that there has been dispute whether 11:19 goes with what precedes or “should be the beginning of the next chapter, introducing a new vision.”<sup>20</sup> Compare also the beginning of the bowls cycles (15:1); this major heptad is “another sign in heaven,” and thus blends with the earlier signs of the previous cycle (12:1, 3). Again, the last two major divisions have an affinity to the bowls' cycle, for they are introduced by “one of the seven angels that had the seven bowls” (17:1 and 21:9). In so subtle a way the Revelation is even in its formal arrangement made a living, moving organism, rather than a row of detached blocks of material.

4. Even though it be granted that Düsterdieck's view of the formal relation of the seventh seal and the trumpet series were correct, this would not at all militate against recapitulation. For instance, Milligan writes, “We cannot, therefore, separate the trumpets

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<sup>17</sup> Albertus Pieters, *The Lamb, the Woman, and the Dragon: An Exposition of the Revelation of St. John* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1937), 124.

<sup>18</sup> Pieters, 131.

<sup>19</sup> Pieters, chapter 2, especially 31–32.

<sup>20</sup> Pieters, 157.



from the seventh seal. The former are not independent of the latter but are evidently developed out of it, although the succession is one of thought rather than time.”<sup>21</sup>

Also, Düsterdieck’s interpretation of the half-hour silence, if accepted, does not put recapitulation into discard. Lenski understands the silence with Düsterdieck as the hushed expectation of the heavenly hosts but does not conclude that what follows is the contents of the seventh seal. Rather, the climactic nature of the sixth seal decides him on the need of recapitulation if the book is to continue.<sup>22</sup>

But the shining example that all of Düsterdieck’s arguments do not avail against recapitulation is Düsterdieck. For in his view the great final catastrophe is not introduced immediately in the trumpet series but much later. Meanwhile the visions immediately evolving from the seventh seal describe “the trial of the patience of saints who are regarded as *awaiting* the day of the Lord.”<sup>23</sup> When we observe that Düsterdieck admits that in the sixth seal “the day of the Lord *begins*,”<sup>24</sup> it becomes apparent that Düsterdieck is himself a recapitulationist.

We reaffirm, in concluding this matter, that the cycle of seals brings us to the Judgment at the sixth seal and into the eternal state in the silence of the seventh. As to formal structure, the evidence is wanting for the view that the visions are arranged in telescopic fashion; and even were this not the case, the essential synchronous nature of the revelations of the visions would be unaffected.

## Part 2

**TRUMPETS:** The language describing what follows the sounding of the *seventh* trumpet is almost unanimously taken as depicting the close of history. “The kingdom of the world is become—ἐγένετο (*egeneto*)—the kingdom of our Lord, and of his Christ.” (11:15). “We give thee thanks, O Lord God, the Almighty, who art and who wast; because thou hast taken thy great power, and didst reign. And the nations were wroth, and thy wrath came—ἦλθεν (*elthen*)—and the time of the dead to be judged.” (11:17,18). “In the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, then is finished the mystery of God, according to the good tidings which he declared to his servants the prophets” was the preliminary announcement (10:7). To be sure there have been diehards of the successive historical school who have so far lost their bearings as to refer all this to the victory of the Goths and other Arians under Narses, or to the victory of Christianity over Judaism involved in the destruction of Jerusalem, and the like. But most interpreters have acknowledged the force of the language (which—together with 12:1ff.—compels some to accept the fact of recapitulation here, if nowhere else). Swete: “With the seventh trumpet blast the Kingdom of God has come and the general judgment is at hand. Thus, this section of the Apocalypse brings the course of history down to the verge of the Parousia.”<sup>25</sup> Pieters: “This is, therefore, the triumphant consummation of the divine enterprise.”<sup>26</sup> Even W.

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<sup>21</sup> Milligan, *Lectures*, 51.

<sup>22</sup> Richard Lenski, *Interpretation of St. John’s Revelation* (Columbus, Ohio: Lutheran Book Concern, 1935), 266.

<sup>23</sup> Düsterdieck, 263.

<sup>24</sup> Düsterdieck, 233, line 21.

<sup>25</sup> Swete, 146.

<sup>26</sup> Pieters, 157.

Scott: Chapter 11:18 “records the last historical action—the judgment of the dead. There is no history beyond it.”<sup>27</sup>

Düsterdieck,<sup>28</sup> Charles,<sup>29</sup> and Beckwith<sup>30</sup> admit that the language describes the consummation but call 11:15–18 proleptic and introductory. The third woe, or contents of the seventh trumpet, we are told, are not found in this passage but in the remaining visions of the book. As the trumpets were said to evolve out of the seventh seal, now 12:1ff. evolves from the seventh trumpet, and the bowls in particular are thought of as the third woe. But for this there is not a shred of evidence:

(a) There is nothing after 11:19 which is called the third woe or seventh trumpet. The third woe is not mentioned at 11:19 because it would sound ridiculously didactic.

(b) Charles vainly tries to prove that each of the three woes is properly prefaced by the prayers of the saints or a vision of the heavenly temple, which means that 11:15–19 is this preface, and the woe must follow. To do this he must identify the first woe with the first trumpet which is manifestly impossible in view of the subsequent 8:13 “woe, woe, woe, for them that dwell on the earth, by reason of the other voices of the trumpet of the three angels who are yet to sound.”

(c) Beckwith rightly insists that the third woe can no more be missing than one of the trumpets, but he refuses to see the third woe in 11:15–19, although he confesses that this leaves the precise calamity meant uncertain. “We should therefore expect immediately after the trumpet blast of v.15 some great calamity to be sent upon the world corresponding to the first and second woes, but this does not occur.”<sup>31</sup> This is a gross underestimating of the contents of 11:15–19. Lenski well remarks, “To say that here no Woe appears is to ignore the fact that the destruction of the destroyers in the final judgment is a Woe greater than any other.”<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, the vision which these verses contain consummates in the revelation of the ark of the covenant in the temple of God in heaven; this is no mere preparation for more historical events but signifies that the whole covenant is now fulfilled through the grace of our faithful God.

Thus, also we take it that in v.15–19 we have the entire seventh trumpet complete. . . . Yet this seventh trumpet and third Woe, by placing us at the final consummation, involves all that now follows in further visions. But not in such a way that these visions follow in a temporal succession—all time has ended—but so that John and we see anew and with greater fulness all that the final consummation involves.<sup>33</sup>

So Lenski aptly states the relation of the ensuing cycles to that of the trumpets as both parallel and progressive.

**DEEPER CONFLICT:** The closing vision of the *Deeper Conflict* division again pictures the end (14:14–20). A simple comparison of the vision with Matthew 13:39, 41; 24:30–31 is enough to settle this. [Also, in the symbolic numbers of 14:20, a thousand and six

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<sup>27</sup> Walter Scott, *Exposition of the Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., (London: Pickering & Inglis, n.d.), 245.

<sup>28</sup> Düsterdieck, 328ff.

<sup>29</sup> Robert Charles, *Revelation of St. John* (International Critical Commentary), (New York: Scribner, 1920), 292.

<sup>30</sup> Beckwith, 606ff.

<sup>31</sup> Beckwith, 608.

<sup>32</sup> Lenski, 356.

<sup>33</sup> Lenski, 358.

hundred are elements of absolute completion: 100, (the number of completion, 10, squared or intensified) times 16 (the number of the earth or creation, 4, squared or intensified).] “The revelations of vv.8–13 now culminate in a vision of the Parousia, represented as a time of general ingathering of the fruits of life,”<sup>34</sup> is Swete’s comment. The opponents of recapitulation still flounder about in a mess of devices though making even further concessions here than at previous climaxes. Charles indulges in amending the text (he excinds 14:15–17) and calls the rest “a proleptic vision of the preliminary Messianic judgment executed by the Son of man on the heathen nations which is described in detail in 19:11–16 and further apparently in 20:7–10, and under another form in 17:14”!<sup>35</sup> (Why he refuses to call the phenomenon of recapitulation, which he seems to recognize in these passages, by the name ‘recapitulation’ is difficult to understand.) Düsterdieck again expressly discounts recapitulation while he admits that the vision “brings, it is true, a preliminary representation of the final judgment.”<sup>36</sup> He prefers to call this another example of the proleptical character of the structure. Similarly, Beckwith grants that “the universal use of the figures employed here show that the judgment here symbolized is the great judgment of the last day.”<sup>37</sup> He refuses to solve the difficulty this brings to his successive arrangement of the vision as some critics do by “the supposition that the passage stood originally at the end of another apocalypse, or of an earlier form of our Apocalypse,” which is fine, but he can only say this “announces in anticipation the coming of the great catastrophe.”

At each new climax this talk of anticipations and preliminaries sounds more feeble. At previous climaxes we were told these evolved the ensuing material out of themselves; but here we must be willing to accept arbitrary statements to the effect that this full, detailed, striking vision admittedly symbolizing the Parousia is only an anticipation. There is no single vision in chapters nineteen and twenty that any more vividly depicts the final separation of the good from the evil and the punishment of the latter! Why not take the passage at face value and admit that since we are here at the end, to continue we must recapitulate?

**BOWLS:** The pouring out of the *seventh bowl* produces a devastating, cosmical, cataclysmic judgment with points of marked similarity to the visions of the sixth seal and seventh trumpet (16:17–21). The end of the world has come again.<sup>38</sup> A great voice out of the temple and from the throne says, “It is done”—*γέγονεν* (*gegonen*) — the perfect tense eloquently describing God’s redemptive plan as fully executed and now followed by the predestined state of eternal blessedness accruing from that finished work of the Redeemer. (A more subtle mark of the finality of this judgment appears, as Beckwith indicates, in the seven-fold use of a form of *μέγας* (*meGas*).

The absolute finality of this judgment Swete makes relative to the course of the Roman Empire which he misinterprets Babylon to mean. However, he does show more insight into the *scope* of this symbol when he adds, “But Rome does not exhaust St. John’s conception of Babylon . . . other ages may witness the rise and fall of other mistresses of the world not less magnificent and depraved.”<sup>39</sup> Beckwith at least places the vision properly at the close

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<sup>34</sup> Swete, 188.

<sup>35</sup> Charles, II, 18.

<sup>36</sup> Düsterdieck, 404.

<sup>37</sup> Beckwith, 661–67.

<sup>38</sup> So, Milligan, *Lectures*, Hendriksen, Lenski.

<sup>39</sup> Swete, 226.

of the age for he acknowledges that it is the last form of Beastly power (Anti-Christ, to him) that destroys Babylon (Rome, to him).<sup>40</sup> But he continues to minimize the significance of these climaxes, for he says of Rome, “she is overwhelmed in a ruin only implied here.”<sup>41</sup> Of course, the subject of Babylon’s fall is treated more fully in the following chapters for that is their special theme, but it would take all the climax out of the progression within the judgments of the seven bowls of wrath to make the last a mere implication and not an actual description of the vengeance of Christ when he comes as a thief (16:15) to destroy the hosts of evil gathered for a last ungodly effort against God and the saints (16:16, compare 17:14; 19:19; 20:9).

**FINAL JUDGMENTS:** The division on *Final Judgments* (17:1–21:8) on any reasonable evaluation of the language brings us to the end of history again. Even H. Cowles, tenacious preterist, though claiming that even chapter nineteen refers to the destruction of the city of imperial Rome, at least grants that the final judgment is foreshadowed here.<sup>42</sup> While there is general agreement that the main theme or emphasis of these chapters is the end of the age (though a recapitulationist does not overlook the fact that the beginning of the Gospel Age is also included in the scope—17:8, 10, 18; 20:1–3), interpretations vary greatly, of course, within the more limited scope of the end of the age, with the particular view to be adopted depending on whether the judgments on Babylon, the Beasts, Satan, and men are considered synchronous with one another, successive, or some combination of the two. Charles, Düsterdieck, and Beckwith refer 17:8 to the fall of Rome and mysteriously bridge the gap to the end of time in 19:1ff.—whether by prophetic foreshortening or by supposing the prophet was just mistaken in thinking it was the Antichrist of the end-time who would destroy Rome, probably matters little to these gentlemen. Indeed, Charles in this section raves much of sources and fragments and from chapter twenty on says, “the traditional order of the text in these three chapters is intolerably disordered and hopelessly unintelligible.”<sup>43</sup> Such enlightening remarks serve well to indicate the problems that have long made these chapters the tinderbox of exegetical warfare, but they are of no value for an understanding of the text. However, all these men grant the point we desire to make here as a link in the case for recapitulation, i.e., in its climactic element this section presents the Final Judgment.

**OBSERVATIONS:** As for our own view of these chapters, the following observations may suffice:

1. Not without bearing on the chronological relations of these visions is the question, in connection with the fall of Babylon, of how we are to understand the fact that the Beast which courts the harlot, in its final state and in association with the ten kings, hates and destroys her. A very obvious question over which the commentators for the most part brush hastily. In answering it, exegetes fail in direct proportion as they have denied or minimized the religious significance of Babylon and have dwelt upon the seductiveness of the world—the “lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the vainglory of life.” It does no good to point out that Judas the betrayer at last was not happy with the thirty pieces of silver and hanged himself—thousands of other ungodly men have faced destruction in full pursuit of the philosophy “Let us eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die” and thus have to the

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<sup>40</sup> Swete, 159, 286.

<sup>41</sup> Swete, 686.

<sup>42</sup> Henry Cowles, *Revelation of John With Notes* (New York: D. Appleton, 1873), 9.

<sup>43</sup> Charles, II, 437.

very end clung with no revulsion of feelings to the seductiveness of the world. This, history's last hour, looms large in importance in the eschatological perspective of Revelation. Satan is loosed from the abyss; the mightiest anti-Christian powers are marshalled for this last desperate conflict with God. Why should Antichrist scorn any anti-Christian agency's help at such an hour? The only sound basis for explaining the Beast's strange change in attitude toward Babylon is the consideration of the change in its own character which Scripture indicates. Whether we understand the Antichrist to be a personal being or the last form of world-imperial opposition to Christ, we must acknowledge that the Bible associates Antichrist with self-deification and non-tolerance towards all other worship, true or false. In 2 Thessalonians 2:4, the man of sin "opposeth and exalteth himself against all that is called God or that is worshipped; so that he sitteth in the temple of God, setting himself forth as God." In Daniel the little horn of the fourth beast not only speaks words against the Most High and wears out his saints (7:25), but also, he magnifies himself above every god (11:36ff.—the basis of 2 Thess. 2), honoring only the god of fortresses—that is, physical might or war as such.<sup>44</sup> In Revelation 13 again, the last form of the Beast, i.e., to whom it is given to overcome the saints (13:7), is given authority that "all that dwell on the earth shall worship him." (13:8). During the gospel age, Satan tolerates any false-gospel or religion or apostate church pointing men to some sort of being or principle of benevolence beyond. But when the last hour of intensified conflict has come, Satan endeavors to concentrate the energies, efforts, might, and worship of the whole world in his Antichrist. Therefore, the Beast at the last not only persecutes the true followers of the Lamb but also destroys all other pretenses at religion—that is, Babylon.

Even though this interpretation of Revelation 17:16 be rejected, it is plain that there must be some succession from 17:16 to 19:19–21, for the Beast and ten horns cannot be destroyed before they themselves make the harlot desolate. A possible difficulty of harmonization presents itself in the *prima facie* impression of the sixth and seventh vials (16:14–20), for there the Beast's forces are gathered to the battle (16:14–15) which we identify with that of 19:19–21, in the sixth vial, whereas the wrath of God is poured out on Babylon in the seventh vial. However, these bowls of wrath are not successive even though the last two go beyond the others to the end of the age. The first five are *no doubt* synchronous judgments, and we may allow for interlocking of details in the last two. Probably the meaning is that Antichrist rises to power gathering his forces, then destroys Babylon (Revelation 19:19ff. omits this since Babylon's fall has already been disposed of in chapters seventeen and eighteen), and is presently brought to naught himself at the manifestation of the presence of Christ.

2. The careers of the harlot-Babylon, the Beast, and False Prophet were intertwined in chapter seventeen where it was revealed that the Beast would destroy Babylon; and the Lamb, the Beast. Then in chapter eighteen the separate strand of Babylon's fall was elaborated, with the point of view now being that her fall, though executed by the Beast, was the Final Judgment of God. Then in chapter nineteen the other strand of the Final Judgment of Christ on the Beast and False Prophet is developed more fully, which involves (see 19:19–20) a recapitulation of 17:11–14. This recapitulation covers, however, only the climactic battle, not the whole New Testament age. Now in chapter twenty the Final Judgment on Satan is the theme, and since his career during the gospel age has not yet been described in this major division, by way of necessary background for a proper presentation

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<sup>44</sup> So, Carl Friedrich Keil, *The Book of the Prophet Daniel*, in *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament* by C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, trans. by M.G. Easton (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1872), 461–67.

and understanding of this final judgment, as in the cases of Babylon and the Beast in chapter seventeen, that career is covered, directly in 20:1–3 and by implication in 20:4–6. There is, therefore, another example of recapitulation of the Christian dispensation, with 20:1–6 synchronous with 17:3–6, 8a, 9, 10a. Also, Satan’s judgment (20:7–10) is thus parallel to 17:8b, 10b–14, and 19:11–21. We do not detain ourselves with a full discussion of the question of Chiliasm but would merely add that in the symmetrically synchronous structure of the entire Revelation as propounded in this paper a millennium understood in the premillennial school’s sense would stick out like a very sore thumb.

