Annual Meeting

Papers

November 18-20, 1999
Sheraton Boston Hotel and Towers
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INTRODUCTION

The Adventist Society for Religious Studies is comprised of Adventist scholars, pastors, and interested lay persons, linked together by a common interest in the Word and in the continuing pursuit of theological and practical concerns that affect the life and mission of the church.

The 1999 annual meeting of the society convened at a moment of international apprehension over the potential Y2K computer breakdown. That atmosphere, together with the fact that in popular thinking the year 2000 represented the beginning of the new millennium, gave additional significance to the theme of the gathering: "The Apocalypse of St. John."

Under this theme, presenters explored a wide range of theological, social, and practical emphases in the book of Revelation, the New England setting of the meetings (Boston, Massachusetts) providing a kind of historical-theological backdrop, and evoking the spiritual roots of the "Advent Movement." We are pleased to put in your hand a compilation of the presentations, confident that within its variety of perspectives, you will find a common respect for this ancient document as the Word of God for out times.

Roy Adams
ASRS President, 1999
Presidential Address
Prepared for the Adventist Society for Religious Studies
Thursday November 18, 1999, Boston
Roy Adams

THE APOCALYPSE:
GOD’S ANSWER TO THE HUMAN CRY FOR ULTIMATE JUSTICE

I’ve always had, I think, a keen sensitivity for justice. And over the years, though I’ve not been particularly vocal about it publicly, that sensitivity perhaps has heightened to radical proportions. (Ask my wife and she will tell you.) And so, when we decided last year in Orlando that the Apocalypse would be the theme of our meeting this year, it didn’t take long for the motif of justice to suggest itself. Actually, my deeper concern is for peace. But as one of my colleagues never tires of saying, there can be no lasting peace without justice. And the thought came to me that if there was at all a divine hand in Scripture, then the universal cry for justice—a cry that becomes more desperate and urgent with every passing day—was bound to find both echo and answer in this climactic document of the Bible.

In an address to the 1999 Annual Council of the General Conference committee a few weeks ago, Undersecretary General of the United Nations Joseph Reed made the observation that “we’re leaving behind a century of unparalleled suffering and violence.” Putting that remark in the context of our theme for this annual meeting, we might ask ourselves whether—given all we know—we have done all we could to allowed the Apocalypse to proclaim its message full-throated to the passing century. Is the message of the Apocalypse confined to church-type entities only? Or does it also have something to say to the political, social, and economic power structures of our times? Something to say about the ghastly atrocities that have characterized a good share of our bloody century?

While I was struggling to make the case for a relevant contemporary reading of the Apocalypse, I ran into a book by the South African minister and freedom-fighter, Dr. Allan Boesak. Conceived in the 1980s during the height of the apartheid horror, Comfort and Protest provides a prime example of the power of this ancient document before us to transcend its own time and place, enter our contemporary Sitz im Leben, and move us from desperation to hope. Buoyed up by the message of John of Patmos (the power of whose testimony “forever changed my life”—p. 13), Boesak directed (what turned out to be) a prophetic word to “all those who, true to their faith, have struggled and fought with us; gone to jail and shared pain and bread with us.” “They are seeing,” he wrote, “the power of the beast. They shall see the victory of the Lamb.”

What should be our position on the validity of such “political” applications of the text? That question undergirds much of what follows in this paper. I have divided my presentation into three parts:

1. How We Read the Text: The Question of “Denotation” and “Connotation”
2. John’s World Our World: A Century of Turmoil and Tragedy
3. Toward Ultimate Indication: The Shape of Cosmic Justice

1. How We Read the Text: The Question of “Denotation” and “Connotation.”

A man came up to me in the lobby of the General Conference building earlier this year and with a straight face shared with me this unsolicited bit of intelligence: “I believe the seventh trumpet will sound in Toronto during the General Conference session,” he said. “And if it does, I will have a message for the church.” (Unfortunately, he was not at liberty to divulge the celestial communiqué, so I don’t have the scoop for you tonight.)

His comment reminded me of the idiocy that has characterized the reading of the Apocalypse in some quarters. All kinds of crackpots across the centuries have taken a swing at the document, and the weirdest imaginable interpretations have been foisted upon the superstitious and the gullible. I remember that when we met Sabbath morning at the Hinsdale church, in connection with our 1994 annual meeting in Chicago, one of the respondents to a paper (I think it was), still smarting with the rest of us over the Waco tragedy, made the remark that as scholars we had neglected our responsibility vis-a-vis the interpretation of this important book, abandoning the field to hermeneutical maniacs and the lunatic fringe of contemporary society. (He might have used stronger language, but his exact words have escaped
We have to face the fact, however, that the figurative richness of the Apocalypse—the profusion of graphic images and metaphors—tends to lead, shall we say, to interpretational creativity and experimentation. Scott Gambrill Sinclair provides a good summary:

“Each century has read its own situation into Revelation’s provocative pages, and each century’s exegesis has, at least in retrospect, seemed to lack a real foundation either in the text or in any divine plan. Thus, in the early seventeenth century Thomas Brightman explained that the first three vials (Rev. 16:2-7) referred to events in the previous half century in his own England. The first vial occurred in 1563 when Elizabeth I dismissed papist clergy; the second occurred in 1564 when the Council of Trent reaffirmed Catholic doctrinal errors; and the third occurred in 1581 when the English Parliament passed an act ‘against the treason of papists.’” Today, four centuries later, Sinclair says, “it is almost unimaginable” that such events could be conceived as part of “the final plagues immediately preceding the consummation of the world.”

In his book Mysterious Apocalypse, Arthur W. Wainwright has compiled an extensive and very useful list of similar kinds of interpretation, a list that demonstrates the wide (and in some cases wil) variety of perspectives across the centuries. Here’s a quick selection from that summary:

In the 16th century, John Foxe, following the lead of men like the Venerable Bede (6th century) and Wycliffe (14th century), exulted in the thought that Constantine was born in Britain, of a British mother. “Under this ‘British’ emperor,” Foxe saw Satan put in chains and the millennium begin. John Aylmer, a later compatriot of Foxe, went even further: “We live in Paradise,” Aylmer wrote. “God is English.”

Joseph Priestley (18th century) “regarded the French Revolution as the earthquake of Revelation 11:13, and thought that it heralded the dawn of a new era.” He saw the clash between the monarchs of Europe and the French Republic as the battle of Armageddon.

In the 19th century, Germans “regarded the Napoleonic wars as a period of tribulation and the French armies as the locusts of Revelation 9. Paris was the whore of Babylon. Napoleon was the beast, the dragon, and the devil, and his defeat fulfilled the prophecy that death, suffering, and weeping would be no more (Rev. 21:4).”

“In the early years of the American colonies there was talk of a millennial New England, and Grindall Rawson described the inhabitants of Boston [where we meet tonight] as ‘citizens of the New Jerusalem.’” In the heat of the American Revolution, England became the Antichrist.

Even the Nazis got into the act. “The Jew,” wrote Hitler’s associate Joseph Goebbels, “is probably the Antichrist.” And at the 1934 Nuremberg rally, “Hitler gave the movement its millennium. He announced that the Third Reich would last a thousand years.”

And as the Cold War heated up, “the Soviet Union and Communist China became the apocalyptic foes for many people in the West.”

To borrow an expression from Jon Paulien, some parts of Revelation are “vexingly difficult.” And because the document “is so obscure,” adds Sinclair, “speculative Christians down through the ages have been able to read their own prejudices into the text. Highly polarized believers have again and again sought to prove that their hated opponents somehow fit the number ‘666’ and so were in reality the nefarious monster described in Revelation 13.” Depending on the “time, place, and persuasion of the interpreter,” says M. H. Abrams, the Beast (or Antichrist) “has been variously identified as the Jews, the Ottomans, the Pope, France, Charles I, Cromwell, priestcraft, the alliance against revolutionary France, the landholding aristocracy, capitalists, the American slaveholder, and Hitler.”

How then are we to evaluate the above situation? Were all these commentators and interpreters loony, misguided? Without meaning to be either overly liberal or flippant about this, I would say that it all centers around the motive or intent of the interpreter. Did they mean to give a formal denotation of the text? Or were they operating in the area of the text’s connotation? The denotative approach is concerned with the exact, exclusive meaning of the text. The connotative approach asks: What does the text mean to me? To my particular situation?—My society, my nation, my culture, my times, the crises that confront me?

Seventh-day Adventists have generally tended in the direction of the denotative. As pace-setting pioneer expositor Uriah Smith, for example, tackled the Apocalypse, his aim was to provide what he considered the meaning of the text. Under this approach, the four horsemen of chapter 6, for instance, mean one thing and nothing else; the “two witnesses” denotes just one reality. And the same for the “beast,” for “Babylon,” or whatever. Clearly this approach is more formal, more restrictive, more exclusive. Its aim is hermeneutical precision. It seeks to establish controls and avoid the pitfalls of unbridled speculation in the interpretation and application of the text.
Either approach by itself presents perils. The denotative may rely too heavily on the historicist method of interpretation, ignore the text’s original meaning, and so arrive at unwarranted—even fantastic—applications of the symbolism, based on purely accidental or anecdotal correspondences. The temptation of the connotative approach, on the other hand, is a tendency to jump too quickly from the text’s original setting to whatever the contemporary situation might be; and thus its applications sometimes come across as bogus, shallow, or unconvincing.

Without getting deeper into the pros and cons of the two approaches, I would simply suggest that we cannot keep the Apocalypse both credible and current without in some way adopting both. The two, far from being mutually exclusive, actually can complement and stabilize each other. On the one hand, efforts to preserve the denotative of the text endows the hermeneutical enterprise with a certain integrity and credibility. On the other hand, a recognition of the connotative value of the text keeps it fresh, dynamic, current.

The denotative approach is vital. But the connotative allows us to minister right now to people on the margins. It allows individual Christians and the corporate church to speak “a word from the Lord” in season to the critical issues of the day, instead of adopting the futuristic posture for which we have become so noted this side of the falling of the stars. While Adventists in Nazi Germany, steeped in the historicist-denotationist method of interpretation, were wringing their hands wondering what to make of developments, pastor Walter Lüthi of the Confessing Church, taking the connotative approach, was able to see in Hitler a reminder of the beasts the church had known before—beasts like Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar, Nero and Domitian. Lüthi’s message was unequivocal: Hitler must be resisted at all cost. “The Apocalypse is upon us,” he said.9

This was the insight that revolutionized Boesak’s outlook. At first he could not see any relevance in the book of Revelation for the oppressed people of his country. “After all, I thought, our people are dying, our towns are burning—and if the Apocalypse is being left to fanatics and escapists, or to the academics of rich countries who have time for games or empty speculation.” Eventually, however, discovering (what I’m calling) the connotative approach to the text (he himself called it the “contemporary-historical”10), he caught the genius of this ancient book as “underground protest literature.”11 Only then did he have an answer for “the mothers of Soweto and Cape Town, of the resettlement camps and little rural villages, when they ask[ed] why their children had to die?”12

With our understanding of the Three Angels’ Message, Adventists in South Africa should have beaten Boesak to the punch. Instead we remained officially silent. This meant, in fact, that it was Boesak and his kin who were the “people of prophecy” in that situation. For it was they who clearly saw the parallel between “the pharaohs of Egypt, and the pharaohs of Rome, and the pharaohs of Pretoria.”13

While we must condemn in the strongest terms mindless speculation and applications that unbalance the gullible, the currentness Boesak and others have found in the Apocalypse is entirely appropriate. In the words of James Dunn, “once Revelation is properly grounded in its original context it is seen to transcend that context and speak to the contemporary church.”14 The book is “a complex literary creation,” says Bauckham, “dense with meaning.”15 And it should not surprise us that people of every generation and culture have been able to derive from its pages both purpose and hope. “When people are victims of war and injustice,” the book can give them “the language with which to express both their disappointments and their hopes.”16 Accordingly, Rodney L. Petersen is correct when he says that “each reading [of the text] carries with it aspects of legitimacy.....”17

Reading the document in this way, we discover in it a living text, its enduring purpose comes alive, and we find both confidence and credibility to take its message in full-throated power, not only to the traditional strongholds of “Babylon,” but also to greedy multinationals operating without restraint or conscience in the developing world, to a military-industrial-technological complex that’s eating out the vitals of poor nations and individuals everywhere who find themselves at the bottom end of the vicious economic ladder.

2. John’s World Our World: A Century of Conflict and Tragedy

I discovered too late that I didn’t have space to describe John’s world in any detail. But the subhead sounded good, so I kept it. The point I wanted to make, however, was that in John’s world, as in ours, society was violent, life was cheap, and the poor did not count for much—especially if they were Christians. And notwithstanding the great strides we’ve made in the area of religious tolerance, I’m hearing (unconfirmed) reports to the effect that more Christians have been killed for their faith in this century than in the entire preceding period since the cross.

Ours is the century that has witnessed two bloody worldwide conflicts, with more than 50 million people killed. Then there was the Korean war—more than one million killed; the Viet Nam War, 722,000; the Cultural Revolution under Mao Tse-tung in the 50s and 60s—some 30 million Chinese killed. Imagine the toll of innocent men, women,
and children included in that incredible number. Imagine the suffering, the pain.

Then think of the nightmare that the following names (at random) bring to mind: Treblinka; the Gulag; Angola; Tienamen Square; East Timor; Northern Ireland; Sri Lanka; Burma; East Germany; My Lai; Cambodia; Sudan; Liberia; Congo; Burundi; Watts; Montgomery; Haiti; Cuba; Algeria; the Middle East; Mogadishu; Romania; Afghanistan; Columbia; Chechnya.

And who can forget the bloody massacres of Bosnia and Rwanda and Kosovo? In Bosnia we watched totally helpless men, women, and children killed, with others brutalized and made to flee their homes in the dead of winter for no other reason than their ethnic extraction. The “ethnic cleansing” continued in Kosovo as tens of thousands fled the onslaught of the Serbian war machine, their homes confiscated or burned to the ground before their eyes, their very identity obliterated. Those left behind experienced hell itself. I read reports that Serbian troops would murder small children and dump them (together with dead dogs, cats, chemicals, and garbage) into village wells to contaminate the water supply.

In a sense we’ve all become callous. There is a tendency to consider less human people who are far away, especially if they’re of a different culture or race or religion or language. And our ever-restless media has long since turned its attention to other important things (like the sale of Marilyn Monroe’s personal effects, or Pokemon, or the ten top pop singers of the century).

That’s the level of public attention today. How soon we forget a Rwanda, for example, a crisis in which upwards of half a million Tutsis were killed. In a touching reminiscence, author Bill Berkeley, who happened to have witnessed the Rwandan genocide and its immediate aftermath, told what he’d seen: “Those few weeks in June and July 1994 left me haunted and bewildered. Churches filled waist-high with decomposing corpses, orphans pulled from the piles of their murdered relatives, mass cholera, hideous machete wounds—there was a weird, surreal, science-fiction quality to Rwanda’s catastrophe that defied easy emotions.” “How,” Berkeley asked, “could so many ordinary people participate in so monstrous a crime?”

How, indeed! That was the question uppermost on the mind of the members of South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission as they convened in Pretoria in April 1996 to try to come to grips with the horrible legacy of apartheid.

Back in 1997, the CBS News magazine program 60 Minutes carried a piece by Bob Simon on the Commission. By way of underscoring the cold-blooded violence of our century, I want to quote at length from Simon’s report, beginning with the confession of Dirk Coetzee, a former captain in the Secret Security Police of the apartheid regime.

Coetzee told how he and his men would administer knock-out drops to black activists, and then shoot them at point blank as soon as they fell over. “Do you remember what went through your mind when you watch[ed] a 23-year-old kid drop over and then get shot in the head?” asked Bob Simon.

Replied Coetzee: “It was a job that had to be done . . . and someone had to do the job and we were there to do . . . [it].”

Coetzee told how, to destroy the evidence, they would burn the body of the victim during the night, taking sometimes “seven to nine hours, until there were no chunks left the next morning.”

Then followed this exchange:
Bob Simon: “What . . . [did] you do, sit and chat during that time?”
Coetzee: “We were sitting around having a barbeque and drinking.”
Simon: “And every once in a while somebody would get up and turn the body around?”
Coetzee: “That’s correct. Yes.”
Simon: “Well, was it just like an ordinary barbeque? Or did the presence of a dead man whose body was being turned around so it would turn into ashes—did the presence of this dead man on a fire next to you affect the atmosphere of the evening?”

Coetzee: “Not at all. Not at all.”

At another point in the interview Bob Simon said to Coetzee: “You guys were playing God?”
Coetzee replied: “We—we were God.”

In the nine months of hearings, said Bob Simon, the revelation of government-sanctioned mass murders and atrocities have shocked even the people who thought that they knew what apartheid was all about. One unidentified woman told the commission what happened to her son: “They had pulled all his hair out,” she said. “Then they pulled his tongue out. Then they went about cutting his fingers off.” An unidentified man told what happened to him: “They attached electrodes to my private parts. Those electric shocks tore my private parts to pieces.”
At this point Bob Simon told how the commission worked. “The victims tell their stories, stories of atrocities which were literally unspeakable under the old regime. Then the perpetrators get a chance to own up to their crime, and by doing so, become eligible for amnesty. All they have to do is tell the truth. They don’t even have to say they’re sorry—no apologies, no remorse and no justice.”