3. The reaping of the harvest of the earth’s redeemed and the gathering of the clusters of the vine for the great winepress of God’s wrath (14:14–20) finds a striking parallel in the casting of the reprobate from the presence of the Great White Throne into the lake of fire and the blessing of the elect in the new heaven and new earth where “God himself shall be with them” (20:11–21:8). Why is the past career of individuals, not found written in the book of life, described as preparation for their judgment? Their lives have no meaning and their individual careers no unity apart from the great anti-Christian powers whose dupes and agents they were; but these have already been fully disposed of (17–19), and all that remains is that those who were enslaved to them and meekly followed them in life should now share their calamity and follow them in death. Also, in the case of the redeemed, to relate their earthly course were to relate them anew to their foes; but why resurrect them again since God has cast them in final judgment into the second death? The synchronism in these last two instances is therefore limited in scope to the day of final judgments as pictured in this main division and elsewhere in the “Revelation.”

4. For the sake of completeness the nature of the climaxes of certain *parenthetical* visions is briefly indicated here:

(a) Before the opening of the seventh seal are two consolatory visions. The second (7:9–17) is a grave problem for all seeking strict succession in Revelation. Grotius thinks of Syrian Christians after the fall of Jerusalem, 70 A.D.! Elliott finds the fulfillment before 395 A.D. but is compelled to speak of the realization of glory by the collective body of the church of all generations. Barnes also, though arriving at 410 A.D. in 7:1–8, admits 7:9–17 is “an episode having no immediate connexion with what precedes or with what follows” and picturing the totality of the redeemed in heaven.<sup>45</sup> Swete<sup>46</sup> talks as usual of mere anticipations of “the issue of the final judgment” and recognizes that “the whole of the episode . . . finds echoes in the last two chapters of the book.”

Conclusive indications that this is the finale of the redemptive program of God are:

(i) The remarkably close parallel of 7:15–17 with 21:3–6, which follows the cosmic regeneration (20:1,2).

(ii) The great tribulation is past (7:14), which, on any interpretation of the phrase—comprehensive of the whole gospel age or restricted in some peculiar way to the end time—means the gospel age is completed.

(iii) The innumerable and universal multitude indicate the great commission is fulfilled and the end come.

(b) The episode of Revelation 11:1–13, immediately before the seventh trumpet, also is concluded by age-ending events. (For a detailed discussion of this, see below, “Eschatological Perspective of Revelation.”)

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<sup>45</sup> Compilation of views by Johann Lange, *Revelation of John* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1874), 11.

<sup>46</sup> Swete, 100–106. So, also, Beckwith, 540; Düsterdieck, 252.

(c) Towards the close of the section, the Deeper Conflict (12–14), is a vision (14:1–5) which is perhaps not strictly parenthetical, and yet since it is complete in itself and not the climax of this section, this may be the proper place to treat of it. It presents the Lamb and one hundred forty-four thousand redeemed on Mt. Zion (compare Hebrews 12:22–24). Swete tries to make it out as an earthly scene, but Düsterdieck acknowledges,

In like manner, just as in ch. vii:9 sqq., an inspiring prospect of the heavenly glory of believers abiding faithful in the great tribulation still impending is afforded before this trouble itself is stated, so also in the first part of ch. xiv. (vv.1–5) a scene is represented in which a multitude of departed believers . . . manifests the glorious reward of the victors.<sup>47</sup>

Though we do not agree with all the details of this analogy, the exegesis of 14:1–5 is essentially correct.

The number of the redeemed is certainly the symbolic number for the completed church of both testaments;<sup>48</sup> the whole church thus in heaven is a feature of the consummation. With this finality accord all the details. The redeemed are viewed as having been purchased out from—ἀπό (*apo*)—the earth and from men, and as having overcome spiritually (i.e., they “were not defiled—*aorist tense*—with women,” v.4), and therefore they are following—*present tense*—the Lamb “whithersoever he goeth,” v.4, (compare 1 Thess. 4:17, “so shall we ever be with the Lord.”).

## Conclusions from the Exegesis of the Climaxes

The evidence has now been presented to demonstrate that the climax of each of the major formal divisions of Revelation from 4:1 to 21:8 brings the reader to the close of history. This hardly seems coincidental. At each of these points the opponents of recapitulation have sought to escape the force of the argument by claiming that these passages did not form part of the basic succession but were sidelights, interludes, anticipations, introductory summaries, and the like. Such excuses might carry some weight in those visions which are classified above as parenthetical. It seems plausible enough to consider these as anticipations of a final order of things which actually arrives only with later chapters in the Apocalypse, but as granted to John beforehand to sustain his spirit, as it were, through the visions of tribulation and woe to come. Even in these three instances, however, it should be noted that each of them occurs in immediate connection with the closing vision of their cycle (except that in chapter fourteen, a trio of angelic warnings intervene). Since the final triumph of God’s kingdom is depicted in these closing visions immediately following, it seems more likely that the assurance contained in these parenthetical visions has primarily a backward reference to the calamitous judgments described in the earlier stages of their cycle. Thus, they corroborate the interpretation of the division climaxes as being actually climaxes of what has preceded rather than anticipations of what is yet to come.

Where it is applied to all the climaxes of the major divisions, this “anticipation” evasion is altogether arbitrary. Especially since it requires an instance of exegetical violence impossible to defend in order to maintain this theory at one point—and that the very earliest

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<sup>47</sup> Düsterdieck, 389–90.

<sup>48</sup> See Lenski, 249–50.

climax, i.e., the sixth seal—the suspicion is hard to avoid that the preconceived notion that the end of the age cannot be presented before the end of the Apocalypse determines the interpretation of all the major climaxes. Furthermore, what is the need of so many anticipations? Is the author afraid he will lose his reader’s attention unless he keeps reminding him that great things are coming? If the earlier climaxes are all mere anticipations, the reader must be disappointed when he finds that the real thing at the end has not so very much more to add to the pictures of the “anticipations”! As for those opponents of recapitulation who tone down the obvious finality of these climaxes to mean something just short of history’s close, the Book of Revelation becomes grotesquely futuristic. If at 6:12–17 the day of judgment dawns and then even at 14:14–20 it is only a preliminary phase of the Judgment that has arrived, concerning what within so meager a scope of time has the author been so verbose in the intervening chapters? Can it possibly warrant so much attention?

Why not therefore accept the synchronous structure which the climaxes demand? At the climax of each cycle the universe is shaken to the foundations, or Christ returns to earth in Final Judgment, or the hosts of heaven triumphantly proclaim that God’s wrath has been poured out and his kingdom consummated—but all such, *we are told*, is a letdown from what we should be expecting! It is but a little prelude. *We must realize* that the seventh seal includes all the remainder of the book, and so again with the seventh trumpet—in spite of the facts that the seventh seal, seventh trumpet, etc. are never alluded to again and that each cycle is beautifully rounded off in its seventh member, and that the succeeding cycle is always a new beginning marked by a formal introduction. That the final Judgment section of the book goes beyond the previous climaxes in intensity and fulness of treatment is quite in keeping with parallelism. For each parallel section has its own theme to deal with, and also our position is that there is a logical progress in the intensity of God’s judgments as found in the successive cycle-themes.

## Part 3

### Successive Events Interpretation Refuted

Recapitulationists are often likely to defend their position, or rather attack their opponent’s position, with facts which fit into the idea of synchronism perfectly, but which might also be construed plausibly in the opposing arrangement. For instance, at 12:1ff. almost everyone is frank to acknowledge that the birth of Christ is symbolized. This is altogether in accord with the parallel-series structure which teaches that each cycle takes us back to the beginning of the Christian era as well as climaxing with the close of the era. But Beckwith also can find a proper place for it, since he considers all of chapters 12–14 “as part of the preliminaries to the events which culminate in the great conflict with Satan and his agents and the overthrow of these, now to be enacted in the seventh trumpet series.”<sup>49</sup> It is quite a simple matter, therefore, to point out how all the material demonstrates a synchronous structure (which to be sure creates a very strong presumption for that view), but it is an altogether different proposition to demonstrate conclusively the falsity of a non-synchronous structure. I believe that there are only two ways of combatting a view of the structure such as Beckwith suggests (we have used them partially in the conclusions we

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<sup>49</sup> Beckwith, 275.



drew from the evidence gathered from the climaxes): 1. To point out the unwieldy arrangement which you are driven to in order to avoid the logical consequences of the accumulation of evidence for synchronism; 2. To demonstrate by exegesis the impossibility or unlikelihood of chronological succession within those visions where Beckwith allows for succession.

1. To illustrate the extremely awkward balance of material necessitated by the successive-events school, we briefly consider Beckwith's general evaluation of Revelation 1–18.<sup>50</sup> Revelation 1:10–3:22 is an “*introductory* vision designed to *prepare* the Church to meet the future foretold in the other visions.” Chapters 4 and 5 furnish “the *foundation* and assurance of all that follows.” Chapter 6 contains “*preparative* and *premonitory* manifestations which come before the immediate forerunners of the End.” Chapter 7 is a *prelude* to the seventh seal. Chapters 8 and 9 present the first six trumpets of sore judgments” which more immediately *precede* the End” and prepare for it. Chapters 10 and 11 are “an *interlude* which serves to *prepare* for the new vision and lends impressiveness to it,” and they conclude with the seventh trumpet which merely “*proclaims* the period of the End.” Chapters 12 and 13 are “*preliminaries*.” In chapter 14 the first vision “is *anticipatory*; it stands *outside* of the events moving toward the last issue”; the announcements of the angels are “*prefatory* to the march of events which is to begin again in chapter XV”; the last vision also must be understood as part of a paragraph which “announces in *anticipation* the coming of a great catastrophe.”<sup>51</sup> Chapter 15 contains an “*announcement, anticipatory* hymn of praise, and immediate *preparation* for the outpouring of the plagues.” We are it seems quite ignorant or timid and failed to get prepared enough in the previous chapters and needed this more immediate preparation of chapter 15. But now that we are considered sufficiently prepared for the great bowls of chapter 16, they come! —but turn out to be only for the purpose to “*specifically prepare* the reader for the great events which are to follow.” To Beckwith these “great events” are the fall of Rome and destruction of Antichrist in chapters 17–19. But strange to say after the wearying array of anticipations, announcements, introductions, preludes, proclamations, preparations, and pre-what-have-yous, even the fall of Rome does not actually appear at all! For after chapter 18 Beckwith admits, “After these manifold assurances of the coming destruction, the Prophet passes over in anticipation to the end, *without allusion* to the beginning or progress of the destroyer’s work”! Yes, the destruction of Antichrist is really pictured—but of course not before an angelic chorus sings “*anticipating*, as if already come, the full establishment of the Kingdom”<sup>52</sup> of God. The dispensationalists turn most of Revelation into their “Great Tribulation”—Beckwith, the “Great Anticipation.”

2. Before chapter 17, succession is allowed by Beckwith only in the visions immediately following upon the opening of each seal, the sounding of each trumpet, and the pouring out of each bowl. We have already dealt with the climaxes of these series and have seen how Beckwith is forced to adopt a telescopic structure for which there is no warrant to avoid the fact that history is finished several times en route. Also, at the sixth seal it has been observed that Beckwith simply begs the question in the face of the evidence contradicting his view. The following features also do not accord with the successive events view:

a. In the sixth bowl (16:12–16) we are brought to the gathering of the kings of the world to the war of the great day of God, the Almighty, which is beyond doubt the same event as

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<sup>50</sup> Beckwith, 255–85.

<sup>51</sup> Beckwith, 661.

<sup>52</sup> Beckwith, 286.

is described in 19:19. John must, therefore, have recapitulated between these two points. Beckwith does not avoid the issue by suggesting the gathering takes place in 16:12–16 and the battle itself is described in 19:19ff.<sup>53</sup> The gathering is also described in chapter 19, and the results of the battle already appear under the seventh bowl. Düsterdieck is likewise hard-pressed here and speaks of this as an allusion<sup>54</sup> and compares it to the mention of the Beast from the Abyss in 11:7 before he actually came on the scene in chapter 13, claiming that both are proleptic; he also indulges in non-existent distinctions between indications and express statements.<sup>55</sup> Even this much, however, is a fatal concession for a system that had already been compelled to narrow its successive passages into so exceedingly meager a portion of the Revelation.

b. In the early members of the seals-trumpets-bowls heptads, i.e., those members which do not specifically describe the end of the age, general principles of God's rule of the world or his judgments on evil-doers are presented, not specific historical events. Such general agencies as war, natural calamities, famines are at work at all times throughout the gospel era. They may be viewed from different points of view and possess logical progression from seals to bowls, but this logical progression does not work itself out in orderly succession or uniformly everywhere down through the centuries to the end; for in any period of history, God's providence may be observed working from the various points of view presented in Revelation in the cases of different individuals and groups. Concerning this matter, especially in connection with the seals, Fairbairn says, "It must ever appear arbitrary to limit to single epochs or particular individuals what has purposely been left indefinite in these respects on the sacred page. Nor can it by any possibility be done so as to produce general confidence and satisfaction."<sup>56</sup> Beckwith recognizes the indefiniteness also, at least in part, for he believes the seals should be regarded as "the beginning of woes" spoken of by Jesus in his Olivet discourse. (See also excursus below on Milligan's view of this relationship). This is true of the first five seals—the last two seals bring the Lord's return itself and its consequences—but these woes continue to the very threshold of Christ's coming. There is then no room for a development in the form of God's judgment; it can now come only in one last overwhelming stroke. The progress in the trumpets and bowls beyond the seals cannot therefore be a chronological succession but rather an increase in intensity logically, and this can be given its proper elbow room only by making the three series of judgments synchronous and each covering the gospel age in its scope.

## **Milligan: Revelation; Matthew 24; Gospel of John**

Prof. Milligan<sup>57</sup> has gone to an extreme in finding correspondence between Jesus's discourse in Matthew 24 and the seals-trumpets-bowls series of Revelation. He does well to point out the use of recapitulation in Matthew 24, which prepares the mind to expect the same in the prophecy of Revelation. (The same purpose is served even more strikingly by the synchronism which obtains in the Old Testament apocalyptic book, Daniel, especially chapters 2 and 7.) Also, the emphasis on grounding the interpretation of Revelation on more didactic portions of scriptural prophecy is well placed. In fact, in spite of questionable steps en route, his conclusions concerning the formal structure of Matthew 24 seem well taken.

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<sup>53</sup> Beckwith, 685.

<sup>54</sup> Düsterdieck, 44.

<sup>55</sup> Düsterdieck, 419.

<sup>56</sup> Fairbairn, 415.

<sup>57</sup> Milligan, *Lectures*, 42–59.

Also, in a general way, the seals do correspond in respect to them with the first section of Matthew 24, i.e., 24:4–14, the history of the church and world in its broad features. But in the following respects there is a forcing and straining of the material:

1. Milligan would make the theme of the second section of Matthew 24 (vv. 15–22), which is supposed to correspond to the trumpets, God’s judgments on the world in contrast to the apostate or false church, which he takes as the primary subject of the next section, Matthew 24:23–28. The obvious reference, however, to the fall of Jerusalem in 24:15–22 (not to speak now of double references or prophetic foreshortening), and especially the parallel use in Luke 21:23, “for there shall be great distress upon the *land*, and wrath to *this people*,” makes it plain that the apostate church of the Old Testament (possibly used here also as typical of the apostate church of the New Testament) is the main theme of this section—not the world.

2. His main subject for Matthew 24:23–28, the apostate New Testament church, may stand. However, he fails to establish that the supposed corresponding cycle in Revelation, i.e., the bowls, shares this primary subject. Some might take exception to his assuming Babylon to symbolize the apostate church, but in this I think he is on the right track. Granting this, he points to Babylon in the third bowl judgment and says, “the object of judgment mentioned under any one member of a group throws light upon the object of judgment under its other members, although under them it may not be so distinctly noted.” The fatal objection to the application of such a principle here *is* that the object of judgment is distinctly noted in the first, fifth, and sixth bowls as “the men that had the mark of the Beast,” “the throne of the Beast,” and “the dragon . . . Beast . . . and false prophet . . . the kings of the whole world” respectively, which are clearly designations not of the apostate church but the world. That is, the bowl-judgments are more comprehensive than Milligan’s system of correspondence will allow.