But the thing that stuck in my craw, the detail that seems to cry out for a higher tribunal, came in the form of comments from opposite sides of the question. On the one side I heard the comment of Charity Kondile, the mother of a boy who was killed and burned by Coetzee. “Imagine,” she said, “some people are in jail for stealing a chocolate, and now men who have committed such crimes will be given amnesty. I mean, that is ridiculous, unbelievable.”

And then I listened to the other side. To Paul Van Vuurun, for example—another former member of the secret police (who has admitted to killing between 20 and 40 people, at least): I was only serving God and country, he insisted, and called the commission a witch-hunt. Many Whites, according to Bob Simon, dismissed the whole business contemptuously as the ‘Kleenex Commission’—a cruel reference to the many who, overcome by emotion, often break down in tears. One white woman on a local radio talk show said: “I truly feel that the Truth Commission should be...[given] the Grammy Award for the greatest comedy of the year and a total waste of money.”

Sometimes we think the biblical injunctions are too harsh, but that’s because of our brief indignation span. We’ve become so jaded that we’ve lost our sense of outrage. Sometimes we think that God is too good to punish people—that He leaves such dirty work up to the devil. But in my view, that position—for whatever reason it’s held—represents a shallow understanding of the gospel. If God Himself does not bring to justice the perpetrators of the bloody crimes and atrocities committed across the centuries, then we live in an immoral universe.

With this sentiment, we come to our final section:

3. Toward Ultimate Vindication: The Shape of Cosmic Justice

Abel’s blood cried out to God from the ground (Gen.4:10). But the eschatological cry of the martyrs and other victims of brutality across the centuries bellows down from the very heights of heaven. We find it in Revelation 6:10: “How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?”

I submit for your consideration tonight that this is a cry for judgment coming from beneath the altar in the heavenly sanctuary—a cry for vindication, for justice. And I believe that the ultimate answer to that cry will come (and can only come) from the heavenly sanctuary itself, the nerve center of the government of God. That, I suggest, is part of the meaning of Rev. 14:6-12, a passage that lies at the heart of Adventist faith: “The hour of His judgment has come.”

At a time when there is growing impatience and frustration with the execution of justice worldwide, this message is, indeed, present truth. I sensed this while on an international flight back in 1995. The Norwegian lady sitting next to me wanted to know what I thought about the atrocities in Bosnia and Rwanda, events fresh in the mind at that time. “Will their perpetrators be brought to justice?”

“Not necessarily by human courts,” I said. “But God Himself will bring them to judgment. They will not escape scot-free.”

A simple explanation, to be sure—old hat for most of us here tonight. But I will never forget that woman’s expression of profound relief upon hearing it. I think the more we come to understand the fundamental concerns of the Apocalypse, the more we’d see it as present truth for our times.

What do people around us—and we ourselves—long for most? I would suggest the following, among others: forgiveness; renewal; community; justice; reconciliation; peace; security. It occurs to me that the first three items in this listing (forgiveness, renewal, community) would never be possible if strict justice preceded them. On the other hand, the last three (reconciliation, peace, security) would never last if justice did not precede them. Without justice, there can be no true reconciliation; without reconciliation there can be no peace; and without peace, of course, there can be no security. Justice, therefore, lies both at the center of the human quest and at the heart of the security of the universe.

Bad news for tyrants and despots, the notion of judgment culminating in justice and vindication is good news for the abused, for the oppressed, for the victims of injustice. That’s why the Old Testament saints, in sentiments that fly in the face of the contemporary Western zeitgeist, rejoice at the prospect of impending judgment.

At this point, three questions come to mind: 1) Who are vindicated? 2) Who are judged? 3) What judgment? What vindication?

1. Who are vindicated? In my attempt to paint a picture of universal justice in the Apocalypse, I came smack
up against a phenomenon that fairly permeates the document; namely, that while there is, indeed, vindication, it is 

vindication for the people of God only. For example, the message of 2:10 is clearly directed to saints: “Be faithful even 
to the point of death,” it says, “and I will give you the crown of life.” In chapter 7 those exonerated following “the great 
tribulation” are clearly the saints, for John sees them standing “before the throne and in front of the Lamb [wearing] 
white robes and . . . holding palm branches [symbols of victory] in their hands” (verse 9). We’re obviously not talking 
here about the oppressed in general.

And that seems to be the pattern throughout the book. The great judgments of chapters 8 and 9 target “only 
those people who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads” (9:4). “The nations were angry,” it says in chapter 
11:18, 19, “and your wrath has come. The time has come for judging the dead, and for rewarding your servants the 
prophets and your saints and those who reverence your name, both small and great . . .” No mention here of persecuted 
people in general. In chapters 13 and 14 the struggle, on the face of it, ensues between the forces of good and evil in the 
classical religious sense; and those finally victorious with the Lamb have “his name and his Father’s name written on 
their foreheads” (14:1). In chapter 16, “the angel in charge of the waters” identifies the ones suffering judgment as “they 
who have shed the blood of . . . [God’s] saints and prophets . . .” (verse 6). In chapter 18, those called to join the 
exultation over Babylon’s fall are the “saints and apostles and prophets . . .” (verse 6). And the reason for God’s judgment on 
the evil city is given: “‘God has judged her for the way she treated you [the saints]’” (verse 20).

Where then is the notion of universal vindication, universal justice? Does Revelation hold out any comfort 
for oppressed people who are not “saints,” not “apostles,” not “prophets”? Does it offer any remedy for the millions 
who through the centuries have been persecuted and abused apart from reasons of faith? Does the book really have no 
in interest in human suffering in general? What does it have to say about oppression? About exploitation? About genocide 
and other crimes against humanity? Is the Apocalypse for Christians only? In wanting to find in the document a divine 
concern for the oppressed in general, was I taking the connotative approach too far? Was I trying to force my own 
agenda on the text?

I went back to Daniel, Revelation’s companion book, so to speak, in the Old Testament to see what I might 
find. There, in chapter 4, we find King Nebuchadnezzar standing on the brink of a divine sentence that would literally 
reduce him to the status of the beast. But the crisis could be averted if the arrogant monarch would change his behavior. 
“Therefore, O King, . . . : Renounce your sins by doing what is right, and your wickedness by being kind to the 
oppressed” (Dan. 4:27). Perhaps this is one of those rare moments in apocalyptic where we see God’s concern for 
suffering humanity in general.

Taking a cue from this rare hint, I would suggest that while the major focus of Revelation is clearly on God’s 
people, there is, nevertheless, an underlying dimension of universal concern for all people. Hence we find that God is 
angry with Babylon not only because “in her was found the blood of prophets and of the saints,” but also the blood “of 
all who have been killed on the earth” (Rev 18:24). He condemns the “great prostitute” because she had “corrupted the 
[whole] earth by her adulteries” (19:2).

So why then does Revelation seem to focus so exclusively on the vindication of the saints? I believe it has 
something to do with the eschatological character of the book. From the perspective of the revelator—regardless of any 
historicist reading of the text today—history was fast catapulting to its denouement. And as far as he could see, the next 
big event would be the establishment of the everlasting kingdom of God.

Under that scenario, normal outcomes no longer obtain. The stakes are too high for “liberation theology” as we 
know it, or for “politically correct” speech. There can be no solace for the poor in general, no remedy for the 
marginalized in general, no vindication for the oppressed in general—except as they align themselves with the Cosmic 
Liberator. This is judgment time—judgment from the One in whose mouth comes the two-edged sword20 that cuts both 
ways.

And thus, as the sky recedes like a scroll and “every mountain and island” dislodges from its foundation, we 
are utterly surprised to learn that among those fleeing the terror of the cosmic Judge—snack amongst kings and princes 
and generals, and tucked in amongst the rich and the famous21 are “slaves”—of all people! And “freemen,” who 
apparently had failed to use their freedom to secure the most important emancipation of all—the release from spiritual 
bondage.

This sobering reality (which Botesak and many others tend to miss) ought to give the greatest urgency to the 
message of the Apocalypse. Knowing what we do, we can never be satisfied simply with seeking the temporal welfare 
of the oppressed. Of course, we should work to make their lives as comfortable here as possible, regardless of their 
decision for or against the gospel. But it would be cruel kindness to leave them satisfied with an earthly pie without
also pointing them to the one that's in the sky.

2. Who are judged?

As I read the book of Revelation from a contemporary standpoint, the following questions come to the fore: Exactly who are the targets of its horrible judgments? Where in the Apocalypse is the idea of a final judgment in which the evil miscreants of the centuries are made to face the music?

The answer is not as straightforward as we might expect—at least not when one judges from the list of sins spelled out for retribution in the book: demon worship, idol veneration, murder, the practice of magical arts, sexual immorality, and theft (see 9:20-21). Those shut out from the new metropolis and thrown into “the fiery lake of burning sulfur” are identified as “the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars…” (Rev. 21:8).

If we’re frank about it, we’d probably admit that we really don’t get hot behind the collar over some of the offences in John’s listing—the “cowardly,” for example; or the “unbelieving”; “those who practice magic”; “idolaters.” While we don’t hold a card for any of these, they really don’t fall, as such, among the evils that have shocked the conscience of humanity, among the atrocities that make us literally drip with outrage.

Shallow is one thing the Apocalypse is not. The book is deep—“dense with meaning,” as Bauckham put it. And even the mildest word in John’s listing is packed with significance. The “cowardly,” for example. In John’s day, “the mere profession of Christianity” was a punishable crime. “A Christian defendant could gain release by offering incense on a pagan altar.” They didn’t even have to mean it; “the external act sufficed.” But the alternative was ugly: “imprisonment, torture, being flung to wild beasts in the amphitheatre, or, in the case of a Roman citizen, being beheaded.” The cowardly were those who took the easy way out. Think of the implications for us today who, living at a time when freedom of speech is protected in law, yet remain silent, our tails tightly tucked between our legs, in the face of the most egregious evil, in the wake of the most revolting atrocities.

I think that if we take the time to examine each item on the Revelator’s list, we would see how all-encompassing they are and, more ominously, how close they are to home.

3. What judgment? What vindication?

The plaintive cry of the martyrs rings down from heaven as the fifth seal opens: “How long, Sovereign Lord, ... until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?”

Many who sing the praises of the Apocalypse are embarrassed by this poignant prayer. Its “condemnation ... in most commentaries,” says Boesak, “is thunderous and immediate. This is not Christian, they say; it is a nullification of the teachings of Jesus,” a return to primitive notions. “If only John ... had found some way of maintaining the principle that love is the strongest power in the world,” laments T. Francis Glasson, “what a great work this would be! But instead, the victory is finally envisaged as springing from sheer force; the Lamb changes to the Rider on the white horse, sprinkled by the blood of his foes, smiting the nations with a sharp sword and gaining supremacy by slaughter and divine omnipotence.”

Many of us have lived sheltered lives—let’s face it, have had only a vicarious concept of what it means to come face to face with evil, and so are all too ready to reduce the final judgment to a great cosmic sigh on the part of God. But the descriptions we have in the Apocalypse are not pretty. They speak of “the wine of God’s fury ... poured full strength into the cup of his wrath” (14:10); of the wicked being tormented with “burning sulfur” (14:10); of the divine rider “dressed in a robe dipped in blood” (19:13) and treading “the winepress of the fury and wrath of God Almighty” (19:15). (I’m not making these up. They’re in the text!) There is no way of representing Armageddon as a bed of roses. The writer of the Apocalypse does not want it sanitized, sugarcoated, or made politically correct.

People unfamiliar with oppression and suffering, says Boesak, “react strangely to the language of the Bible. ... [But] the oppressed do not see any dichotomy between God’s love and God’s justice. Why is there this division between the God of the Old Testament and the God of Jesus? Why, on this point, does white Western Christianity go back to the heresy of Marcion? God takes up the cause of the poor and oppressed precisely because in this world their voices are not heard—not even by those who call themselves Christians. God even has to take up the cause of the poor against ‘Christians.’ Christians who enjoy the fruits of injustice without a murmur, who remain silent as the defenceless are slaughtered, dare not become indignant when the suffering people of God echo the prayers of the psalms and pray for deliverance and judgment. In the midst of indescribable pain and appalling indifference, this prayer—and the certainty of God’s loving response—has become our sustenance. ... How God does it is for God to decide. That God shall do it is our faith and joy.”

It is significant that when Ellen G. White excoriated the nominal churches of her day for their tolerance of the
egregious practice of slavery, she reverted to the language of the Apocalypse—and to the Three Angels’ Message no less. “The tears of the pious bondmen and bondwomen,” she said, “of fathers, mothers, and children . . . are all bottled up in heaven. Angels have recorded it all; it is written in the book.” “Justice and judgment have slumbered long,” she heard the angel messenger say, “but will soon awake. Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord.” *The fearful threatenings of the third angel are to be realized . . .* “The names of the oppressors are written in blood, crossed with stripes, and flooded with agonizing, burning tears of suffering.” “The slave master,” she said, “must endure the seven last plagues and then come up in the second resurrection and suffer the second, most awful death. Then the justice of God will be satisfied.”

If it seems as though the Apocalypse focuses on justice to the exclusion of mercy, it is only because of the enormity of the crimes that come up for judgment in the book. In the face of extreme evil, there is a sense in which a “rush to mercy” can appear irresponsible, insensitive—even immoral.

But if judgment involves punishment, what will that punishment be? More of the same? More bloodshed, more carnage, more torture, more killings? What did that Norwegian woman on our flight from Amsterdam think God would do? What did I think? What would constitute adequate retribution in the case of a Joseph Stalin? a Hitler? an Idi Amin? a Pol Pot? a Radovan Karadíc? a Slobodan Milosevic? a Saddam Hussein? a Mao Tse Tung? Who can comprehend the full toll of innocent human suffering in the world? Who can measure the volume of innocent blood shed across the centuries? Who can adequately comprehend the barbaric atrocities perpetrated by gangsters and tyrants across the pages of history? Will simple nonexistence be punishment enough? Will there be a distinction made between the perpetrators of genocide, say, and the common, ordinary, (so to speak, “upright”) sinner, whose only “crime” on earth was the failure to surrender to the Lord Jesus Christ?

Few things highlight human judicial impotence more poignantly than our attempts adequately to administer justice on the perpetrators of heinous crime. A judge, to demonstrate extreme outrage over a particularly brutal homicide, may sentence the criminal to, say, 300 years in prison. But what happens if that same person is convicted of multiple similar crimes? Here the ludicrous often descends to the farcical, with a judge passing sentence of two, three, or more 300-year prison terms, to be served, however, concurrently. It’s a response of sheer frustration in the face of extreme evil. But the situation becomes even more hopeless when we come up against the human animals that have masterminded the systematic liquidation of thousands—even millions of human beings across the centuries. Where is the human court that can administer adequate justice in cases of such monstrous evil?

Besides, some of the crimes committed today are too complex and entrenched for human justice to unravel. And some of the criminals too powerful for human courts to prosecute. That’s why we need a judge big enough to take on the system, however well established. Big enough to handle any criminal, however powerful. Big enough to confront the most entrenched citadels of organized crime and tyranny. A judge who is absolutely beyond corruption or intimidation. That judge is Christ, the One who is both Lamb and Lion.

But this naturally invites the next question: How will Christ handle it? What superpunishment does He have in His bag that’s more adequate than ours? When a human savage stands before Him, guilty of the slaughter of ten thousand people—a million, three million, what form will adequate justice take?

The more I reflect on this issue, the more inscrutable it becomes. And without in any way denying the physical aspect, I think it’s at this point that I can see eye to eye with those who emphasize the psychological dimension. As we all know, the punishment in the head is much more excruciating than the one on the back. For a child, “a little talking to” can be far worse than a session in the woodshed—especially if they are required to look into the face of the one doing the “talking.” Combine this common psychological response with the universal human reaction to the numinous—and you begin to understand the reaction we see in Revelation 6:15-17. Here the wicked literally beg inanimate nature to bury them alive. Imagine the stomach-wrenching dread that elicits that kind of effect—erstwhile self-assured and arrogant human beings now absolutely petrified at the prospect of encountering “the face of him who sits on the throne and . . . the wrath of the Lamb.”

And there is something else: The tyrants of the centuries, the perpetrators of genocide and mass murder, the profiteers that have lived in luxury brokered on the backs of the poor and destitute—these will rise from the dead as fully sentient beings, with the same greed, the same arrogance, the same lust for power they’ve always had. And it’s in that mode, as they “surround the camp of God’s people,” that they will see the reward to those they once abused and brutalized. To see these former victims—the humble poor, the destitute, the persecuted—now vindicated, recipients of the highest honor that divinity can bestow on humans—that will be hell, an emotional and psychological torture that will make even the physical component a welcome end.
We should not presume to know exactly how God will effect retribution on the human animals that have perpetrated the ghastly atrocities of the centuries. I would argue that the nature of the final judgment is a mystery locked up in the mind of God. But one thing is for sure: it will end in justice—the foundation to cosmic reconciliation, universal peace, and eternal security.