In a similar vein, but on a much larger scale of correspondence, Milligan<sup>58</sup> defends the thesis that the whole structure of Revelation is patterned in its arrangement of ideas on the structure of the life of Christ in the Gospel of John. Thus, both John’s Gospel and Revelation start with a prologue containing the main ideas to be developed in the main body. John 1:19–2:11 sets forth the Redeemer on the field of history before the conflict; Revelation 2–3 depicts the church in the world before the struggle. (But the marks of a severe struggle are already evident in the church). John 2:12–4:54 shows Christ in victory over sinful hearts and diseased bodies, as assurance against the coming struggle (but in John 4:1 the hostility has already started); Revelation 4–5 presents assurances of the church’s victory. John 5:1–12:50 describes Jesus’s conflict with the Jews and Revelation 6:1–18:24, the church’s struggle with the world. (But this is exceedingly general, and this in the bulk of both writings). John 13–17, Jesus pauses with his disciples at the end of a struggle substantially finished; Revelation 19:1–10, the church pauses to celebrate Babylon’s fall and to consign her enemies to death. (But it is arbitrary to single out this as an outstanding instance of a pause after victory in Revelation, especially in view of its synchronous structure.) Revelation 19:11–22:5, new conflict, victory and epilogue; John 19–21, cross, resurrection and epilogue. (But again, it is arbitrary to select only these chapters of the Apocalypse as describing these subjects.)

Milligan has hold of a truth here that is altogether too neglected in the commentaries. That truth is not that the logical structure of John’s Gospel and Revelation agree in any striking way; it is unfortunate that he burdens the truth he has with this forced, artificial

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<sup>58</sup> Milligan, *Book of Revelation* throughout; *Lectures*, 61ff.

construction which cannot do justice to either Gospel or Revelation. But the truth epitomized in the quotation-statement, “ ‘As thou didst send me into the world,’—that is the Gospel;—‘Even so sent I them into the world,’—that is the Apocalypse,”<sup>59</sup> is as instructive as it is attractive.

On the subject of recapitulation much more might be said. The evaluation of the problems already discussed would, however, be determinative of our view elsewhere since they cover the most crucial passages. If these features of Revelation do not recommend the synchronous structure to the student of this book, it is not likely that the consideration of any other passages would. Now, to avoid the impression that parallelism is the most prominent characteristic of Revelation and thus obscure its true nature, I would like to suggest briefly some manifestations of the equally important progressive-climactic course of thought evident in the Apocalypse.

## Logical Progression in Structure of Revelation

**PATH TO HEAVEN:** The outline, of the book here adopted, itself suggests one feature of the climactic order of thought. Revelation 1:9–3:22 pictures the church in the world and Revelation 21:9–22:5, the church in glory. Thus understood the visions are properly bounded instead of dribbling off, as regards the thought content, into loose ends at start and finish. Also, this makes prominent one of the, if not *the*, main purposes of all the visions of judgment and woe included within these bounds. To be sure, it is through such judgments that Christ brings every foe of his to be the footstool of his feet, but it is by this same process that his church is purified from every defilement and made to be his holy bride. This process of cleansing, this transformation of the church, a pilgrim below, into the church at home in the Father’s glorious mansions above, is adequately introduced and concluded only if the contrast of these two terminal main divisions of Revelation is recognized. Only when the church on earth, partaking of the sin and imperfection of this world, and the finished glorious creation of God’s redemptive program are thus presented in all their contrast, are the ways and the wisdom of God in suffering his people to tread their persecuted path through this life justified to men.

This instructive feature of the book is lost in an outline like Hendriksen’s, for the crowning vision of the church in glory is thrown in on his view simply as part of the seventh main section, the part that brings that section to the usual climax. Thus, it is on a par merely with the climaxes of the other divisions, and its obvious distinctiveness is lost. It is clear to all that the seven letters constitute a separate division of the book for their epistolary form is distinctive, and they form one of the obvious heptads. In the case of 21:9ff., however, it may possibly be urged that it should be included as a mere continuation of 21:8 and thus become part of the division on Final Judgments. We will, therefore, defend the construction adopted here, especially since this affords the opportunity to confirm the contrast between the seven letters’ picture of the church and this last vision of the redeemed in glory, as being the author’s specific intention.

1. It is true that the subject matter of 21:1–8 and 21:9–22:5 is quite similar. In the nature of the case this should be expected since every series ends with the close of the age or eternity, making it necessary, if a final vision of the consummation be added, that it blends into or parallels the previous climax in this way. Also, 21:1–8 has not a right to belong to the last unique vision, since it is not unique but bears a very close resemblance in thought

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<sup>59</sup> Milligan, *Lectures*, 69.

and language to other climaxes such as 7:9–17 and 14:1–5. As for its general similarity to 21:9–22:5, this is but another evidence of the author’s skill in making his transitions logically as well as formally smooth.

2. There is a distinction that should not be overlooked. After the brief statement that John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God made ready as a bride adorned for her husband, v. 2, the remainder of the revelation in 21:1–8 concerning the future of the saints is by *audition*, not direct vision. On the contrary, the whole of 21:9–22:5 is visionary in form.

3. It may seem to some that this is an insignificant or superficial consideration, but in light of the use of the phrase in the structure of Revelation, I believe some weight must be given to the fact that in the introduction to the vision of 21:9–22:5 John says that the angel “carried me away *in the Spirit*”—*ἐν Πνεύματι* (*en Pneumati*)—to see the holy city. This is the fourth and last appearance of such a statement. The evidence shows that this phrase is used most discriminatingly, since it appears in the introduction to what are probably the four fundamental sections of the book. It occurs in 1:10 which is introductory to the other (of what we are calling) terminal divisions of the Revelation, the Church Imperfect in the World. It occurs again in 4:2, after the seven letters and in the introduction to all the visions of the church’s conflict with the world and God’s non-final judgments on the wicked. Thirdly it occurs in 17:3 in the introduction to the Final Judgments, the outcome of the conflict. This affords a very striking parallel in the entirety of its introduction (17:1–3) to the last case (21:9–10), as well as in the contrast of its subject matter, representing the outcome of the apostate church whereas the outcome of the faithful church is found in 21:9ff. In 1:10ff., the church is in the midst of the world; in 21:9ff., the church has been taken out of the world. In 4:2ff., the church is in conflict with and overcome by the world; in 21:9ff., the church is at peace having overcome the world. In 17:3ff., the church apostate appears transformed to the world; in 21:9ff., the church glorified appears perfectly purified from the world. In these simple contrasts is the heart of the Apocalyptic message.

4. The unique appropriateness of 21:9–22:5 to serve as the closing contrast to the opening picture of the church in this present evil world (Revelation 2–3) appears in a detailed analysis of the fact that the imperfections attending the residence of the church on earth are conspicuous by their absence or their opposites in Revelation 21:9ff.:

In *Ephesus* (2:2) were false prophets; the *holy city* (21:14) has walls founded on the twelve true apostles of the Lamb.

In *Philadelphia* (3:9) and *Smyrna* (2:9) were false Jews; the *gates of the new Jerusalem* (21:12) are inscribed with the names of the tribes of true Israel.

*Pergamum* dwelt where Satan’s throne was (2:12); the *church at last* shall dwell where God’s throne is (22:1).

In *Sardis*, the most part was dead (3:1); in *the new Jerusalem* are “only they that are written in the Lamb’s book of life” (21:27).

It was necessary that the *churches of Asia* should serve as lampstands in the world (1:20; 2:5); *in glory* “they need no light of lamp, neither light of sun, for the Lord God shall give them light,” (22:5, compare 21:23), “and the lamp thereof is the Lamb. And the nations shall walk amidst the light thereof” (21:23–24).

The *church of John’s day* was filled with impurities—heresies and spiritual fornication (2:14–15, 20), imperfection and lukewarmness and liars (3:2, 9, 16); the *church of the eternal day* is marked by purity (21:18,21), the absence of “anything unclean, or that maketh an abomination and a lie” (21:27), indeed it is patterned after the Holy of Holies (21:16).

In the *cities of Asia*, the servants of God must face persecution (2:8–10; 3:10) resting on God’s promises to overcomers; in the *heavenly city*, the saints reign for ever and ever (22:5), and the overcomers inherit the promises (2:7, compare 22:2; 2:11, compare 21:27 and 22:3; 2:17, compare 22:4; 2:26–28, compare 22:5 and 21:22 [22:16]; 3:5, compare 21:27 and 22:5; 3:12, compare 21:10 and 22:4; 3:21, compare 22:1 and 22:5).

To make this analysis is practically to exhaust the contents of both divisions. So exhaustive a contrast is not a coincidence. Of course, these elements of contrast are found elsewhere in Revelation (see below), but in 21:9–22:5 there is an accumulation of points of contrast that indicate distinctiveness.

5. When to the facts of (a) the *a priori* desirability of a closing section to parallel by contrast the picture of the church in the seven letters, and (b) the actual extraordinary qualifications of 21:9–22:5 to be such, we add the previously observed affinity of 21:1–8 with the section beginning at 17:1 (including the further observation now that the appearance of the new heaven and new earth in 21:1 further associates 21:1–8 with the preceding since the fleeing away of heaven and earth (20:11) clamors for such a reappearance before this main division closes), the case for a new major division at 21:9 seems to be established. (It is interesting to notice that thus understood the conclusion of this Final Judgments section (21:1–8) closely parallels the end of the seven seals section (7:9–8:1); the close of the trumpets (11:19), and bowls (16:17–21) sections are akin, and the lone middle section of the Deeper Conflict is unique in its conclusion.)

It thus appears that there are five synchronous sections in Revelation, each of which ranges over the whole gospel dispensation and climaxes with a definite presentation of the eschatological finale, and in which as a whole the emphasis gravitates increasingly toward the end of the age, and which are bounded on either side by a section which, while not describing a period of time or subject matter not elsewhere alluded to or developed, yet does not fulfill the qualification of the others of covering the whole New Testament age. The final section obviously does not at any point take us back to the beginning of the New Testament dispensation. The seven letters just as obviously do not present a definite picture of the eschatological finale. It is perhaps the greatest single weakness of Hendriksen’s view that he is compelled to make the mere applicability of the seven churches of Asia’s conditions to the church of any period in the New Testament age the entire basis for the parallelism of this division with the others. In so doing he must ignore the following: (a) These letters formed an aspect of John’s experience in receiving the entire Revelation, distinct from all that follows. (b) They do not, and in the nature of the case could not, picture the end as the following series do at their climaxes. (c) The formal introductions of material contrasted to the seven letters as “the things which must come to pass hereafter” is evident in 4:1, re-emphasizing the break in the experience of the prophet at this point. The terminal sections are therefore not synchronous with the central five sections, but do not thereby mar the symmetry of Revelation but rather enhance it formally, while they also ground and crown the logical development in the book.

In this feature we have the most comprehensive example of progress of thought in the Apocalypse. As the Lord who bought her endured the contradiction of sinners against him and the pain of the cross before entering into the glory and joy that was set before him, so the church must carry the cross of affliction from within and from without until she is rewarded at length with the crown of life. This fundamental contrast and the progress inherent in it is made prominent in the opening and closing divisions of Revelation—the church imperfect and suffering in this evil world, and the church perfect and triumphant in that holy city Jerusalem which cometh down out of heaven from God.

The foregoing has made the distinctiveness of the terminal sections clear, but I trust in so doing the usual error in this regard has been avoided, namely, isolating the seven letters too completely from the rest. We have observed that the progress evident between the terminal sections illuminates the purpose of the intervening visions of judgment, and thereby all is logically knit together. It should also be observed that while 4:1 serves as a plain boundary line between what precedes and follows, this is not an absolute boundary even chronologically. In the following visions of “the things which must come to pass hereafter,” we are time and again brought back to the ministry of Christ and the inception of the church’s mission which of course precede the “things that are” as John beheld them in the church of his day in the seven letters.

**PATH TO HELL:** The progress which inheres in Revelation is exhibited in another way which appears as we further guard the *seven letters* from the isolationist policy, though not forgetting their distinctiveness, by a recognition of their *germinal* nature. There is not a major character (not speaking now of divine persons, though this were no exception) in Revelation which is not introduced and viewed from the point of view of church life in 1:9–3:22.

1. There was of course within the seven churches the *true church* invisible which the Head of the church could commend (2:2, 6; 2:9–10; 2:13; 2:19, 24; 3:4; 3:8–10; 3:19). Their ultimate estate of glory and the fulfillment of the promises made to them has already been discussed, i.e., the crowning vision of the New Jerusalem. But also throughout the book this body of the faithful appears, sometimes in similar visions of the crown attained (6:10–11; 7:9–17; 11:11–13; 14:1–5; 14:14–16; 15:2–4; 20:4–6; 21:1–8), sometimes suffering for their testimony more clearly than in the seven letters (6:9,11; 11:3–10; 12:13–17, compare 13:17; 18:24; 19:19; 20:9), or as protected of God and distinguished from the world, thus meeting the exigencies of new developments in the context (7:3–8; 11:1), or as the body of whom is Christ according to the flesh (12:1, 2, 5).

2. Also within the seven churches of Asia could be found *false, apostatizing* influences (2:2, 6; 2:9; 2:14–15; 2:20–23; 3:1; 3:9; 3:15–17). This leaven is seen working increasingly elsewhere in Revelation (9:1–19;<sup>60</sup> 11:2). The full, vile description and the final destruction of this agency is described towards the close (14:8; 16:19; 17–18) and seems to afford more delight in its fall to the hosts of heaven than the destruction of any other foe of the church (19:1–5), just as its plain and full manifestation in that wilderness where he had last seen the radiant woman occasions the Seer more surprise than any other revelation (17:6).

3. The world outside, the *imperial power*, is reflected in the seven letters in the persecution of the churches (2:9–10; 2:13). There is a very clear progress in the extensive development of this subject. In the fifth seal (6:9–10) the presence of Christian martyrs is evidence of the world’s manner of receiving the gospel and dispensations of God’s providence in the first four seals (compare 7:14). In chapter 11 is a remarkable anticipation and development of this theme in the Beast from the Abyss slaying the two witnesses. Then in chapter 13 the Beast is fully described in his Satanic agency, hellish power, and hatred of the saints (compare 14:9; 16:1,5,13,14,16). Its relation to Babylon is expounded, and its own entire history illuminated in chapter 17 (vv. 3–13) and its defiance of God in 17:14; 16:16; and 19:19. The climax of this career in judgment is fully described in 19:11–16, 20–21 (compare 6:15; 11:15; 14:11; 16:19; 17:14).

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<sup>60</sup> So, Fairbairn.

4. Almost inseparable from the imperial power in Revelation is *secularism*, man's prophethood gone astray, the wisdom of this world which genders materialism, false science and philosophy, and buries the souls of men in the interests of this world, enslaving them especially to the power of this world as manifested in imperial force. I believe the baneful effect of this secular drag upon the church appears in the loss of the Ephesians' first love (2:4), in the deadness and imperfection of the Sardis church (3:1–2), and in the lukewarmness that prevailed in Laodicea due to their dependence on their riches in the things of this world (3:15–18). Then beyond the seven letters, it is this wisdom of the world which opposes the foolishness of the gospel and makes the prophet's experience bitter in sounding forth the good news to many peoples, nations, tongues, and kings (10:10–11). On the other hand, this same worldly wisdom causes the merchants of the nations and the kings of the people to lament the destruction of the false apostate religion (chapter 18). Again, this worldly propaganda is seen for what it is, a fellow-beast of the imperial agent of Satan, deceiving men by its lamb-like features but enslaving them to the first Beast by its dragon-like claims—it is the false prophet (13:11–18). With the Beast and Satan, this false prophet gathers the nations to their destruction in the last conflict with God (16:13–14, 16) and is cast itself into the lake of fire at last (19:20).

5. The deep, underlying *Satanic power* set against the purposes of God is also specifically indicated in the churches of Asia (2:9,13, 24; 3:9). A widely recognized element of progress is the increased intensity of the spiritual conflict beginning at 12:1. Satan is now plainly exposed as the bitter foe of Christ and his people; he is the unseen source and strength of all the persecuting efforts of Beast and false prophet (12:17, compare 13:1, 11). When at the end they are overwhelmed by the Lamb, this constitutes the final overthrow of Satan also. (If national imperial power as such is utterly and finally uprooted from the world, i.e., the Beast is cast into the lake of fire, at 19:19, how can Satan still be using the nations as his agents of hostility against the saints in 20:8 if chronologically this is a thousand years later? He cannot; the author has recapitulated between these points.) As a vision of Satan appears just before the specific introduction of his agents (chapters 12 and 13)—though chronologically there is no difference since it was through the Beast in the form of Rome and Babylon in the form of Judaism that Satan opposed Christ at his birth and in his earthly ministry (12:3ff.), so also when these specific agencies have completely disappeared (19:20) before the wrath of the Lamb, Satan is brought to the reader's attention again and his destruction is pictured—and as in the inception of the anti-Christian efforts so now in their final overthrow, Satan is not to be chronologically separated from his agents, but rather their fall is his—19:20 and 20:10 are one. Being thus bounded by these two visions of Satan, the intervening careers of the Beast and False-Prophet are forcefully portrayed as Satanic in their source, character, and end; and thereby all is eloquently climaxed.