Said the sage of Patmos:

"I saw Heaven and earth new-created. Gone the first Heaven, gone the first earth, gone the sea. I saw Holy Jerusalem, new-created, descending resplendent out of heaven, as ready for God as a bride for her husband. I heard a voice thunder from the Throne: 'Look! Look! God has moved into the neighborhood, making his home with men and women! They're his people, he's their God. He'll wipe every tear from their eyes. Death is gone for good—tears gone, crying gone, pain gone—all the first order of things gone.' The Enthroned continues, 'Look! I'm making everything new. Write it all down—each word dependable and accurate.'"28 "They shall see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads" (22:4).

The cry of the martyrs will change to a song of victory: "‘Great and marvelous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are your ways, King of the ages.’ With the redeemed from across the centuries they blink their eyes, pinch themselves, verify that it's all true, shout then in one final thunderous triumphant roar across the universe a single word:  YES!"

POSTSCRIPT

Whether by insight or Providence, the society managed to select, I think, a subject worthy of such a time in history as that to which we've come: "The Apocalypse of St. John." What more relevant consideration could occupy us on the eve of the new millennium?

Every generation faces the temptation to play one-upmanship with the ones that preceded it, looking down their noses at the best efforts of their predecessors. But I think it's important for all of us to recognize that we stand today on the shoulders of our pioneers. Of course, I think we need ever to move forward. Our pioneers themselves would be disappointed if they should rise from the dead to find that we had been stuck precisely where they left us. But while this forward thrust must continue, I think we can do so with appropriate humility and in a posture completely free of historical snobbery, conceit, or arrogance. I hope it was in that spirit that I offered my own small contribution tonight.

I've been very pleased with recent Adventist contributions in the area of the Apocalypse that seek, without arrogance, to push back the theological and conceptual frontiers, and lead us into a deeper, more comprehensive understanding of the book. (Some of the contributors are in this very audience this evening and will be making presentations. I look forward to sitting at their feet.) May we always strive to keep our contribution, as Charles Bradford would say, "in the currency of the realm," to frame our expositions in language that ordinary people can grasp, to resist the call of the esoteric and the arcane, and remain on the level of "water buffalo theology." "Too frequently," says Martin Marty somewhere, "the language of scholars on the front edge of the church's thinking doesn't match the language that is out there. We need the kind of language that reaches a depth of heart in that place where the infidel moves..."

May this annual meeting here in Boston move us forward to that end, leaving us, as Chuck Scriven would say, more than ever, committed partisans with God in the struggle for ultimate justice.
ENDNOTES


2. Boesak, [5].


5. See *ibid*, 167-176, *passim*.


7. Sinclair, 17.

8. Quoted in Sinclair, 17.


15. Bauckham, 3-4.


20. 1:16; 2:12.


24. Boesak, 72.


27. White, *Early Writings*, 275, 276.

REVELATION AND THE FINAL REVOLUTION

Keith A. Burton
Oakwood College

Do you want a revolution? Do you want a revolution?
Sick and tired of my brothers killing each other.
Sick and tired of daddies leaving babies with their mothers.
To every man that needs to lay around and play around.
Listen potnah you should be man enough to stay around.
Sick and tired of the church talking religion.
But yet they talk about each other making decisions.
No mo racism, two facism. No pollution.
The solution? A revolution.
Do you want a revolution? Do you want a revolution?¹

So begins the title track of the controversial Kirk Franklin’s *Nu Nation Project*. The track is prefaced by the recital of Revelation 7:16-17: “They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.”

In our opulent society where we throw away more than we eat; where our bottled water comes with an expiration date; where we take central heat and air for granted; where tears are an infrequent invader to our otherwise contented lives, this text may not mean much. It’s easy for biblical scholars to interpret it as the psychological yearning of the disenfranchised Christians of first-century Rome who pined for release from the Domitian persecutions.² However, for those of us who share the hope of the second advent, this is the locus of our faith. We ache for the day when wrongs will be righted. We don’t believe Elijah Mohammed. The hope of paradise is not a mythical fantasy. We defy Jesse Ventura. Our faith is not a crutch used by weak-willed sissies to avoid reality. We don’t share the philosophy of Andre Crouch. Suffering would not be worth it without a reward. We are undaunted by the taunting of Karl Marx. Our religion is not a drug to which we are addicted. We believe in the future, for like Haile Selassie in his memorable address to the United Nations, we “are confident of the victory of good over evil.”³

Indeed, the Revelation to John contains a vivid account of the victory of good over evil. In graphic terms it describes the culmination of the gospel. Many do not realize the full power of the gospel and its radical implications. The gospel is not merely about a “sweet little Jesus boy” who lies in a manger, it promotes a conquering king who upsets the status quo. The gospel is not simply about passive submission, it encourages aggressive assaults against demonic forces. The gospel is not about political complacency, its about engaging in a struggle against this Babylonian society. The messianic expectations of the Jewish people have not disintegrated into oblivion. They are now being shared by members of the family who have been grafted in. They are as real as they were when Daniel saw the stone that was hewn out of the mountain without hands. The gospel is about conquest. It does not come in the shroud of political correctness. It is couched in political rhetoric. It dares to speak of an invading kingdom. It is not concerned with making alliances. It openly condemns governments. It is subversive. It speaks of anguish and pain. It predicts bloodshed and disaster. It portrays an avenging God who is a consuming fire. In no uncertain terms, the gospel is not friendly to this world of exploitation and injustice. It speaks of a new world order—one that is ushered in by a revolution.

³Speech of His Imperial Majesty the Emperor Haile Selassie, presented before the United Nations on February 28, 1968.
Many are uncomfortable with the connotation of the term “revolution.” Revolutions are only won after bloodshed and pain. However, revolutions are spawned by necessity. The very mention of the word “revolution” suggests that something is wrong with the present order. The American revolution would not have been necessary if taxation had been balanced with representation. The West Africans enslaved in Haiti would not have taken arms if they were able to tolerate life under minority rule. The Chinese would not have protested English exploitation if they enjoyed being taken for granted. The Zimbabweans and Azanians would not have engaged in heroic struggles for freedom if they believed the apartheid system to be equitable. Revolutions take place as a result of injustice.

The very notion of Christianity is revolutionary. A Christian is one who believes that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah of prophecy. The Messiah of prophecy is one who leads the people of God to political prominence. Under Messiah’s reign, there is no rival kingdom. The New Testament letters attest to this Messiah. His first coming was only a prelude to the second. It was somewhat preparatory. He came to recruit soldiers who are willing to suffer for the cause.

“Blessed are you when people shall revile you and persecute you and say all manner of evil against you for my name’s sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven.” Indeed, the New Testament culminates with the grand climax of the revolution, as evil is overcome by good, and individuals in the conquering army receive their reward. As Christians, we are called to be a part of the revolution. We find ourselves in situations that demand us to be conquerors. As practical and reflective theologians, we are called to actively agitate the complacency that permeates our sin-soaked society. We are called to prophesy to the decaying bones that are oblivious to injustice, oppression, and exploitation.

As a person of African decent, I have dedicated a significant portion of my ministry to address injustices that directly impact those who share the melanin of our common ancestors, Adam and Eve. My European—and European-minded brethren cannot understand why one with a terminal degree in New Testament Interpretation and Classical Literature devotes time to such topics as Sabbath in Africa, The Nation of Islam, The Economic Empowerment of Black People, and Racism in the Church. However, I cannot live out my calling like an ostrich with his head buried in the soil. I cannot dichotomize between my Christianity and socio-cultural reality. I cannot allow my academic credentials to force me on a path to self-aggrandizement. As I proclaim the gospel of liberation that sets all people free, I cannot forget the plight of my ancestors. I cannot forget the tens of millions who were forcefully abducted from the shores of Africa.

I cannot forget the evil capitalist system that used my great-great-grandparents to build new nations and satisfy the luxuries of Europe. I cannot forget the fallacy of the 1833 and 1863 emancipation proclamations, which only introduced a new form of slavery. I cannot forget the Berlin Conference of November 15, 1884 where the land of my foreparents was divided among England, France, Portugal, Holland, Spain, and Germany, as if the African continent was an oversized Monopoly board. I cannot forget the apartheid systems of the nations controlled by Europe, that patterned themselves after the system legalized in America after Plessy versus Ferguson. I cannot forget the racism in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, which is so entrenched that the majority would send the publishing houses into bankruptcy if they received Sabbath School Quarterlies depicting Jesus and other biblical characters with dark skin and curly hair, instead of the images of Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo. As one called to be a preacher of righteousness, I must not be vague in my prophesying, but I must use concrete examples so that my audience may be aware of the sins for which they must repent. If I am to fulfill my part in this revolution, and I know my part infinitely, I must be clear in identifying the strategies that the enemy uses to achieve his goals.

\footnote{For a Christian position on the legitimacy of the confrontational struggle against evil systems, see autobiography of Bishop Abel Tendekai Muzorewa, \textit{Rise Up and Walk} (Nashville: Abingdon, 1978), esp. 172-187.}

\footnote{See Will H. Willimon, \textit{Sighing for Eden: Sin, Evil & the Christian Faith} (Nashville: Abingdon, 1985), 200: “Christian preaching is prophetic whenever it honestly exposes our sin and delusions and then invites us to participate in the revolutionary work of the risen Christ who, by his presence in our world, is forever defeating false gods and raising up for himself a people and a kingdom made up of the poor, the powerless, the sick, the victimized, the hungry, and the wretched of the earth.”}

\footnote{Jan Smuts is credited with framing the Apartheid system in South Africa, but one only need look at America to see that he had a model on which to frame his system.}
However, more important than my African heritage is my merger into the body of Jesus Christ. Consequently, as a Christian who has chosen to be a part of this remnant movement, I must also pay attention to the broader evils that all society. My vision cannot be so tunnelled that my prophetic insight is limited to the color of my iris. I realize that although my people suffer from the yoke and results of European oppression, I cannot presume that we are the exclusive objects of the sniper's bullet. The revolution is global. My people comprise just one category of those who are affected by the rampant and uncontrollable machine-gun fire of the one who "walks about like a roaring lion seeking whomever he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8). As I am confronted by the daily news, I am reminded that Satan does not have discriminating taste—he is an equal-opportunity destroyer. Indeed, "All creation groans together in travail for deliverance" (Romans 8:22).

Even as Africa is plagued with civil unrest, economic plight, and AIDS, the rest of the world—yea the rest of creation—also suffers. Europe is continuously troubled by the tribalism of Irish Catholics and Scottish Protestants, Serbs and Croats, Albanians and Kosovors, Chechynans and Russians. Turkey is buckling under its second earthquake this year. In addition to the Indonesian squabbles with East Timor and Moslem-Hindu conflict, Asia is also burdened with natural disasters. The earth continues to quake in Japan and Taiwan. Over 3 million people in Bhubaneswar, India are still fighting the aftereffects of the cyclone that terminated 10,000 lives. North America is engaged in psychological warfare as Jerry Springer and Oprah Winfrey redefine morality. Poverty is on the rise while Bill Gates's wealth is ten times the amount of the combined wealth of 33 million African Americans. Selective wars are being fought as drugs are demonized and alcohol and sensuality are glorified. The survivors of No Gun Ri and the memory of My Lai remind us that Uncle Sam's troops have the potential to inflict the same atrocities as the programmed destroyers under the command of Pol Pot, Idi Amin, or Adolph Hitler. Signs of the times are everywhere, and as we investigate the world scene, it is apparent that this is not the creation upon which God placed his endorsement. This is not the beautiful masterpiece that God pronounced "very good." (Genesis 1:31).

Those of us who look beyond earthly geographical boundaries for our ultimate identity realize that the only thing that will help the world now is a revolution. There needs to be a global transformation that is able to penetrate the very core of this earth. Many Christians have been influenced by the New Age version of global revolution and sit around the table with the Parliament of World Religions while attaching their signature to the "Declaration for a global ethic." They reflect on the sentiment on John Lennon's "Imagine" and reject the violent images of Revelation. The problem is, the New Age vision does not address the problem of sin and evil. Even if the people started loving each other, it cannot put an end to ferocious creatures, disease, natural disasters, immorality, and the many malignant sores that plague blighted humanity.

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7 The first major earthquake in Izmit on August 17 killed 17,000. Izmit was troubled again on September 13. The third occurred in Kayasnl on November 14, killing 362 and injuring 1,800.
10 No Gun Ri is the location of the 1950 massacre of 400 Koreans by U.S. troops. See Associated Press article by Sang-Hun Choe, "Survivors of No Gun Ri tell their stories," Huntsville Times, Sunday, November 14, 1999, A4.
13 In his conclusion, Mark Sommer, Beyond the Bomb: Living Without Nuclear Weapons (Massachusetts: Expro Press, 1985), 168, pleads: "... can we create a culture and myth sufficiently compelling and attractive to overcome the species' lingering and obsolescent fascination with war?"
Experience has taught us that temporal revolutions have only temporary significance. The American revolution can be interpreted as the transfer of slave ownership from England to the former colonies. The Chinese cultural revolution under Mao Tsehung led to oppressive communism. The united struggle of ZANU and ZAPU against Ian Smith’s Rhodesia was eclipsed by the consequent Shona massacre of Ndebeles. Even Jonah’s repentant Nineveh was not able to transmit its righteous repentance to consequent generations. We do not need another revolution that has no power over sin. We need a permanent revolution that ushers in an eternity of righteousness. We need a revolution that will resound the final “amen.”

This kind of revolution is described in Revelation. It is a revolution that ends all revolutions. It does not merely address the symptoms of the problem, it cuts to the root itself. It is a revolution in which God will “... destroy those who are destroying the earth” (Rev 11:18). It is a revolution in which all the forces of evil are systematically destroyed. It is a revolution in which “... the beast [is] captured, and with it the false prophet..., [after which] these two [are] thrown into the lake of fire and sulphur” (19:20). It is a revolution in which “... the devil... [is] cast in the lake of fire and sulphur” (20:10). It is a revolution in which “... death and Hades [are] cast in the lake of fire” (20:14). It is a revolution in which “... anyone who [is] not found written in the book of life [is] cast in the lake of fire” (20:15). Evil is permanently eradicated. The earth is everlastinglly disinfected. The antiseptic judgment accomplishes its assignment.

With the powers of evil toppled, the announcement can be made: “The kingdom of our Lord and his Messiah, and he shall rule into the ages of the ages” (11:15). And what kind of kingdom will it be? Listen to John:

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth. For the first heaven and the first earth had gone away and the sea was not there. And I saw the holy city the New Jerusalem coming down from heaven as a bride dressed for her husband. And I heard a great voice from the throne saying, behold the tabernacle of God is with humans, and he shall tabernacle with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them as their God, and he shall wipe every tear from their eyes, and there shall be no death, nor mourning, nor crying, nor shall there be pain, because the things of this world as it is now have gone away (21:1-4).

Listen to Kirk:

There’s gonna be a brighter day, All your troubles will pass away
A revolution’s coming, Yes it’s coming, coming, coming.

Think of the state of the world, and listen to your heart. Do you want a revolution?

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14 See John Hope Franklin, From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans, Fifth Edition (New York: Knopf, 1980), 96: “With British domination at an end and stable government established, Americans could no longer lay the onus for slavery at the door of the mother country. They proudly accepted the challenge and responsibility of the new political freedom by establishing the machinery and safeguards that insured the continued enslavement of blacks. Ironically enough, America’s freedom was the means of giving slavery a longer life than it was to have in the British empire.”


16 K. Franklin, “Revolution.”
THE BOOK OF REVELATION AT THE CROSSROADS:  
WHERE WE'VE BEEN AND WHERE WE'RE GOING

Jon Paulien  
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The Distant Past

The Book of Revelation began its existence as a public text. According to Rev 1:3 a blessing was pronounced on "the one who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy." This implies the intention that the book be read to the churches in a public setting and find its place in the lives of believers as a corporate document. So Revelation began not only as a public text, but as a popular text, to be heard, savored and interpreted by the "common people" in public interaction with one another. The role of "scholars" in the interpretation of the book was left undefined.

In the Middle Ages the popular interest in the Book of Revelation continued. New evidence suggests that popular excitement in relation to the year 1000 was greater than the previous generation of historians had thought. Richard Landes, a major figure in the recent year 1000 debate, goes so far as to suggest that the established church went out of its way to suppress even the memory of year 1000 excitement in Western Europe. Popular interest in the Book of Revelation seems to have peaked with the work of Joachim of Flores in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Scholars, on the other hand, generally neglected the book during this period.