What is germinal in the seven letters develops in the progress inherent in Revelation. What is at first barely suggested as working behind the scenes and producing the effects observable on the surface of the earlier visions, presently appears itself on the surface fully described; then hastens on to judgment. To be sure the various climaxes throughout Revelation present the final judgment; but there is an increasing emphasis on the identity of the basic powers involved in this judgment, until in 17:1–21:8 this progress in thought is consummated with each hostile character being dealt with in turn with finality so that they never again darken the Seer's vision. To summarize, there is progress from the seven letters' germinal forms on to the end in the clarity of the identity and nature of the agents producing the Apocalyptic history, in the fierceness and depth of the world's hatred for



Christ, climaxing in one last unrestrained effort which is visited with Judgment, in the metamorphosis of the falsely professing church into a state of unrestrained harlotry, as well as in the perfecting of the church, the bride of Christ.

**PATH OF WRATH:** The counterpart to the progress in ungodly activity is naturally progress in the *judgments of God*. This is a rather comprehensive feature and widely acknowledged. Involved in this deepening of judgment to meet the deepening of sin are the seals-trumpets-bowls heptads. There is an increasing ominousness in the thoughts of opening seals, of sounding trumpets, and of pouring out bowls of wrath. Again, the fraction which is typical of the judgments are successively one fourth, one third, and in the bowls which are called “the last” plagues, judgment is no longer fractional but complete in its effects. Also, the identity of the objects of judgment becomes increasingly specific, in step with the same feature in the progress of the world’s hostility. This matter might be further elaborated,<sup>61</sup> but since it is generally accepted, we conclude by indicating that the climax of this process is the great Final Judgments, and thus sin and punishment climax, and disappear together.

No doubt the careful seeker could point to many other evidences of climactic arrangement in the Apocalypse. The three features indicated above are, however, the most comprehensive examples, namely, the germinal nature of the seven letters with the gradual development of the characters and careers of the forces detectable therein, especially in their hostility to God; the increasing severity of the judgments of God; and the perfecting of the faithful church and her deliverance from the present evil world into the glory and joy of the eternal city of God.

## Part 4

### The Eschatological Perspective of Revelation

“We have no right, therefore, in interpreting the Apocalypse, to interject into it the thought either of a long or a short development of events. It is a representation in which an idea, not the time needed for the expression of the idea, plays the chief part.”<sup>62</sup> In accord with this and enlarging upon it, Milligan finds in the Apocalypse three great ideas—conflict, preservation, and triumph; the first two are correlative, contemporaneous, and issue in the third at the manifestation of the Lord.

The main point here is well taken, but in the whole there is an over-simplification of the data. There is the preserving of the elect in their conflict with an evil world, and there is the ultimate triumph of the church in the final overthrow of her persecutors at the appearance of Christ in flaming fire taking vengeance, but there is also the recurring feature in the visions of a great crisis or hour of trial for the church and temporary yet dismaying success by the Satan-controlled enemies of God’s people. The presence of this crisis period just before the final triumph of the elect makes it necessary to qualify Milligan’s denial of the legitimacy of finding any intimation of the duration of this last age before the consummation, at least to the extent of recognizing two distinct periods within this age, the first of which would be relatively long. This is not to say that John necessarily conceived of the elapsing of

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<sup>61</sup> See Milligan, *Lectures*, 104ff.; and Fairbairn, 415 (seals); 424 (trumpets); 427 (vials).

<sup>62</sup> Milligan, *Lectures*, 153.

centuries as necessary to the fulfillment of his prophecies; rather, it is pointed out to clarify the eschatological structure presented by Revelation.

The sequence of a long period of preservation and witnessing by the church, terminating in a brief period of control by the Satanic hosts, which is in turn followed by the vindication and glorification of the saints and destruction of their foes at the second advent, is manifested in the following features of Revelation.

**CHAPTER 11:** The “two witnesses represent the Church in her function of witness bearing,”<sup>63</sup> and to them it is given to prophesy twelve hundred and sixty days. Their testimony completed, they are slain by the beast who comes up out of the abyss and lie dead for three and a half days. The hellish glee of the foe is then cut short by the resurrection and ascension of the witnesses and the great earthquake.

Irrespective of what interpretation of the symbols be adopted, it is undeniable that the suggested structure of testimony, trial, and triumph lies on the surface of the passage. Furthermore, in favor of the interpretation that this vision comprehends the whole interadvental age and that the hour of trial here depicted transpires immediately before the Parousia of Christ, rather than that the vision presents a typical episode fulfilled whenever and wherever the Word is proclaimed, we urge the following:

a. The 1260 days is elsewhere in Revelation used to denote the period of the church’s protection from the world’s hostility in its entirety.

b. The scope of the witnesses’ ministry (v. 9) affects all peoples, tribes, tongues, and nations. The inference seems fair that the gospel has therefore been preached in the uttermost parts of the earth, those whom Christ purchased from these very same groups (5:9) have been gathered into the fold, and that therefore the end is due. When the church’s testimony is finished as it is here (11:7), the end must come—Matthew 24:14.

c. The world power is called the beast out of the abyss. It is true that the abyss might be thought of as the ultimate origin of the beast at any time during its career. However, this description is especially apt at that last hour when it is thoroughly controlled by Satan who has just been loosed from *the abyss* (20:1, 7ff.). Furthermore, this is the only view that has warrant in Revelation itself, for in the other instance where the Beast is so described (Rev. 17:8ff.), its coming up from the abyss occurs after the present period when it is functioning through its sixth and seventh heads but apparently is not functioning in as openly an infernal manner, and this coming up from the abyss is in order to its going “into perdition” (compare 19:20).

d. There is a finality in the symbolism of the ultimate triumph of the witnesses that indicates that the day of salvation is past. The nations are just as decisively deprived of another chance to be confronted with the gospel in the manner of the ascension of the two witnesses as in the silencing of their mouths in death. Although such symbolism in itself should not, perhaps, be pressed, yet it may at least be insisted that such a strict interpretation of the character of the symbolism is the only interpretation in accord with the statement of 11:7. Also, the symbolical meaning of the numbers used to describe the earthquake judgment, in connection with the triumph of the witnesses, most consistently construed,<sup>64</sup> also suggests the finality of this event (i.e., The “tenth” denotes a minor completeness which betokens complete collapse, and 7000 denotes divine, absoluteness of completion.)

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<sup>63</sup> Swete, 100–106.

<sup>64</sup> See Lenski, 348, 358.

e. Against these considerations, whatever possible difficulty might be attached to the fact that there remains a group, “οἱ λοιποὶ” (hoi loipoi), after the earthquake, would not seem sufficient to alter the proposed interpretation. Indeed, their reaction of fright heightens the effect of disaster, and their giving glory to the God of heaven, though similar to the language of 16:9 where repentance is the plain connotation, is best understood in the light of a passage like Proverbs 1:24–28,<sup>65</sup> as a calling on God (which keeps the force of the language) which is, however, too late (which meets the demands of the context). That the language cannot be pressed as conclusive evidence of conversion appears from the fact that “every created thing” ascribes glory unto God and the Lamb (5:13).

**CHAPTER 20:** Again, regardless of interpretation (except in cases where the thousand years is deprived of temporal duration altogether as in A. Kuyper or W. Milligan) this passage bears on its surface the framework of eschatology defended here. There is the long period of Satan’s restraint, the little season when he is loosed, followed by his final destruction. An elaborate refutation of the Chiliastic scheme is not the purpose here; I would only remark that the presence in the passage of that very eschatological structure which elsewhere in Revelation obviously refers to the present gospel age is an argument in favor of an amillennial view. This view is here assumed to be correct, and we go on to observe the parallel between the structure of 20:1–10 and 11:1–13.

a. As the witnesses were given authority for a comparatively long period to complete their testimony to the nations, so Satan is restrained for a long period from so controlling the nations that they can crush the church’s testimony to the gospel as she seeks to penetrate to the uttermost part of the earth in obedience to her Lord’s command. The idea of completeness symbolized by the *thousand* years corresponds to the fact in chapter 11 that the witnesses are silenced only “when they shall have *finished* their testimony.” (v.7).

What may be said to Milligan’s objection that it would introduce confusion to designate the same period of time as both three and a half years and thousand years?<sup>66</sup> To say the least, Milligan with his very strong—and commendable—insistence on the symbolical significance of numbers in Revelation is in no position to offer such an objection. It is of the genius of his system to say with us that though the same period is in view it is not its length but its character primarily that is suggested by these numbers of years. Furthermore, it is clear that whenever 1260 days, forty-two months, or 3½ times is used, earthly history is the vantage point; when one thousand years is used, the reference is to the spiritual realm, i.e., Satan in the abyss or the saints in the intermediate state.

b. It has already been remarked in the discussion of the Beast from the abyss in chapter eleven that the short crisis phase in which it overcomes the witnesses is illuminated when paralleled with Satan’s coming up from the abyss after the one thousand years for a little season to paralyze the efforts of the saints (Rev. 20:8–9a). The entire symbolism of these verses is adequately accounted for by Hendriksen,<sup>67</sup> “The meaning then is this: the era during which the church as a mighty missionary organization shall be able to spread the gospel everywhere is not going to last forever; not even until the moment of Christ’s second coming.”

c. Those who made war on the two witnesses, and rejoiced over them, who were from all the nations, presently perished; so, Gog and Magog, the nations in the four corners of the earth, having succeeded in encompassing “the camp of the saints about” are devoured by

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<sup>65</sup> So Lenski, 349.

<sup>66</sup> Milligan, *Lectures*, 208.

<sup>67</sup> Hendriksen, 234.

fire from heaven and Satan who gathered them is cast into the lake of fire—the hard-beset saints overcome.

Milligan presents two further objections to the view here expounded: 1. “How can it be said of them (i.e., departed souls) that in whatever era they departed they ‘shall reign with Christ a thousand years’ if by these years we are to understand the whole period of the Christian dispensation and that alone?”<sup>68</sup> Milligan here assumes an atomistic viewpoint wholly foreign to the Book of Revelation and introduces the idea of a progressive enlarging of the living-reigning group which does not seem to be in the apostle’s mind in this passage at all. Rather, John views the church above *generically* and characterizes its intermediate state as one of living and reigning throughout. 2. Milligan further contends that Satan cannot be thought of fairly as bound in respect to the deceiving of the nations since “that action has never ceased. He has been their betrayer and destroyer in every age.”<sup>69</sup> Milligan himself urges that in the cross and resurrection of Christ, “Satan in his character as the deceiver of the nations has been in principle, completely, and forever, overcome.”<sup>70</sup> But why not acknowledge further that this victory of Christ and securing of all authority in heaven and on earth is most intimately connected with the command (which is a prophecy also) to the disciples to go and “make disciples of all the nations” (Matt. 28:18–19), transforming the Jewish kingdom into a universal one? The importance of this activity in the eschatology of Scripture can hardly be overestimated; certainly, it does not overstate this mighty expansion of God’s kingdom among the nations to say that Satan was bound and that he might not deceive the nations until the gospel age was completed.

**THE CAREER OF THE BEAST:** The Beast in its final form has been mentioned already. When we correlate all the evidence bearing on its activity in relation to the saints, the eschatological outlook which marks Revelation appears again. By way of introduction, we make the following observation. Clearly, Jesus Christ is portrayed in this book perfectly fulfilling the *three-fold office of prophet, priest, and king* on behalf of his people. Such is stated in brief compass in 1:5–6 and is elaborated in the activities of Jesus symbolized throughout the Apocalypse. His prophetic office is exercised in his whole relation to John in revealing the contents of Revelation, as well as more specifically in the seven letters and the opening of the seven-sealed book (though this last involves execution as well as revelation). His priestly office appears in the recurring symbol of the Lamb slain and in the consequences of the victory of his death, such as casting out Satan (12:7–10), arraying the saints with the robes of his righteousness (6:11; 7:9, 14), purchasing the elect (14:4), and in his close association with the heavenly temple (21:22, 23; 22:1, 3). His kingly office is exercised most clearly in his overcoming all his foes and those of his people (5:2, 16; 12:5; 17:14; 19:11 ff., especially 16). This is of course not at all exhaustive but makes the point.

Now I believe that just as in Christ we behold man’s intended three-fold office perfectly executed (not to mention now the redemptive, vicarious character of his work), so in the three main earthly foes of Christ’s church we behold the ultimate in the prostration of man’s three-fold office: the first Beast in respect to kingship; the second Beast, to prophethood; and the harlot-Babylon, to priesthood.

Man as priest is supposed to dedicate the world unto God. In the *harlot-Babylon*, man has aspired unto God’s prerogatives and has dedicated the riches of creation and civilization unto himself. Therefore, we find the long, detailed account of the merchandise of the world

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<sup>68</sup> Hendriksen, 208.

<sup>69</sup> Milligan, *Lectures*, 209.

<sup>70</sup> Milligan, *Lectures*, 216.

(Rev. 18) which was employed for the arraying of the harlot (especially 18:14, 16). Under this symbol falls all false religion and especially the apostate church; instead of leading men to God as they pretend, these cause the nations to commit spiritual fornication—"to drink the wine of the wrath of her fornication" (14:8). Such, the kingly power endures the peoples of the world to do, until it throws off all restraint at the end-time. Then there can be no more supporting (17:3) of institutions which make even a pretense of pointing to a supreme Being beyond, for then the kingly-power claims all worship for itself, and the result is the harlot's desolation (17:16). This interpretation of the harlot-Babylon as the prostituted priesthood or false-apostate religion seems almost conclusively confirmed by the remarkable similarity of detail in the character and career of the apostate Old Testament church as represented under the name of Jerusalem in Ezekiel 16:1–42: Jerusalem was an insatiable harlot multiplying her whoredoms unto all the nations (vv. 15, 26, 28–29); she was decked with all the world's goods (vv. 16–19); and her lovers at length turn on her in wrath (vv. 37–41), which Jehovah will gather them to do (v. 37)—just as it was God who put it into the hearts of the Beast and the nations to execute his will by destroying the harlot-Babylon (Rev. 17:17).

The *second beast* is plainly designated as the *false-prophet*. As true interpretation in accord with the true exercise of man's prophethood would have led to wisdom and understanding, it is natural that the efforts of the false interpreter are aimed at deception and ignorance. The description of this false-prophet's activity closes with an appeal to those who are in Christ exercising the office of prophet aright—"he that hath understanding" (13:18)—to see through the deception of the false-prophet, that is, to see that in leading men to worship the beast the false-prophet leads not unto ultimate truth, unto God, but into the chaos of creaturehood—"Six hundred and sixty and six" (Rev. 13:18).

But we have digressed a long way from our present interest of tracing the career of the figure symbolizing the prostitution of man's *kingly office* to Satan, the figure of the *Beast*. The undeniable derivation of the details of the description of this beast (13:2) from Daniel 7, where the beasts admittedly represent actual world empires, puts the burden of proof on the interpreter who denies that unregenerate man's kingly activities as displayed in governments and building of empires are symbolized by the beast of Revelation. Lenski is on the right track in insisting on the symbolical meaning of the number of the heads and horns and in insisting that the beast be not confined to any particular state or continent; but he goes too far into the abstract in his generalization of this figure as "the whole antichristian power"<sup>71</sup> without embodying this power in the general concept of empires or kingdoms.

The course of this imperial power is sketched three times: 13:3–7; 17:8; 17:10–14.

A. **Revelation 13:3–7** The Beast appears to John on the world scene at the beginning of the gospel age during which the radiant woman is protected in the wilderness; at least, such seems the obvious inference of a comparison of 12:13–17 with 13:1. This is confirmed by 13:5, "There was given unto him authority to continue forty-two months," which is the equivalent of the woman's wilderness sojourn (12:6). When the beast appears, it has already suffered a death stroke but has—or is in this reappearing from the sea—revived. This death stroke is best understood (by analogy with Daniel 2) in connection with the decisive victory of Christ represented in the previous chapter (see especially 12:7–9). Satan was decisively defeated, bound in certain respects—but not as yet finally overthrown. So, the beast suffered its mortal wound, but God gives it authority "to *continue*" during the

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<sup>71</sup> Lenski, 386.

gospel age (13:5). This corresponds to the long period of the church's testimony; also, the activities ascribed to the beast and his false prophet, i.e., their signs, blasphemies, demanding worship, etc., in chapter thirteen, should be understood as covering this same period. Yet, there is nothing which prohibits the thought that these activities issue in a climax which involves a last great crisis for the church. In fact, such an end-time crisis is demanded by a comparison of 13:7, 15 with 11:7 where the making war, overcoming and killing of the saints, was after the 1260 day—or missionary—period. In this passage the course of the beast is not carried far enough for us to witness its final overthrow, unless we read on into chapter 14 and see it implied there. As far as it goes, however, this passage demonstrates the eschatological framework of the Apocalypse here defended.