Little changed at the time of the Reformation. Revelation was treated with some disrespect by Luther and was the only Bible book on which Calvin did not write a commentary. On the other hand, the book was loved by the

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4Jean Calvin, Calvin's Commentaries, 45 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1947-1950). Froom believed that while Luther had serious doubts about the value and authenticity of Revelation at first, his attitude had become more positive by 1545. See Froom, Prophetic Faith, vol. 2, p. 273. See first introduction to Revelation in Schriften for the negative view.
peasants and became a major focus in the Peasants' Revolt and the uprising at Münster. The disparity of interest in the book between scholars and laity continued into the 18th and 19th centuries. During those centuries there was little scholarly interest in the book outside of the influential works by Newton and Bengel. At the popular level, however, interest surged as the result of the efforts by interpreters such as William Miller and John Nelson Darby. As the world approached the end of the 19th century, therefore, a clear pattern had been established. The Book of Revelation was received with enthusiasm by humble believers, but was not the object of major academic attention.

By that time, however, another major pattern had been established. The attention lavished on Revelation by the "common people" had proven to be a mixed blessing. Popular interpreters read the book as a direct witness to their own time and place. The literary and historical contexts of the book's author were largely ignored. Instead of public reading and interpretation producing a unity of acceptance in the believing community, the reading of the book became increasingly a matter of private interpretation. Revelation became the source of inspiration for hotheads and nut cases. Private reading produced a chaos of interpretation. The "failure" of Miller's prophetic scheme in particular led to considerable disillusionment with regard to interpretation of prophecy in general and historicist interpretation of Daniel and Revelation in particular.

Two Waves of Scholarly Interest

Beginning around 1890 and continuing into the early 30s of this century, there was a major wave of scholarly interest in the Book of Revelation. Scholars sought to correct irresponsible misinterpretation by refocusing attention on the original literary and historical context of the author's time and place. Ramsey went to Asia Minor to see what could be learned about the seven churches on the very ground where they had existed. R. H. Charles, Henry B.

I can't resist paraphrasing an interchange between Luther and one of his colleagues at the time of the Peasants' Revolt:
Colleague (agitated): Herr Luther, the peasants are revolting!
Luther: So what? I've known that for years.

For a summary of radical, popular developments at the time of the Reformation see Kyle, pp. 58-60.


For an extensive scholarly comparison of the competing systems of Miller and Darby, and their popular impact on the United States, see Stephen O'Leary, Arguing the Apocalypse: A Theory of Millennial Rhetoric (NY: Oxford University Press, 1994).


William M. Ramsay, The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia and Their Place in the Plan of the Apocalypse (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1904), reprinted by Baker Books (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1979). See the recent reevaluation of Ramsay's work by Steve Freisen, "Revelation and Realia Revisited: Archaeology and the Apocalypse," a paper presented to the Reading the Apocalypse Seminar of the Society of Biblical Literature, national meeting, Chicago, IL, November 20, 1994. Freisen seems to have become the leading figure in the intersection between the archaeology of Western Turkey and scholarship on the Book of Revelation. Steven J. Freisen, Twice Neokoros: Ephesus, Asia, and the Cult of the Flavian Imperial Family (Leiden: E. J. Brill,
Swete, William Milligan, E. B. Allo, Ernst Lohmeyer and J. A. Seiss sought to respect the author’s intention for his work by giving careful attention to the ancient Greek. In reaction to popular attempts to understand what the text means, there was a rigorous focus on what the text meant. Historical-critical presuppositions led to a treatment that was largely preterist, in other words, interested in the impact of the book on its original audience alone. There was little attempt to apply the book’s message to the interpreter’s time and place. The concept of predictive prophecy was rejected.

More recently, in the 70s and 80s of this century, a second wave of scholarly interest developed. Like the first wave, it was largely limited to historical-critical interpretation from a preterist approach. The main area of focus was the genre of Revelation. From the Early Christian Apocalypticism Seminar (Society of Biblical Literature) through the Uppsala Conference, scholars wrestled with the issue of whether Revelation was to be understood as prophetic, apocalyptic or epistolary in nature. The early critical consensus, expressed in the work of John J. Collins, was that Revelation was to be understood primarily as an apocalyptic work. Other names associated with this debate were

1993).


13The Book of Revelation, The Expositor’s Bible (Cincinnati: Jennings & Graham, [1889]).


David E. Aune, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Adela Yarbro Collins, Leonard Thompson, David Hellholm. Currently, in part due to the radical critiques by Mazzaferrì and Müller, there is the general sense that some blend of the three generic types is required by the evidence. In addition to the general interest in genre, significant commentaries appeared during these two decades; the voluminous and controversial work by J. Massyngberde Ford, and those by Robert Mounce, Pierre Prigent, and Heinrich Kraft. These last hundred years have not been the friendliest time for SDA scholars in Revelation. Historical-critical presuppositions tended to rule out a faith approach to the book or an appreciation of its predictive elements. The historicist approach to the book has been laughed off by the academy. Our tendency toward a more popular style of reading the Apocalypse was usually considered irrelevant to serious study. The fields of exegesis and biblical theology


in general were largely closed to work from an SDA perspective. So SDA scholars who succeeded in making their scholarly mark in biblical studies did so in the fields of archaeology, text criticism, and linguistics.

A change in the above atmosphere was signaled for me by the work of Edgar McKnight. In his book Post-Modern Use of the Bible, McKnight provokes in readers a whole new way of thinking about the past, present, and future of biblical interpretation. McKnight decries the way a critical approach to the text creates distance between the text and modern readers. He argues for the right of each reader to make sense of the text for himself or herself while remaining in dialogue with critical assumptions and approaches. The hermeneutical circle should expand from original intent to the literary relationship of the parts to the whole of the text, to its progressive contexts of the consciousness of individual readers and in communities of readers over the centuries.

McKnight outlines with striking clarity that both the popular and scholarly approaches to the text were satisfying in their time because they offered interpretations that were consistent with the prevailing worldviews that brought them into existence to begin with. Just as allegorical interpretation fit comfortably in a platonic world, so critical interpretation fit comfortably into a world that limited truth to sense experience, thus defining God out of existence. Neither view of the world was objective; both were comfortable and popular assumptions. McKnight suggests that we have now moved into a "post-modern age" in which language is capable again of conceptualizing God but in a sense different than in the dogmatic age. McKnight hopes that in this age biblical texts can be read without a detour through any philosophical system.

McKnight builds on the above to argue that meaning is dynamic. Individuals and groups make sense of their world by means of a particular view of the universe. But since none are in direct touch with ultimate reality, a plurality of meanings and worldviews inevitably results. Such pluralism may be a "nightmare" to many, but McKnight sees it as the key to the future of biblical interpretation. Instead of combining into exclusive groups struggling to define the correct approach to the biblical text, scholars of the Bible can gain from the richness of diversity. By sharing a variety of readings, each scholar's own reading is enriched.


30 The work of Horn and Geraty particularly comes to mind, more recently that of Sten LaBianca and Randy Younker. This voluminous tradition (too voluminous to offer a selected listing here) is amply witnessed to in the pages of Andrews University Seminary Studies and the many publications of the Archaeological Institute at Andrews University.


Because of work such as McKnight's, I have seen a major change in attitude over the last fifteen years of attendance at meetings of the Society of Biblical Literature. Scholars are much more willing to express faith, and there seems to be a much greater readiness to admit mistakes and/or ignorance. Faith-based approaches to the text are increasingly seen as a contribution to knowledge, provided they are serious attempts at dealing with the evidence. Today the world of biblical scholarship is open to the exegetical and theological work of Seventh-day Adventists. Today graduates of Andrews University's Ph.D. program are treated with respect, not just among evangelicals, but among critical scholars as well. This has brought about what I call the third wave of scholarly interest in Revelation.

**The Third Wave of Scholarly Interest**

I see the third wave of scholarly interest in Revelation signaled by the emergence of David Barr as a major force in the current debate over the book. Barr began publishing on the Book of Revelation in the mid-80s. He argued for a more oral and narrative approach to the book in contrast to its critical analysis as a historical document. In doing so he helped open the field to literary and social approaches to the book. In 1990 he guided the establishment of the “Literary Criticism and the Apocalypse Consultation,” which was replaced after two years by the “Reading the Apocalypse Seminar.” The two groups were largely made up of younger scholars eager to move the debate forward.

The purpose of the seminar was to explore the “intersection between literary and social readings of the Apocalypse.” I sense that Barr was hoping to avoid the quagmires of both precritical and critical readings of the Apocalypse and develop some consensus among those advocating more contemporary approaches to the book. As the years went by, however, I sensed his increasing frustration as the fifteen to twenty members of the group seemed to fragment in a variety of directions; literary, structuralist, feminist, rhetorical, theological, liturgical, and so on. In the end the group decided to publish a couple of books that would highlight a variety of reader responses rather than a

34I recall with some amusement the comment of an "old guard" scholar ten years ago that the exegetical work of believers such as Richard Hays and Tom Wright was "neo-fundamentalist crap!" No one dares level such charges at first-rate scholars like Hays and Wright today.


consensus approach. What I have personally appreciated about Barr is his willingness to allow those he disagreed with
generous access to the group’s deliberations over the years, in spite of the fragmented conclusions that resulted.