**B. Revelation 17:8** Every reader is struck by the multitude of Satanic substitutes for the true work of God appearing in Revelation.<sup>72</sup> In this passage, the name used of the first and second persons of the trinity, “He which is, and which was, and which is to come,” (1:4, 8) is counterfeited; “the Beast that thou sawest was and is not, and is about to come up out of the abyss, and goeth into perdition.” To change the temporal point of reference (as Lenski<sup>73</sup>) from the time of the angelic interpretation of the vision (which is something far different than seeing the vision) to the time of Christ's ministry introduces confusion. The “is not” refers to the time of John's receiving this explanation, i.e., the late first century; its *terminus ad quem* (final point in time) is clarified in 17:10–11, and its *terminus a quo* (starting point in time) is understood in the light of the beast's death-stroke as explained above. It occasions no real difficulty that the beast in chapter 13 is pictured as active during the gospel age, whereas here in 17:8 it “is not” during this same period. An analogous case is the binding of Satan during the gospel age (chapter 20), while at the same time he is cast down to the earth and is very much active (12:13). That the beast “was,” would therefore refer to Old Testament activities before Christ came and delivered the “death-blow.” The “is about to come up out of the abyss” is still future, just as the fact that Christ “is to come” is future. (Beckwith agrees that this is a last, future development and associates it with 19:11–19.<sup>74</sup> He identifies this form of the beast as the antichrist. Though probably not the antichrist himself, but rather the force he heads up, yet surely this stage is the acme of the beastly development.) As there is a sense in which Christ is now come in his kingdom, so also the beast may be thought of as present in the present imperial powers (compare chapter thirteen), and yet “is about to come,” just as Christ also in a final sense will come at a future day. (Notice that the deceptive parousia of the man of sin [2 Thess. 2] immediately precedes the true parousia of Christ.) Then the abyss-like character of the beast becomes manifest, according with the loosing from the abyss, for this last little season, of Satan, the power working in the beast. Although, finally, the structure of the sentence (v. 8) makes “and goeth into perdition” coordinate with, rather than subordinate to, “and is about to come up out of the abyss.” I believe an examination of the next passage will reveal a very close relation between the two, besides proving further that this coming up out of the abyss pertains to the future final crisis.

It has appeared again, then, that the career of the beast consists of the long period of restraint of evil—“is not,” the short crisis period—“is about to come up from the abyss,” and the final victory of Christ over the beast—“and goeth into perdition.”

**C. Revelation 17:10–14** In 17:10 the seven heads of the beast are explained. The number seven is as symbolical here as anywhere else in Revelation. The number five of

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<sup>72</sup> See Milligan, *Lectures*, 110–14.

<sup>73</sup> Lenski, 501.

<sup>74</sup> Beckwith, 397.

necessity shares in the symbolism of the seven of which it is a part and therefore refers in a general way to all B.C. activity of the beast. The sixth head-king, “the one is,” is the imperial power of John’s day. The seventh had not yet arrived but would later and would continue a little while, which refers to developments still future to the imperial power of John’s day generally. The absolute necessity of generalizing here should warn against literalism in the first five heads, especially since there is no particular scriptural ground for identifying five—no more, no less—empires before Christ, as the diversity of such attempted identifications abundantly testifies.

The final development of the seven—ἐκ τῶν ἑπτὰ (*ek tōn hepta*)—is the beast, appearing as an eighth empire; and as the culmination of this process of iniquity goes into perdition. It should be noted that in 17:11 the beast’s substitute for the divine name contains only the first two elements (compare 11:17, where when Christ has come the last clause of his title is also omitted): ὁ ἦν καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν (*ho ēn kai ouk estin*); but taking the place of, and therefore surely the equivalent of, the καὶ μέλλει ἀναβαίνειν ἐκ τῆς ἀβύσσου (*kai mellei anabainein ek tēs abussou*), is the statement the beast was an eighth kingdom, climaxing the seven, and as such going into perdition.

This clinches two of the above contentions. 1) The οὐκ ἔστιν (*ouk estin*) of 17:8 refers to the present gospel age up until the finishing of the church’s testimony. 2) The going into perdition is most intimately related to the coming of the beast from the abyss, which of necessity makes the openly abyss-like character of the imperial power a phase of the end-time. This confirms our interpretation of chapter eleven where we found no mere typical experience of the gospel but the total course of the witnessing church, in so far as we based the interpretation on the presence of the “beast from the abyss” at the close. This end-time appearance of the beast, and its going to perdition is elaborated in 17:12–14 where in association with the ten horn-kings the beast wars against the Lamb who overcomes them (compare 19:19–21; 20:10).

Again, therefore, we have the long period of the comparative restraint of evil (sixth and seventh heads, 17:10); the hour of crisis (the beast as the eighth head and the ten horns, 17:11–13); and the victory of the Lamb (the beast goes into perdition, 17:11, and the King of kings overcomes, 17:14).

As a comprehensive exhibition of this same structure, we examine the *three heptads of seals, trumpets, and bowls*. In the first five seals, and the first six of both trumpets and bowls, is that long period of calling to repentance, especially by the judgments of God on evil doers. There is a progression in the severity and finality of these judgments which intimates that there must be a corresponding aggravation of the fury of the hostile world which is persistently unrepentant. Everything points to a final crisis clash, but this does not appear as a clearly defined hour of trial for believers within the first two heptads. However, in the bowls’ series, the world’s hostility is more specifically and frequently referred to than in the seals and trumpets (16:2 “men that had the mark of the beast, and worship his image”; 16:9, blasphemy and lack of repentance; 16:10, “throne of the beast”, blasphemy, no repentance). We are well prepared then for a mention of the climax of this worldly opposition, and it appears in the sixth bowl. This pictures the kings of the whole world gathered together “unto the war of the great day of God, the Almighty. . . . And he gathered them together into the place which is called in Hebrew Har-Magedon” (16:14, 16). This battle is the same as that of 19:19 and 20:8. Furthermore, in view of the parallelism of these heptads, this final war may be readily supplied as the climax crisis in the seal and trumpet series also. Nor is it wholly unprepared for there. At the opening of the fifth seal (6:9–10) appeared martyrs, revealing that the world was rejecting the call to repentance inherent in

the first four seals.<sup>75</sup> Also, after the sixth trumpet (9:20–21) is a comprehensive statement of the failure of the nations to repent in spite of the physical and spiritual judgments visited on them in the trumpets-series. Then, of course, the final triumph of the righteous through the power of the Almighty appears in the sixth and seventh seals (6:12ff., 8:1), the seventh trumpet (11:15ff.), and the seventh bowl (16:17ff.), where are described the cosmical changes, the terror of the unrepentant in the hands of an angry God, and the consummation of God's kingdom.

The church which has faithfully proclaimed the Word to the wicked as God visited judgments upon these wicked through the long gospel age is tested in a final Har-Magedon of distress but is again seen triumphant in Christ, as we survey these three heptads.

We merely suggest as a possible very general case of the apparent eschatological structure proposed here, the entire structure of the Revelation. We do not forget the fact of synchronism which with its many interlocking elements forbids a simple consecutive outline of the book under the three proposed headings without a detail being out of place. Still, it seems to be a fair conclusion that in respect to the main emphasis of the thought, chapters 1–16 deal more with the state of affairs during the gospel age, and in chapters 17–22 the idea of God's judgment predominates increasingly. Also, from the closing of the first of these two divisions to the middle of the second are concentrated almost all of the specific references to the final manifestation of the world's Satanic hatred of Christ—16:13–16; 17:8–14; 19:19; 20:8–9. The whole of Revelation in a general fashion shares the eschatological structure which more specifically appears in its various parts.

To leave the matter here would display the plant with its flower but would deprive it of its source of life. The Revelation does not so display its eschatological perspective but roots and grounds it in the historical manifestation and ministry of the eternal Son of God, the Lamb of God slain before the foundations of the world. The opening vision presents the overwhelmingly glorious figure of the "one like unto a son of man" who says "I am the first and the last and the living one; and I was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades. Write, therefore!" All of the things which John shall see, the things that are and the things which shall come to pass hereafter—the whole book of Revelation—unfold as the consequence of the historical career of the eternal, Living One. Again, when the seven letters to the churches have been delivered and the visions proper are to be disclosed, they are prefaced by the disclosure of "the Lion that is of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David" who "hath overcome," even the "Lamb standing as though it had been slain," "in the midst of the throne" and adored in union with him who sits on the throne by all the heavenly host and every created thing in heaven, on earth, and under the earth. He has overcome—let the last days proceed. Again, in the heart of the Revelation, the man child's life and victory over Satan passes in review. Before the church's arch-foes are introduced bringing in the deeper spiritual conflict in the latter portion of the Apocalypse or her final victory elaborated with crowning glory, it is said of her Christ that by reason of his rebuking Satan through his ministry of suffering on earth the time of his authority "is come." Because Jesus Christ lived, died, and rose again, there is a church with a testimony for the nations, there is a hatred which will one hour reach a climax on the part of the unbelieving, unrepentant world which refuses his kingly call, and there will be a final and everlasting triumph for God and his redeemed.

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<sup>75</sup> It is possible that the little time, *χρόνον μικρόν* (*chronon mikron*), during which the number of the martyrs was to be fulfilled, is one with the little time, *μικρόν χρόνον* (*mikron chronon*), during which Satan was to be loosed after the thousand years, and that we have, therefore, in the fifth seal a specific reference to the final crisis.



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# Servant Standards

## Commentary on the Form of Government of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Chapter 23 part 1

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by Alan D. Strange

### Chapter XXIII Ordaining and Installing Ministers

1. When a call is issued to a minister or licentiate it shall be regarded as a request by the calling body for his installation. When the person called has declared his willingness to accept the call this shall be regarded as his request to be installed; in the case of a licentiate it shall be regarded as a request first to be ordained.

**Comment:** The issuance of a call on the part of the body issuing it (a congregation, presbytery, or agency of the church) serves as a request to the presbytery that the one receiving it be installed; his declared willingness to accept such a call constitutes his request to the presbytery to be installed. If the one receiving such a call is a licentiate, his stated desire to accept that call is to be taken as a request that he be first ordained to gospel ministry and then installed into the position to which the call pertains.

2. A licentiate may be ordained as a minister of the Word when he has given sufficient evidence that he has the ministerial gifts required for instruction and rule in Christ's church in accordance with the provisions of Chapter XXI, Section 1, and has been called to a ministerial service approved by the presbytery. A minister may be received from another denomination when he has given sufficient evidence that he has the ministerial gifts required for instruction and rule in Christ's church in accordance with the provisions of Section 6 of this chapter.

**Comment:** A licentiate, one may recall from the commentary on FG 21, is one who has given sufficient evidence of the graces and gifts requisite for gospel ministry, and the presbytery has consequently licensed him. Licensure serves, on the part of the presbytery, as a certification that this candidate has such graces and gifts. The licentiate becomes a probationer, undergoing a trial period to determine whether God's people and further examination by the presbytery will discover that the candidate is indeed fit to receive a call and be ordained to ministerial service. When sufficient evidence is present and a successful probation has been concluded (typically no less than six months), a licentiate may be ordained as a minister of the Word when he has received a call to such ministerial service that is approved by the presbytery. Similarly, a minister may be received from another denomination when he has proven himself in terms of section 6 of this chapter, below.

3. That the most effectual measures may be taken to guard against the admission of unqualified men into the sacred office the presbytery shall ordain a licentiate, or receive a minister from another denomination, if he has satisfactorily completed the academic requirements set forth in Chapter XXI, Section 3, and an adequate course of study in a theological seminary equivalent to that required for a regular three-year theological degree.

Ordination of a licentiate, or reception of a minister from another denomination, without the full requirements specified above and in Section 6, below, may be granted as an exception to the above rule only if the presbytery, after reporting the whole matter to the general assembly and weighing such advice as it may offer, shall judge, by a three-fourths vote of the members present, that such exception is warranted by the qualifications of the candidate.

If the presbytery is satisfied as to the ministerial qualifications of the candidate but finds that he lacks competency in the Hebrew and Greek languages, or one of them, it may judge by a three-fourths vote of the members present to waive these requirements without referring this question to the general assembly for advice. Such action shall be taken only when the applicant has given affirmative answer to the following question:

Do you agree that you will make a continuing endeavor, under the direction of the presbytery, to attain competency in those languages until the presbytery is satisfied?

**Comment:** As noted earlier, in the comment on FG 21.3 and elsewhere, Presbyterians are committed to an educated clergy. It is important that licentiates in the OPC or ministers from other denominations possess and be able to demonstrate adequate learning, which ordinarily includes the completion both of an undergraduate degree at a college or university and a divinity degree at a theological seminary. If the candidate has not achieved such academic attainments, he must be able to compensate for such, either through complementary academic attainments or, in rare cases, rigorous proven self-study. In any case, one must be able to pass comprehensive examinations for ordination, whether prepared for such by institutional preparation or again, rarely, in exceptional cases, one's own course(s) of study.

These days one often hears that character qualities, not intellectual ones, predominate in the list of necessary attributes for would-be officers, especially ministers and ruling elders. A survey of 1 Timothy 3:1–13 and parallels confirms that predominance. That academic training as such is not explicitly addressed in the pastoral epistles—though the human author, Paul, was himself highly academically trained—does not mean that it is neither needed nor desirable.

While the requirement that an overseer/bishop (*episkopos*) be “apt to teach” has an academic component to it, the weight of the apostle's emphasis admittedly remains focused on graces rather than gifts. Admitting that, though, is not to make light of the need for ministers to have solid academic preparation for the gospel ministry. There are so many things in the present day necessary for ministry, not only the biblical languages, which the apostles knew and spoke, but also how to deal with all that has transpired in modern times (e.g., in the works of Marx, Nietzsche, Darwin, Freud, Foucault, Derrida, etc.) as that impacts the faith, including currents. Ministers should be able in some measure both to preach the gospel and defend the faith against its detractors. Such preparation involves, in no small measure, rigorous academic study and application.

Having said that, the necessary graces that must mark a candidate for ministerial office are indispensable to the office. It is easier, in one respect, for a man to be highly gifted and quite dedicated in intellectual preparation for office than it is for him to be

spiritually disciplined and, frankly, pious. To be a man of real prayer and godliness, a man who honestly sees himself in his native sin and misery and earnestly desires more than anything to be holy and a vessel fit for the master's use, is always paramount. Paul's list in 1 Timothy 3 is not exhaustive but suggestive of the kind of godliness that must mark a man who would be a minister of the gospel. The challenge to presbyteries here is quite real: while it is hard work to prepare properly for the ministry academically and intellectually, success in such is more readily ascertained by the presbytery as an examining body than is assessing true humility and piety in the candidates. That often takes some time truly to manifest itself, and presbyteries must do the best that they can in the limited time of engagement that they enjoy in the process of licensure and ordination. However, written and oral testimonials required by FG 23.6 may play an important part in the presbytery's assessment of the godliness of a candidate.

The way that Presbyterians have sought to assure a ministerium that is academically gifted (graces usually being ascertained from personal observation and field experience assessment) is to require candidates to attend schools particularly equipped to aid in academic preparation for ministry, namely, theological seminaries. Completion of a three-year program (or its equivalent) in such is commonly where a man both obtains the tools that he needs for ministry and sharpens his use of them. The seminary, of course, gives neither gifts nor graces but can serve to help a man develop that which God has given him. As noted earlier, if a man lacks such theological training, he must nonetheless possess the sorts of gifts and have skill in the use of them with which theological training in a seminary is calculated to furnish him.

In any case, no presbytery can ever dispense with ascertaining that a man has the requisite gifts and graces for ministry. If he has otherwise developed the necessary gifts and graces, elsewhere than study in a theological seminary, a presbytery may seek an exception to the rule requiring seminary education for ministers. Ordination of a licentiate or reception of a minister from another denomination without the full requirements specified in the first paragraph of this section may be granted as an exception only if the presbytery reports the matter to the GA and weighs such advice as it may offer and then determines, by a three-fourths vote of members present, that such exception is warranted by the qualifications otherwise evident with respect to the candidate.

If the presbytery has found that a candidate possesses the necessary ministerial qualification but lacks competency in the biblical languages, it need not take such to the GA. The presbytery can waive the language requirement, by a three-fourths vote of the members present, but only after ascertaining that the candidate is willing to make a continuing effort to satisfy the presbytery that he has attained competency in both the Hebrew and Greek languages. The candidate, in fact, must affirmatively pledge that he will endeavor to do so.

4. When a licentiate indicates his willingness to accept a call, the presbytery shall, at the earliest time convenient to both the presbytery and the licentiate, examine him as to his qualifications for the sacred office, with a view to his ordination.

**Comment:** In Presbyterianism, one is never ordained without a call to a specific office: pastor, teacher, or evangelist. It is only when someone deemed qualified to be called to office, which is what licensure (and being a licentiate) is, receives a call from a

local congregation, presbytery, or other authorized denominational agency that the process of ordination begins. This process, which involves various examinations, including an examination on the floor of presbytery in theology, ensues only upon the reception of a call by a licentiate and his expressed willingness to accept such a call. Licentiate have asked presbyteries from time to time to begin the examination process for ordination in anticipation of a call, but the process never begins until the reception of said call. His receiving a call does mean that the presbytery is to begin the process of examination at the earliest convenience of both parties with his stated intention to accept the call.

5. If a licentiate is called to ministerial service within the Church, and the presbytery has authorized his ordination, he shall be ordained and installed at an occasion arranged for the purpose. If he is called to ministerial service under auspices other than those of this Church and indicates that he desires to accept the call, the presbytery, if it approves of the call and authorizes his ordination, shall ordain him at a time suitable to the parties concerned.

**Comment:** When a licentiate, being called to ministerial service within the church by some duly authorized body (local congregation, presbytery, or other authorized agency), has been approved and authorized by the presbytery for ordination, he shall be ordained to the gospel ministry and installed into that particular call. It should be noted that ordination is to the gospel ministry generally (wherever the Lord shall call one to service throughout the course of his life) and installation is to that particular call specifically, which may change multiple times in a man's lifetime of service in the ministry.

The second sentence indicates situations in which a man seeks ministerial service outside the church. If the call to such ministerial service is from a church outside the bounds of the OPC, and the man desires to accept said call, the presbytery must determine whether it approves of such a call. If it does, the presbytery authorizes his ordination and proceeds to ordination at a mutually agreeable time. In some cases, a call is not in view (as in an appointment to teach in a theological seminary, which does not issue calls since it is not the church), and any call to service in such must come from within the church (from a presbytery or local session, to serve as a teacher in that institution).

6. Trials for ordination shall consist of the following: (1) the evaluation of written and oral testimonials as to the candidate's satisfactory exercise of the gifts for the gospel ministry; (2) an examination as to the candidate's Christian faith and life; as to his knowledge of the Bible, theology, apologetics, ecclesiastical history, the Greek and Hebrew languages, and such other branches of learning as to the presbytery may appear requisite; and as to his knowledge of the confession, government, discipline, and worship of the Church; this examination may include such written discourses, founded on the Word of God, as shall seem proper to the presbytery. If the examination is referred to a committee an examination at least in theology shall also be held before the presbytery; if one-fourth of the presbyters present at the meeting are dissatisfied with the examination in theology, the candidate shall be required to continue the examination at a future meeting of the presbytery.

**Comment:** Even as a man undergoes various trials before being licensed to preach the gospel, once he receives a call to ministerial service, he, as a licentiate, undergoes

various trials for ordination. These trials consist mainly of two parts: the presbytery receiving and assessing various testimonials concerning the candidate and further examinations, extending those that he received when a candidate for licensure. With respect to testimonials, it is customary for a candidate to request various parties familiar with his preparation for ordination and recipients of his ministry to submit attestations to the presbytery on his behalf. Such testimonials affirm that the candidate has gifts suitable for gospel ministry and that he has, in a satisfactory and beneficial way, exercised said gifts among them.

Further examinations also gauge the suitability of the candidate for gospel ministry. He is examined in faith and life with a view to ascertaining his Christian character, commitment, service, and the like. He is examined as to his overall, comprehensive knowledge of the Bible (often referred to as an “English Bible Exam,” meaning the Bible in one’s own language as opposed to an exam in the original languages of the Bible). He is also examined in all the loci of systematic theology, including apologetics (for which licentiates are not examined), church history, and the original biblical languages (Greek and Hebrew). The presbytery, though it is not customary among us, does have the freedom to examine him in other areas of learning that it might deem necessary, especially for his calling (perhaps in philosophy, if he is called to teach apologetics, e.g., in a seminary).

The candidate for ordination is also examined in the secondary (specifically, the Westminster Confession of Faith) and tertiary standards of the church (the BCO, commonly called the examination in the “black book”), which is what is meant by examination in the confession, government, discipline, and worship of the Church. These are also new and additional exams to those he received for licensure. All these examinations may be oral, written, or a combination, with the right of the presbytery to ask for written discourses wherever it deems appropriate or needful. It is often the case that if a man is being examined by the same presbytery that licensed him, particularly if the ordination exams occur soon (within a year, say) after the licensure exams, that the presbytery either does not reexamine him much or at all in materials in which he has been shortly before examined in by that same presbytery.

These examinations may be conducted by the presbytery on the floor of the presbytery, though this is not customarily done. Rather, the examinations as a whole tend to be given by the presbytery to a committee (usually a standing Committee on Candidates and Credentials), which may conduct them as it sees fit (or in keeping with the instructions of the presbytery). The committee reports to the presbytery the candidate’s progress (e.g., the committee reports that the candidate has successfully sustained his examinations in Greek and Hebrew). In all cases, however, an examination in theology must be conducted on the floor of presbytery. At least that examination, in other words, must be done before the whole presbytery, usually conducted by member(s) of the Committee on Candidates and Credentials before being opened to questions on the floor from the presbytery as a whole.

For this examination in theology successfully to be sustained, the candidate must receive the approbation of at least three-quarters plus one of the presbyters present at the meeting. This is a way of putting positively what is put negatively by the FG at this point: If one fourth (25%) of the presbyters witnessing the floor examination in theology are not satisfied with the examination, ascertained by a vote expressing such, the ordination

process goes no further at this point. Rather, the candidate, who has received a negative vote by at least a quarter of the presbytery, is required to return to the presbytery, if he still wishes to pursue ordination, for further examination at another date. To ensure proper vote counts, here many presbyteries often resort to roll call votes (or at least rising counts) instead of mere voice votes (secret ballots are not generally seen as appropriate in such a case, since votes on such should be open). This shows the extraordinary amount of support by the presbytery that a candidate must enjoy successfully to sustain examination in the ordination process.

7. When a licentiate has been called to be the pastor of a congregation and has expressed his desire to accept the call, and the presbytery has satisfied itself that he has the requisite qualifications for the office and service as specified in Sections 1, 5, and 6, above, the presbytery shall appoint a time to meet to ordain and install him. The service shall be, if convenient, in the church of which he is to be the minister. It is also recommended that a day of prayer and fasting be observed in the congregation previous to the day of ordination.

**Comment:** The most ordinary situation in view here is a licentiate being called to pastor a particular local congregation. When a licentiate has thus been called, and indicated that he wishes to accept said call, and when the presbytery has satisfied itself that the candidate in view has the necessary qualifications for office and service as noted already in this chapter of the FG (in Sections 1, 5, and 6, above, most pointedly), the presbytery shall determine and appoint a time to meet so that it might ordain and install him as a pastor of the congregation that has issued a call to him.

The service of ordination and installation for said candidate should ordinarily, if convenient, take place in the church to which he is called to be minister. The reason that such might not occur is, say, the church rents a facility on Sundays and wishes to have the ordination on Friday or Saturday and cannot secure the facility for that time. Then the ordination and installation may occur in a neighboring church or the like, with as many of the calling congregation present as possible. The last sentence of the section is sometimes neglected but should not be. At some day before the ordination and installation of the candidate, it is appropriate that a day of prayer and fasting be held in the local congregation in anticipation of such. The focus of such would obviously be to seek the Lord for blessing upon the ministry of the one to be ordained, both for the minister and the congregation, that his ministrations would be most suitable for the congregation and that they would joyfully receive such, for the good of all and the glory of Christ.

8. At the time for ordination and installation the moderator of the presbytery, or another appointed in his place, shall preside over the meeting of the presbytery, with the congregation present. A minister previously appointed shall preach a sermon appropriate to the occasion. Afterwards the moderator shall briefly inform the congregation of the proceedings of the presbytery preparatory to this occasion; he shall also instruct the congregation, in the following or similar language, concerning the warrant and nature of the office of minister of the Word of God and the duties of a pastor toward a congregation:

The Word of God clearly teaches that the office of minister was instituted by the Lord Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul declares that our Lord "gave some to be apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the

perfecting of the saints, unto the work of ministering, unto the building up of the body of Christ."

The duties of the minister of Christ may briefly be set forth under the following heads: the faithful exposition of the Word of God and its application to the needs of the hearers, in order that the unconverted may be reconciled to God and that the saints may be built up in their most holy faith; the offering of prayer to the Lord on behalf of the congregation; the administration of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper; and the exercise, in conjunction with the ruling elders, of the government and discipline of the church.

The office of the minister is first in the church for dignity and usefulness, for, by our God's sovereign design, the ministry of the Word is the primary instrument in our Lord's gathering and perfecting of his church. The person who fills this office is designated in Scripture by different names expressive of his various duties. As he has the oversight of the flock of Christ, he is termed bishop. As he feeds them with spiritual food, he is termed pastor and teacher. As he serves Christ in his church, he is termed minister. As it is his duty to be grave and prudent, and an example to the flock, and to govern well in the house of God, he is termed presbyter or elder. As he is sent to declare the will of God to sinners, and to beseech them to be reconciled to God through Christ, he is termed ambassador. As he is commanded to warn the house of Israel against the enemies of God and his Word, he is termed watchman. And, as he dispenses the manifold grace of God and the ordinances instituted by Christ, he is termed steward of the mysteries of God.

He shall instruct them concerning the duties of a congregation toward a pastor, and shall endeavor to give the people a proper sense of the solemnity of both ordination to the office and installation in the field of service.

Then, addressing the candidate, he shall propose to him the following questions:

(1) Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice?

(2) Do you sincerely receive and adopt the Confession of Faith and Catechisms of this Church, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures?

(3) Do you approve of the government, discipline, and worship of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church?

(4) Do you promise subjection to your brethren in the Lord?

(5) Have you been induced, as far as you know your own heart, to seek the office of the holy ministry from love to God and a sincere desire to promote his glory in the gospel of his Son?

(6) Do you promise to be zealous and faithful in maintaining the truths of the gospel and the purity, the peace, and the unity of the church, whatever persecution or opposition may arise unto you on that account?

(7) Do you promise to be faithful and diligent in the exercise of all private and personal duties which become you as a Christian and a minister of the gospel, as well as in all the duties of your office, endeavoring to adorn the profession of the gospel by your life, and walking with exemplary piety before the flock over which God shall make you overseer?

(8) Are you now willing to take the charge of this congregation, in agreement with your declaration when you accepted their call? And do you promise to discharge the duties of a pastor to them as God shall give you strength?

**Comment:** All that has proceeded in the ordination process (the call itself, the desire to accept it on the part of the candidate, the evaluation of the testimonials, and the areas of further examination by an approving presbytery) has been with a view to that to which we now come: the actual service of ordination and installation. The moderator of the



presbytery, or someone that he appoints to serve on his behalf, convenes the meeting of the presbytery at the time, date, and place agreed upon beforehand. Normally, this meeting is convened initially, and usually privately, with only presbyters (ministers of the presbytery and duly commissioned ruling elders to that meeting of presbytery) and those who may be seated as corresponding members (non-commissioned ruling elders of the regional church, guest ministers from other presbyteries or other denominations, etc.) present.

This meeting, occurring something like fifteen minutes before the presbytery reconvenes in the meeting place with the congregation present, goes over the basic format of the public meeting that is to follow. This meeting recesses to come back to order in the public meeting, highlighting that a service of ordination and installation is a presbytery meeting that occurs with the calling congregation present for most of the meeting. This service proceeds somewhat in the fashion of a customary worship service: the moderator of the meeting leads the presbytery and congregation in Scripture, prayer, song, etc. Someone previously appointed, usually requested by the ordinand (often a mentor or the like), preaches a sermon.

After this, the moderator then details the proceedings that have transpired leading to this point of a man receiving a call and being ordained and installed in the pastorate in that place. The moderator then sets forth the warrant and duties of a minister of the Word of God, particularly those pertaining to the pastoral office. The FG furnishes specific words for this task. These or like words should be used in informing the congregation of such, which include not only setting forth the duties of a pastor to a congregation but also those of the congregation to the pastor. Further comments on these important words about the nature and warrant of the office of minister will appear in an appendix of this commentary.

Now the time has come for the administration of the ministerial vows. We live in a day in which vows often mean little (marriage, baptismal, church membership, and the like). The minister, as in everything spiritual and ecclesial, should take leadership and show both at the administration of the vows, and subsequently, that he takes the vows with utmost seriousness and always endeavors, though not without fault, to maintain the sacred vows that he took at his ordination. They should in no small measure come to shape his walk with Christ and the way he conducts himself throughout the whole course of his office.

A few noteworthy things about the vows: the first three are carefully cast to suit the different subjects to which the ministerial candidate pledges loyalty. The first is to the Bible, the second is to the doctrinal standards, and the third is to the church order. Different verbs are operative in each case: one says that he “believes” the Bible, “receives and adopts” the doctrinal standards, and “approves” the church order. These different verbs fit, since the Bible is simply believed as given, without qualifications or scruples; the doctrinal standards are sincerely (from the heart) received and made one’s own confession of faith (minor scruples being allowed that do not impact the system of doctrine, at the presbytery’s discretion)<sup>1</sup>; and the church order is “approved,” meaning

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<sup>1</sup> The precise nature of confessional subscription, and what scruples may be expressed, is taken up in David W. Hall, ed., *The Practice of Confessional Subscription* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1995); see especially the essay in this volume by John R. Muether, “Confidence in our Brethren: Creedal Subscription in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church,” 301–310. Gregory E. Reynolds, “The Nature, Limits,

one is willing to work within its present structure, even if one conceives helpful improvements. The vow of subjection to the brethren in the Lord is a sobering one, meaning that the candidate willingly subjects himself to the presbytery and its due disciplinary process, both informal and formal.

The fifth question has motive as its concern: can the candidate honestly affirm that he seeks the ministry because he loves God and wants to promote the glory of Christ's gospel? This stands over against seeking it for perceived self-glory or the promotion of one's own agenda. Question six asks whether one is willing to maintain the truth at all costs, not at variance with the purity, peace, and unity of the church but to promote such. Such zealousness and faithfulness as the question enjoins is always necessary, even more so in perilous times in which persecution for the faith especially looms. The seventh vow has in view what I said above: the minister, both personally and in the exercise of his office, in private and public, must be an exemplar. The importance of this question cannot be overestimated. The final oath is one involving the particular call and congregation and the approbation of the candidate that he continues willing to serve those who have called him to such service.

9. The candidate having answered these questions in the affirmative, the moderator shall propose to the people the following questions, to which they shall answer in the affirmative by holding up their right hands:

(1) Do you, the people of this congregation, continue to profess your readiness to receive \_\_\_\_\_, whom you have called to be your minister?

(2) Do you promise to receive the word of truth from his mouth with meekness and love, and to submit to him in the due exercise of discipline?

(3) Do you promise to encourage him in his arduous labor and to assist his endeavors for your instruction and spiritual edification?

(4) And do you promise to continue to him, while he is your pastor, that worldly maintenance which you have promised, and whatever else you may see needful for the honor of religion and his comfort among you?

**Comment:** Following the eight questions that the ministerial candidate must answer are four questions that the congregation must answer, pledging that it continues to receive this newly ordained man as their pastor, promising to receive the word from him meekly and lovingly, and promising to submit to him in the due (proper) exercise of church discipline. Further, the congregation pledges to encourage him in labors and to assist him duly, including providing worldly maintenance (a proper salary, housing, pension, insurance, and all other fitting matters) and all that will honor the faith and provide for the proper comfort of the minister as he labors among them. By this the congregation pledges to love and respect its new pastor and to provide for him all that he needs as he labors among them so that he might be, as his call noted, "free of worldly care." This is a challenge for congregations that cannot afford to pay their pastors without him needing to be bi-vocational.

10. If these questions have been satisfactorily answered, the candidate shall then kneel, and by prayer and the laying on of the hands of the presbytery, according to the apostolic

example, he shall be solemnly ordained to the holy office of the gospel ministry. Prayer being ended, he shall rise and the moderator shall declare him to be ordained a minister of the Word of God and the pastor of that congregation. The presbytery shall then extend to him the right hand of fellowship. The moderator, or others appointed for the purpose, shall give solemn charges in the name of God to the newly ordained minister and to the people, to persevere in the discharge of their mutual duties, and shall, by prayer, commend them both to the grace of God and his holy keeping. At the conclusion of the service the pastor shall dismiss the congregation with a benediction.

**Comment:** Upon the affirmative answers to the questions to the ordinand and to the congregation, the candidate kneels, generally in the front of the congregation, and the presbytery, by the laying on of hands (in keeping with the example of the apostles) and prayer, solemnly ordains the candidate to the holy office of the gospel ministry. Who precisely lays on hands (whether only ministers or ruling elders as well) has been previously commented upon and is ably argued by Clowney as limited to ministers,<sup>2</sup> though the practice has widely come to be that both ruling elders and ministers lay hands on the ordinand (FG 25.6.d).

After this the newly ordained man rises and the moderator declares that he has been duly ordained and installed and is now the pastor of that congregation. Members of the presbytery (those who laid hands on him) shall extend to him the right hand of fellowship, often using the historical practice of shaking his hand and saying, “I give you the right hand of fellowship to take part in this [ministerial] office with us.”

The moderator, or, more commonly, those requested by the newly ordained pastor then brings charges, one to the pastor and the other to the people, encouraging each to persevere in their duties, followed by prayer for God’s blessing upon it all. It is fitting that the new pastor be charged faithfully to execute all the duties pertaining to his office and that the people be charged to receive said ministrations better to fit them in all their service to our God. All is committed to God in prayer, without whose empowerment and enabling nothing of good will emerge. The whole service is concluded with a benediction, a biblical blessing, pronounced by the newly ordained and installed pastor.

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<sup>2</sup> Unpublished MS by E.P. Clowney, “The Laying on of Hands by the Ruling Elders at the Ordination of a Minister,” taken from the Minutes of the Presbytery of New Jersey (OPC), compiled by Stated Clerk Jon Stevenson, March 15, 2015. This paper, in addressing the import of the laying on of hands from a biblical-theological perspective, shows it to be a ministerial act, akin to the benediction, and therefore pertains to the ministerial office. It is my hope to publish this as an appendix when this work is published in book form.

# ServantReading

## Swain and Poythress on the Trinity

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Robert Letham

*The Trinity: An Introduction*, by Scott R. Swain. Wheaton: Crossway, 2020, 154 pages, \$15.99, paper.

*The Mystery of the Trinity: A Trinitarian Approach to the Attributes of God*, by Vern S. Poythress. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2020, xxx + 688 pages, \$39.99.

Books on the Trinity have abounded in recent years. By no means all have been satisfactory. Social trinitarianism has prevailed, with God portrayed as a community, akin to a human family. Some evangelicals have propounded a form of subordinationism. The books being reviewed are two quite distinct contributions produced by highly regarded Reformed scholars, neither of which fall into these categories.

Swain focuses on the *doctrine* of the Trinity. This is not a historical discussion as such nor is there a consideration of recent scholarly work, although Swain is more than capable of addressing both. It is a primer, one that can conceivably be used in adult Sunday school, for elder training, in college or seminary classes, or simply for general reading. That is not to say that scholars could not benefit from it; they certainly could. Swain gets to the heart of the matter and expresses complicated and profound ideas in cogent ways, doing so in a remarkably succinct and accessible manner.

This is the best concise introduction to the doctrine of the trinity that is available in print. The Roman Catholic scholar, Gilles Emery, has written an almost definitive work on a similar scale, more advanced and technical, but Swain has the field to himself both for the tyro and for anyone wanting a concentrated distillation of the biblical and historical doctrine with clear and accurate delineation of major heresies and errors. Sessions, ministers, anyone should get hold of a copy.

Poythress's latest tome is more speculative and complex. It also raises some significant questions that require a lengthier discussion. In this, I will refer to matters that may be a cause of concern if the book were to be read in a particular way. However, it becomes clear that the author does not intend these outcomes. As we shall see, the concluding section (591–94) is perhaps not as carefully expressed as it might be and should be tightened up when the time comes for a second edition in order to avoid possible misunderstandings.

Poythress is a polymath, equally at home in mathematics, science, and linguistics as well as New Testament studies and theology. Even critical reviewers have agreed that he has made “a significant achievement.” They have noted his irenic and humble example. This is greatly needed at present in view of a welter of sulfurous writing belching forth in recent years. “Blessed are the peacemakers,” our Lord taught; it is evident that Poythress wishes to bring together warring factions, not create more of them. In this, he is on the side of the angels.

Poythress discusses successively the classical attributes of God, the doctrine of the Trinity, the trinitarian basis of language, philosophical conundrums, and challenges in classical Christian theism, focusing mainly on Aquinas and his use of Aristotle. He aims to enhance Christian theism by encouraging a more pervasive trinitarian focus.

Each chapter has study questions, suggestions for further reading, and a prayer. The book abounds in diagrams, reminiscent of the profusion of charts in Ramist works of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Both Poythress and his close collaborator, John Frame, have a penchant for diagrams. These may be helpful for some readers, but I must be visually challenged as diagrams generally leave me bemused, so I stick to the text!

Poythress has a similar readership in view as Swain does, although we have a comment on that later. He writes, as usual, in a very simple, direct style, readily comprehensible but not simplistic.

## Positive

One cannot but be struck by Poythress's pervasive use of Scripture and commitment to a faithful rendering of it. The book throughout is worshipful. Its focus is on the mystery of the Trinity, which goes beyond the powers of human reason. This is not the Palamite idea<sup>1</sup> in orthodoxy, where the mind is to be emptied and where God is in his essence unknowable, but rather is to be understood in Van Tilian terms, in the sense of the transcendent greatness of God. This is vital in thinking of God. Considering the Trinity is inevitably a life-changing practice; it will either lead us to greater love for and communion with the living God, or if not, we would be better off never having begun. We approach with reverence and awe for our God is a consuming fire. If we come from this book with nothing other than that, it will be a lesson well learned.

## Questions

However, several significant questions arise. In some way, they are interconnected—unified, distinct, and co-inherent, we might say, to use categories that Poythress himself adopts. Each one relates to how far philosophy is and should be deployed in service of the truth, to what extent its use has been beneficial, and in consequence how the past teaching of the church and its leading figures should inform our reading of Scripture. My comments are more reflections that flow from my reading, addressing common dangers and possible misconstruals.

First, there are questions of hermeneutics. Poythress does not adopt these problematic positions, but the general stance he takes may give rise in the reader to the suggestion that they follow from what he says. This is particularly the case in his final summary where he calls us to abandon a primary reliance on tight, abstract logical argument in theology (592-94). Much depends on what is meant by that. From elsewhere in the text, it appears that “perfect being theology” is in view, where an abstract notion of perfection is applied to God, without recourse to the Bible. This warning would serve a salutary purpose. On subsequent readings it is clear that

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<sup>1</sup> Gregory Palamas, a fourteenth century Orthodox theologian, taught that the essence of God is inaccessible, our knowledge of God limited to his energies (his workings), an unacceptable division in the Trinity.

Poythress is opposed to the influence he detects from Aristotle, especially as mediated by Thomas Aquinas. The Bible is enough, he asserts.

At this point his language might lead the reader to suspect, wrongly, that behind this lies a common and false view of the slogan *sola Scriptura*. It is thought by many that this principle commits us to base our thought, theology, and language exclusively on the Bible, without recourse to any extrinsic authority. However, when the slogan was devised—various proposals locate it from the eighteenth to the early twentieth century—it merely asserted the belief and practice of the generality of Reformers and their successors that the Bible is the *supreme* authority. This is the position of the Westminster Standards. It does not exclude other authorities but rather subordinates them to Scripture. This is the position Poythress actually and correctly takes, since he interacts at length with a range of such figures.

B. B. Warfield pointed to the absurdity of rejecting reason and logic. He wrote, the re-emergence in recent controversies of the plea that . . . human logic is not to be trusted in divine things, is, therefore, a direct denial of a fundamental position of Reformed theology, explicitly affirmed in the Confession, as well as an abnegation of fundamental reason, which would not only render thinking in a system impossible, but would discredit at a stroke many of the fundamentals of the faith, such e.g. as the doctrine of the Trinity, and would logically involve the denial of the authority of all doctrine whatsoever, since no single doctrine of whatever simplicity can be ascertained from Scripture except by the use of the process of the understanding.<sup>2</sup>

In line with this, Poythress states that God is supremely rational (594). However, there can arise a potential danger of misunderstanding when revelation and faith are apparently set against philosophical language.

The outcome of such a misunderstanding is that so many times one is faced by books that attempt to construct doctrinal arguments based on biblical exegesis without recourse to the history of discussion. These are effectively attempts to reinvent the wheel. This is a recipe for heresy. By ignoring the consensus of the historic church, one ignores the biblical exegesis that underlay that consensus. The Socinians, Arians, and Jehovah's Witnesses are but a few instances of how this can work out in practice. The Socinians had a high view of the Bible and would have passed presbytery exams on that question, but by rejecting past tradition, in practice they privileged their own exegesis over the accumulated centuries of the biblical exegesis of others. Of course, Poythress is *most emphatically* not to be associated with these aberrations. I know that he will repudiate them with every atom of his being, as his outline of his interlocutors demonstrates (3–5).

However, the not uncommon methodology by which the Bible is pitted against the traditional formularies ultimately leads in that direction. That is an exceedingly dangerous path to follow. Calvin did not go that way, neither did the Westminster divines, as the minutes and papers of the Assembly amply illustrate.

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<sup>2</sup> B. B. Warfield, *The Westminster Assembly and Its Work* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1934), 226. I am grateful to Sherman Isbell for pointing out the following works which address the question of inferences from Scripture; George Gillespie, *A Treatise of Miscellany Questions* (Edinburgh: Geddeon Lithgow for George Swintoun, 1649), 243. Wing /G371; Aldis, H.G. Scotland /1367. James Bannerman, *Inspiration: The Infallible Truth and Divine Authority of the Holy Scriptures* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1865), 582–88; Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1992), 1:37–43.

Second, pressing the issue further, Poythress calls for changes in technical terms and abandonment of both Aristotelian metaphysics and tight, abstract reasoning in theology (592–94). His particular target is Thomas Aquinas (283–338).

The argument is undermined by Poythress's ahistorical reading of Aquinas. Poythress accuses Aquinas of constructing an approach to the Christian faith heavily reliant on reason with heavy doses of Aristotle. The context in which Aquinas wrote was the threat posed by the Islamic interpretations of the recently rediscovered corpus of Aristotle. There are hints that some form of "double truth" theory was in vogue, by which theological integrity could be maintained while accepting the new criticism, with theology and reason held in contrasting tension. Into this confusion, Aquinas sought to demonstrate that while Christian truth depends on revelation, it is compatible with reason and can be rationally explained and defended.

It appears that Poythress is relying on outdated scholarship on Aquinas. In fact, Aquinas was primarily a biblical commentator, and his doctrine of the Trinity was founded in biblical exegesis, especially in his commentary on the gospel of John (which is on my desk at the moment). He was thoroughly trinitarian. His great *Summa Theologia* needs to be read in the light of his biblical commentaries. Indeed, right at the start of the *Summa* he insisted that the teachings of the fathers and doctors, and the philosophers, are all subject to the supreme authority of Holy Scripture:

Since therefore grace does not destroy nature but perfects it, natural reason should minister to faith as the natural bent of the will ministers to charity . . . (2 Cor. 10:5). Hence sacred Scripture makes use of the philosophers in those questions in which they were able to know the truth by natural reason, as Paul quotes a saying of Aratus . . . (Acts 17:28). . . . Nevertheless, sacred doctrine makes use of these authorities as extrinsic and probable arguments: but properly uses the authority of the canonical Scriptures as an incontrovertible proof, and the authority of the doctors of the church as one that may properly be used, yet merely as probable. For our faith rests on the revelation made to the apostles and prophets, who wrote the canonical books, and not on the revelations (if any such there are) made to other doctors. Hence Augustine says (*Letter to Jerome*, 19:1): "Only those books of Scripture which are called canonical have I learned to hold in such honor as to believe their authors have not erred in any way in writing them. But other authors I so read as not to deem anything in their works to be true, merely on account of their having so thought and written, whatever may have been their holiness and learning."<sup>3</sup>

Aquinas considers reason to be compatible with revelation and faith if grounded upon it. We should remember that Aquinas was not attempting to convince unbelievers for there were few if any self-identifying unbelievers around at the time. Rather, the mystery of the Trinity engendered a determined, focused, and highly refined engagement of the intellect. Faith was seeking understanding.

While many in Reformed circles have adopted a dismissive attitude towards Aquinas, Poythress, to his credit, has taken the trouble to read him. While I am being a touch critical here, it is clear to me that Poythress has seriously engaged with 'the angelic doctor' and recognizes the primacy he accords to the Scriptures over all human opinions.

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<sup>3</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1a.1.8. Responsio, obiectio 2.

It appears to me that the use of thought patterns and methodologies not found in the Bible is unavoidable, indeed necessary, if we are to communicate the truth clearly in our own context. The key question to ask ourselves is from where does the control come? How far do we go before the message is shaped by the contextual language rather than being expressed by it?

Third, Poythress suggests areas where theology has been corrupted by Greek philosophy, specifically by Aristotelian metaphysics. He is critical of a range of theologians down the years who he considers have tainted their work by imbibing alien philosophical ideas. In some cases, such as Dionysius the Areopagite (458–62), this is evidently so. This may seem superficially akin to the theory of Adolf von Harnack, which led to a widespread distaste for the historic Christian faith as expressed in its creeds and confessions. Systematic theology went through a period when it was regarded with disfavor for this very reason, and biblical theology was held out as the ideal. Yet systematic theology distinctively provides the tools to defend the church from heresy and error.

Harnack's theory has been undermined many times over, from the days of Kelly, Pelikan, and Grillmeier onwards. His argument was invalid. For example, the incarnation and resurrection were nonsensical to Greek philosophy of whatever stripe. Moreover, the evidence demonstrates that the church took Greek words and gave them new meanings, adapted and fitted to reflect the truth. The agreement on the use of *ousia* and *hypostasis* brokered by Basil is an obvious instance. In the face of teaching that would have destroyed the gospel, the classic councils distilled their reading and understanding of Scripture by borrowing language from elsewhere to elucidate "the sense of Scripture," as Gregory of Nazianzus put it. They stretched such language and accorded it meaning appropriate to the mystery of the Holy Trinity.

These criticisms are of a general nature and highlight the dangers that can arise when the historic formularies of the church are questioned or relativized. While Poythress does not go in that direction, it is easy to come away from the reading, if not better informed, with a sense that the cumulative wisdom and biblical exegesis underlying the historic ecumenical councils is somehow damaged.

Fourth, I have a series of observations that are broadly sympathetic, with certain qualifications. Poythress attempts to read trinitarian distinctions back into the divine attributes. The orthodox teaching is that the attributes of God are identical with his being, with who he is, and are so eternally. Poythress agrees. To oppose this would be to suggest that God has parts less than the whole of himself, or else that there are eternal entities other than God, or that God has accidents (things that are not inherent and necessary to God's being).

At the same time, the attributes are manifested in distinct hypostatic ways. The love of God is indivisibly common to all three hypostases, which Poythress affirms, yet in the external works of God, love is demonstrated in the Son in a manner peculiar to him, for only the Son, in our nature, went to the cross. However, since the Trinity is indivisible, and the works of the Trinity are inseparable, all three hypostases are involved in all such works, the cross included. Poythress's diagram of unity, distinction, and coinherence embraces all these aspects. Focus on the unity to the exclusion of distinction and you are on the road to modalism. Stress distinction and the perils of social trinitarianism are not far off. Ironically, Poythress's recognition of this is reminiscent of Aquinas's treatment of essential love and personal love in God.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1.37.1



There are some fine balancing acts required here. Poythress states that the “mercy [of God] is differentiated: the Father initiates, the Son accomplishes, and the Spirit applies” (569). This has echoes of Calvin, who wrote that to the Father “is attributed the beginning of activity . . . to the Son . . . the ordered disposition of all things; but to the Spirit is assigned the power and efficacy of that activity.”<sup>5</sup> However, it may convey a possible suggestion that the three are separable, exercising different functions. In reality, all three are engaged indivisibly in initiation, accomplishment, and application, since in all God’s works all three hypostases work inseparably. Poythress appreciates this, for unity and coinherence are integral to his trinitarian thought, together with distinction (90–100). The point is that such elements, as Vermigli put it, terminate hypostatically (*personaliter*) on, or as the Latin tradition calls it, are appropriated to, one particular person.<sup>6</sup> John Owen wrote of the one indivisible will of God as coming to hypostatic manifestation as the will of the Son, the will of the Father, or the will of the Spirit, not as divided into three wills but as distinct hypostatic manifestations of the one will.<sup>7</sup> This is reiterated by Poythress (571–74). If each hypostasis had its own will, one would have tritheism. If there were no hypostatic distinctions in the one will of God, one would have modalism. This is an example of where someone may go astray through a simple, basic reading of the Bible but where refined theoretical or metatheoretical tools, clarified over centuries, can keep us from danger—philosophy, in other words, in the service of the truth revealed in Scripture.

In summary, Poythress calls us “to abandon tight, abstract logic in theological reasoning” (594). On one level, that was how the trinitarian crisis was resolved in the fourth century, in the Greek church. The Nicene Creed was confessed at the Council of Constantinople by bishops, not philosophers, mainly through biblical exegesis, particularly of Old Testament passages. The problem was that the anti-Nicenes, Homoian Arians and Eunomians, insisted on the Bible only, to the exclusion of the cumulative wisdom of the church’s interpretation of the Bible. In rebuttal, the church, through figures such as Gregory of Nazianzus, defended what they called “the sense of Scripture.” In later years, Article 8 of the *Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England*, a document that profoundly influenced the Westminster Confession, put this brilliantly: “The Three Creeds, Nicene Creed, Athanasius’s Creed, and that which is commonly called the Apostles’ Creed, ought thoroughly to be received and believed: for they may be proved by most certain warrants of holy Scripture.”<sup>8</sup>

Moreover, the fathers achieved this from a perspective that held to the simplicity and immutability of God every bit as much as Aquinas did. Both they and he were saying the same thing in differing ways. Both affirmed the mystery of the Trinity. However, at Nicaea in 325 it had become evident that biblical language could be cited by orthodox and heretics alike, the latter using it in support of their own beliefs. To mark the boundaries between truth and heresy new terminology was needed. This call to abandon tight, abstract logic in theological reasoning should be carefully reconsidered in a second edition of the book.

There is something of a puzzle over the precise readership Poythress has in mind. He writes in such a way as to engage the general reader, with basic language,

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<sup>5</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1:13:18.

<sup>6</sup> Peter Martyr Vermigli, *Commonplaces*, 2:17, trans. Anthonie Marten (London, 1583), 599–600.

<sup>7</sup> *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold, 23 vols. (1850–1855; repr., London: Banner of Truth, 1965–1968), 19:86–88.

<sup>8</sup> *The Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, n.d.), 636.

diagrams, and prayers, yet he calls for an abandonment of abstract logic and philosophical terminology they are unlikely ever to encounter. On the other hand, if his aim is to persuade specialist theologians and others of that ilk, a more extensive and informed historical analysis is required that would go well beyond the bounds of this volume.

This is not at all to negate the fact that this is a most stimulating piece of work, indicated by the questions it provokes. It is a book replete with wisdom, insights, and perspectives, too many to enumerate here. However, as with anything written on the Trinity by whomever it may be, it is well to read it critically, under Scripture, with deference to the considered biblical exegesis that underlay the Niceno-Constantinopolitan creed (Nicene creed) and the tradition that stemmed from it, confessed down the centuries. It is clear that Poythress wishes to operate within these bounds, and, at the end, he acknowledges that he does not want to change “what orthodox Christians have believed through the centuries” (591). Thank God, we have no need to reinvent the wheel.

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# ServantReading

## Exodus Old and New: A Biblical Theology of Redemption, *by L. Michael Morales*

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Bryan D. Estelle

*Exodus Old and New: A Biblical Theology of Redemption*, by L. Michael Morales. InterVarsity Academic, 2020, 207 pages, \$22.00, paper.

Michael Morales has done it again: he has written a thought-provoking, stimulating, and well researched book on biblical theology. The work has made a fine contribution to the growing number of books on the exodus theme in Scripture. It is well written and very accessible, but not at the expense of intellectual rigor. In short, the reader will grow in their appreciation of this important theme in Scripture and be better equipped to see the broad rubric that this theme provides for analyzing the atoning work of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Morales shows great sensitivity to philological and literary structural details throughout. Moreover, the publisher (IVP) and editors are to be commended for producing a handsome but inexpensive volume, one in which there are no typographical errors as far as I could discern.

The book has three major sections: the historical exodus out of Egypt, the prophesied second exodus, and the new exodus of Jesus the Messiah. Most of the chapters occur in the first section where Morales focuses on the plight of humans as “exiled” from the garden before the actual historical exodus. He also develops the important theme that the deepest longing of humans is for relationship with their Creator. This becomes an important leitmotif for Morales. For Morales, the atonement becomes the central focal point of the Pentateuch, and consequently, the rest of Scripture. The so-called “recognition formula” (i.e., then they will know that I am the Lord) is pervasive in Exodus (and Ezekiel) and Morales recognizes this and develops it. This formula becomes important then in the four chapters that occur in the second section with a focus on the second exodus in the Prophets and answering the particular and very important question of who the servant of the Lord is, especially in the book of Isaiah. Finally, the third section contains three chapters with a study of the exodus pattern in the Gospel of John followed by two summary chapters that draw matters together and address the significance of the pattern that has been traced throughout the rest of the book.

One way in which Morales distinguishes himself in this book (and others he has written) is engaging the so-called mythical motifs, especially the so-called combat motif which is a subplot of the divine warrior motif in Scripture. In this, God is presented as a king who conquers the tumultuous waters, or sea dragon of chaos, and proceeds after gaining victory in this cosmological battle to build his kingdom. Morales does not fall into the anti-historical mentality that so many commentators do when they are dealing with the influence of these themes upon the Scripture.

Chapter five deals with the important theme of the Passover. Of course, this theme could not be neglected in a book dealing with exodus patterns. Indeed, Morales picks up this matter later in the book in the chapter devoted to the Gospel of John. Again, substitutionary atonement moves into the foreground as Morales covers this important theme. There, Morales claims that Jesus instituted “the Eucharist as the Passover meal of the new exodus” (160). Morales makes the significant point that “John’s Gospel [is] where one finds the deepest meditation on the new exodus” in Passover, and that “Jesus the Son of God is the true Passover Lamb” (160). My wish here is that Morales had emphasized discontinuity between the New Covenant institution of the Lord’s Supper vis-à-vis Passover: The Lord’s Supper is not to be identified with the Passover of the Old Covenant and its regulations. The celebration of the Passover by our Lord and his disciples provided the occasion for the institution of the New Covenant perpetual ordinance, but it is not to be identified with it. After all, Jesus fulfilled the entire sacrificial system in addition to the Passover. This point needs to be made and bears repeating considering the continued assumption by so many Christians that the Lord’s Supper is merely a New Covenant practice of Passover; however, this is not so. Moreover, the practice of paedocommunionists (which is against our confessional standards) continues in some Reformed and evangelical churches.<sup>1</sup>

Chapter six of Morales’s book emphasizes Moses as the servant of Yahweh. This is a helpful chapter that can strengthen our appreciation of Moses as a unique prophetic figure in the Old Testament economy (cf., Hebrews 4), who was a servant over God’s Old Testament economy. One can grow in their interpretation of Moses as type of the Messiah to come. Nevertheless, it is here that this reviewer wanted Morales to be perfectly clear about the role of Moses as mediator as a type of Christ. Moses is a mediator in so far as he is a type of Christ. Ursinus, who is acknowledged far and wide as the best commentator on the Heidelberg Commentary, notes in his own day that some say that Moses was the Mediator of the Old Covenant. However, in the opinion of Ursinus, and this reviewer’s as well, the better opinion is that Moses “was Mediator only as a type of Christ, who was even then already Mediator, but is now the only Mediator without any type; for Christ having come in the flesh, is no longer covered with types.”<sup>2</sup>

In Part 2 of the book, Morales begins to treat the second exodus theme that is so pervasive throughout the Protestant canon of Scripture. Overall, Morales demonstrates that he is up to date on the scholarship and thoughtful in his reflections. The focus here should be his treatment of the Mosaic covenant. First, it is helpful when discussing this difficult and complex subject to distinguish between the Mosaic covenant and the Mosaic administration. Confessional scholars, who adhere to the Westminster Confession of Faith (hence WCF, 7:5–6), should, without equivocation, affirm that the Mosaic Covenant is part of the administration of the unfolding Covenant of Grace throughout redemptive history. Nevertheless, Morales identifies Mosaic covenant as a “gracious covenant” (120, 130) and one that was intended to bring the Gentiles out of their estranged relationship with God (this side of being exiled out of the garden) and back into fellowship with their God. But it bears repeating that the Mosaic Covenant was made

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<sup>1</sup> see Bryan Estelle, “Passover and the Lord’s Supper: Continuity or Discontinuity?” in *Children and the Lord’s Supper*, edited by Guy Waters and Ligon Duncan (Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R), 99.

with one nation only: Israel. Noticeably absent was any discussion of a typological works principle embedded during the Mosaic administration. Furthermore, although the covenant of grace is continuous throughout redemptive history, and although the covenant initiated at Sinai—in its substance—is part of the administration of the covenant of grace; nevertheless, the Mosaic Covenant and Mosaic “economy” need to be distinguished. After all, the same WCF, for example, uses the term *law* to refer to the Sinai covenant-administration by way of synecdoche (in which the part is taken for the whole).<sup>3</sup> The Mosaic Covenant could not accomplish the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant. But a Messiah who would perfectly fulfill the works principle embedded in the Mosaic Covenant could and did. Therefore, we see that the Westminster divines did not shirk from recognizing the forensic foundation of the covenant of grace. There is a conspicuous absence of Scriptural texts in this book that refer to the Mosaic Covenant as a “ministry of death” (cf., 2 Cor. 3:10). Although it would be an error to magnify this Pauline point to the exclusion of others, this important emphasis cannot go unregistered.

The best chapters of Part 2, in my opinion, were ten and eleven where Morales does a very able and eloquent job. There is much grist for the mill here on how to preach and teach these important chapters. Part 3 shifts to the New Testament. A creative and stimulating discussion of the exodus motif in the Gospel of John occurs in chapter twelve. The final two chapters tie everything together, and Morales really brings it to bear upon the reader. Indeed, the edifying, almost evangelistic tone in the end of the book reinforces that this sadly neglected theme—the exodus motif—is the warp and woof of salvation grammar throughout Scripture.

The last point that needs to be made is that this reviewer wishes that Morales had taken pains to distinguish between “pattern,” “motif,” and “theme” throughout the book. They are not the same, but they are often used almost synonymously throughout the book. That would have strengthened Morales’s overall excellent presentation. Aside from the criticisms mentioned above, the book deserves careful attention and a wide reading because Morales has ably discussed a complex and very important motif in our Bible.

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<sup>3</sup> See WCF 25.2, 7:5–6, and WSC 27.

# ServantReading

## The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self, *by Carl Trueman*

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By T. David Gordon

*The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution*, by Carl Trueman (with Foreward by Rod Dreher). Crossway, 2020, 425 pages, \$34.99.

Had I entered a coma during my cancer year (2004, only one year after *Lawrence v. Texas* abolished anti-sodomy laws) and emerged nearly two decades later, I would have felt like Rip Van Winkle, who awoke to find that the colonies were now a country (by a generous definition, anyway). Less than a decade before those treatments, the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) passed *both* houses of Congress by large, veto-proof majorities, and though Democratic President Clinton criticized the law as “divisive and unnecessary,” he nonetheless signed it into law in September 1996. That was before I entered my hypothetical coma. Shortly after, though President Obama disagreed with gay marriage when he ran for his first term (2008), by his second term he referred to those who disagreed with gay marriage as “haters.” DOMA was ruled unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in *U.S. v. Windsor* (2013) and *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015), both of which argued that it is unconstitutional to regard heterosexual marriage as more legitimate than homosexual unions. Biological males (“cisgender” men in the new imagination) competed against biological females in the 2020 Tokyo Olympics. The change was profound and appeared to be sudden.

The change was not sudden. As Carl Trueman displays in *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, the re-imagining of what it is to be human took place over the course of more than two centuries in the West, promoted by individuals such as Rousseau, Marx, Nietzsche, and Darwin. What we commonly regard as the “sexual revolution” is much larger than that; said sexual revolution was and is merely one manifestation of an entire re-imagining or re-conceiving of what the human essentially is. As Trueman puts it:

the sexual revolution is *simply one manifestation of the larger revolution of the self* that has taken place in the West. And it is *only as we come to understand that wider context* that we can truly understand the dynamics of the sexual politics that now dominate our culture. (20, emphases mine)

Trueman is aided in his analysis by other students of cultural and intellectual history, including Charles Taylor, Philip Rieff, and Alasdair MacIntyre, yet his work goes further and broader and examines particular roots of the modern conception of the self not only in figures we ordinarily associate with the revolution—such as Nietzsche, Marx, and Darwin—but in others who are less frequently observed, such as the infamous Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Romantic poets such as Wordsworth, Shelley, and Blake.

The book is divided into four parts. In the first part, Trueman discusses the Architecture of the Revolution, in which he provides important definitions and concepts that will be crucial to

his analysis. The second part—Foundations of the Revolution—is where Trueman’s analysis reaches back further into Western cultural history than most other analysts do, preceding the exposition of Nietzsche, Marx, and Darwin with his analysis of Rousseau, Wordsworth, Shelley, Blake, and others. This was the aspect that I found to be perhaps the most beneficial in the book, because the roots went back substantially prior to the nineteenth century, even back into the late-eighteenth century. Part 3 of the book deals with the Sexualization of the Revolution and demonstrates how Freud (et. al.) informed the New Left. Part 4 discusses the Triumphs of the Revolution in its tripartite analysis of the Triumph of the Erotic, the Triumph of the Therapeutic, and the Triumph of the T (his term not only for transgenderism but for the entire conception of the human that animates transgenderism).

Throughout, Trueman weaves seamlessly his references to both primary and secondary literature where pertinent, and the proper blending of the two is what makes the book so engaging to read, in a field of study (intellectual history) that is ordinarily so pedantic that it drives away all but its most committed devotees. Not since Goldilocks has an author so frequently gotten it “just right.” The primary references are convincing, and the secondary references assure the reader that Trueman’s view is not idiosyncratic, even though it is distinctive (and possibly, in its entirety, unique).

Rousseau justly plays a large role in Trueman’s analysis, as he did in Paul Johnson’s *Intellectuals*, in which Johnson referred to him in the book’s first chapter as “An Interesting Madman,” with considerable justification. But while Johnson justly called attention to Rousseau’s remarkable failure as a husband and father, Trueman demonstrates that Rousseau was not *un*-principled, but principled; his own intellectual principles led him to believe that monogamous heterosexual marriage was an instrument of oppression that needed to be resisted. He was *committed*, as it were, to being *uncommitted* to his wife and children. For Rousseau, such abandonment of one’s family was not merely permissible; it was mandatory. Prior to Trueman, I don’t recall anyone else demonstrating so convincingly that the re-imagined human is not merely permitted to march to a different drummer; he is required to do so.

The broad movement over the last two-plus centuries has many specific dimensions, each thoughtfully elucidated by Trueman; but the fundamental change in conception is from what we could call “external man” to “internal man.” Where the older conception defined the human externally by nation, geography, religion, vocation, family, ethnicity, or any other external reality, the newer conception defines the human internally, by the self, untethered by or to any external realities. When Rousseau asserted that the human “was born free, but is everywhere in chains,” any external reality was conceived by him as a kind of chain or bondage. Only the internal self is truly free to be a true self.

As is true with almost all significant books, this one should be read at a single moment, and not spread out over weeks. Those will read it best who set aside a weekend, or a couple days of vacation time, to read the volume in its entirety. Since Trueman’s goal is for readers to perceive the historical trail that brought us to the present moment, it is best to read it with few interruptions. Only then will readers see the coherence of our present incoherence. If you find yourself—as I did—feeling like Rip Van Winkle awakening to an entirely new order, this thorough and insightful work will disabuse you of the notion. Church officers especially will be aided by eschewing the superficial commentary of the various news media in order to see such a convincing display of the historic roots of the present cultural moment.

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# ServantPoetry

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by John Donne (1572–1631)

## Annunciation

Salvation to all that will is nigh;  
That All, which always is all everywhere,  
Which cannot sin, and yet all sins must bear,  
Which cannot die, yet cannot choose but die,  
Lo, faithful virgin, yields Himself to lie  
In prison, in thy womb; and though He there  
Can take no sin, nor thou give, yet He will wear,  
Taken from thence, flesh, which death's force may try.  
Ere by the spheres time was created, thou  
Wast in His mind, who is thy Son and Brother;  
Whom thou conceivst, conceived; yea thou art now  
Thy Maker's maker, and thy Father's mother;  
Thou hast light in dark, and shutst in little room,  
Immensity cloistered in thy dear womb.