While the Reading the Apocalypse Seminar seemed a gathering of rugged individualists, I detected a number of
areas in which the group seemed to divide almost 50/50. And depending on the issue, the group would divide
differently. About half the individuals in the group preferred to retain an interest in the original author’s intention (“it’s
not a legitimate reading to interpret the seven seals as aquatic animals”),38 the other half being primarily interested in
how contemporary readers respond to the book.39 Similarly, about half the scholars seemed to prefer what McKnight
would call a “modern” reading of Revelation, the other half preferring “postmodern” reading. About half the group
seemed to appreciate Revelation from more of a faith-based, evangelical background,40 while the other half seemed to
have a more secular and critical interest in the outworking of the subject.41 I personally felt that the interaction of these
“opposites” was an extremely fruitful exercise.

In the course of the Seminar’s development some interesting synergisms did develop. Josephine Ford presented
readings of the Apocalypse from the perspective of contemporary artists. Barr’s work sought to unite literary, oral,
social and structural approaches to the book. Fiorenza produced a commentary which includes a historical-critical
analysis, followed by a contemporary, feminist analysis of Revelation.42 Tina Pippin challenged the limits of propriety
in her analysis of the author’s presumed sexual fantasies.43 Even I found a place in the discussion by examining how
Revelation has affected popular culture and how an awareness of popular culture affects the reading of Revelation.44

In this type of open-ended approach to the Bible, believing scholars have found a new place in the academy of
biblical scholars. Although David Aune believes that Ranko Stefanovic reveals too much of his Adventism in his
book on the sealed scroll of Revelation 5,45 he nevertheless cites him at great length in his monumental commentary.46
Barr intends to use my paper on popular culture as the lead article in a textbook for college university students interested

38Among these I would include Aune, Adela Collins, Leonard Thompson, Fiorenza, Ford, and myself.
39Among these I would include Tina Pippin, Barr, Jean-Pierre Ruiz, Ron Farrer, and Edith Humphreys.
40Among these I would include Humphreys, Ramsey Michaels, John Stanley, and myself.
41Among these I would include Barr, Fiorenza, Collins, and Pippin.
42Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Revelation: Vision of a Just World, Proclamation Commentaries, edited by
43See her book, Death and Desire: The Rhetoric of Gender in the Apocalypse of John (Louisville, KY:
   Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), but prepare yourself for some shock value. Pippin continues to press the
   1999).
44I shared the above assessment of the seminar and its context with David Barr himself. Expressing a
   humble concern that I had overstated his role in the "third wave," he otherwise concurred with my analysis of
   developments. Email from David Barr on November 3, 1999.
45I have unfortunately lost track of a letter from Aune in which he made the observations on which the
   above assessment is based. The same has been confirmed in private conversations with him. Stefanovic’s
   dissertation was published as The Background and Meaning of the Sealed Book of Rev 5 (Berrien Springs, MI:
46David E. Aune, Revelation, 3 vols., Word Biblical Commentary, edited by David A. Barker and Glenn W.
   Hubbard (Waco, TX: Word Publishers, 1997), vol. 1, pp. 320, 339-340, 346, 355, and elsewhere. He also lists the
   work of another Adventist member of this society, R. Dean Davis (The Heavenly Court Judgment of Revelation 4-5
in studying Revelation, to be published by Scholars Press. This new level of openness to faith is an exciting development, and I challenge all of you to pick an area of the academy, listen for a while, get to know the key players, and then make a contribution of your own. The table has been set for you already.

With the closing meeting of the Seminar in 1997, attention in the world of Revelation scholarship moved to the publication of two monumental commentaries, that of David Aune in the Word Biblical Commentary series,\(^{47}\) and that of Gregory Beale in New International Greek Testament Commentary.\(^{48}\) Averaging more than 1500 pages, they represent a compendium of more than a hundred years of scholarship. Aune himself has joked that he wrote the last nineteenth-century commentary. His is a monument of historical-critical attention to the author’s intention, and to a rigorous analysis of every detail of the text from a disinterested, scholarly perspective. Beale, on the other hand, is unabashed in his believing, theological approach to the book. What has surprised me is that my students at the Seminary generally prefer Aune to Beale because his descriptive approach seems to have made him more honest with the text. Beale’s belief system clearly affects his reading and to that extent distacts the reader away from what may be a more natural reading of the text. While Aune offers little synthesis, his detailed analyses guide the reader into the text and its environment with as little prejudice as possible. Together, they provide an incomparable resource to students of Revelation.

The capstone of this third wave of interest in Revelation may have come at the 1998 SBL meeting in Orlando. A sizable crowd witnessed a full-length dramatization of the entire book by David Rhoads, followed by a panel discussion and reactions from the audience. It was as if we had come full circle from Rev 1:3. Once again the Book of Revelation became an oral text, a public text. For most of the audience, including the panelists, it was the first time that the original intention of the author was fully experienced, and in the contemporary setting of Disney World no less! In a real sense author’s intention and reader’s response became one.

**Continuance of the Third Wave**

This weekend, two follow-up efforts seek to extend the third wave of scholarly interest in the Book of Revelation. As a follow-up to last year’s dramatization of Revelation, the Frontiers of Biblical Scholarship program will present a panel of distinguished scholars discussing how archaeology and critical scholarship have helped us better understand the original context in which Revelation was written.\(^{49}\) This is the second in a three-year series that will result in a video aimed at providing scholarly insights into Revelation in a format accessible to nonprofessionals.

A second session, the new “Apocalypse in Context, both Ancient and Modern Consultation” will explore the possibility of continuing the work of the seminar group within the larger context of the Society of Biblical Literature.\(^{50}\) The level of interest in the consultation this year and next will probably determine whether the “third wave” of scholarly interest has any steam left in it.

**Adventist Study of Revelation Then**

The subject of Adventist study of Revelation deserves a paper in its own right, but I would like to offer a few

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\(^{50}\) AAR/SBL 1999 Annual Meeting Program Book (Boston, MA, November 20-23, 1999), Session S26, "John’s Apocalypse and Cultural Contexts Ancient and Modern Consultation" (Saturday, November 20, 1:00 PM-3:30 PM), p. 69.
general, intuitive comments about the 150 or so years of SDA study of Revelation.51 SDA studies of the book generally followed the methods of William Miller from the time of the Great Disappointment until a hundred or so years later. A systematic and often allegorical approach combined with a historicist heritage to govern SDA interpretation. The theological fragmentation that one would expect from a lack of attention to exegesis, however, did not occur.52 There seem to be two reasons for this. First, respect for the prophetic contributions of Ellen White limited discussion in many passages of the book. She provided a divine safeguard against erroneous conclusions, even though the methods of Bible study were less than rigorous in their exegesis.53 Second, the wide acceptance of Uriah Smith’s interpretations on Revelation in areas not addressed by Ellen White provided a general framework in which Adventist thought and evangelism developed its basic unity of understanding.

The lack of exegetical rigor among the pioneers can be illustrated by Uriah Smith’s work on the trumpets.54 In the course of 42 pages of interpretation there is but one single exegetical statement. Verses are printed according to the King James Version followed by pages of historical detail without a single reference back to the text or its background in the OT. 62% of the text is in quotation marks, being culled from earlier historicist writers. This leads to the suspicion that Brother Smith himself never did any serious work in the text. Even more interesting, the entire piece, quotations and all, was taken from an anonymous pamphlet published in 1859, probably from the pen of James White.55 The one exception to the general lack of exegetical rigor among the pioneers was the work of J. N. Andrews, who understood the original languages and proved fairly insightful with regard to exegesis.56 This may have been a reason that Ellen White called him “The ablest man in all our ranks.”57

The Hermeneutical Crisis Since 1915

In spite of the lack of exegetical rigor, unity of understanding was largely maintained as long as Ellen White was alive.58 By the time of the 1919 Bible Conference, however, concerns were being expressed as to how the Bible

51This subject is worthy of a major study, but I can only be suggestive here from my own experience in the process. The footnotes are incomplete and the whole thesis is likely to be flawed.


55The Sounding of the Seven Trumpets of Revelation VIII and IX (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press of the Review and Herald Office, 1859).


should be handled in the absence of a living prophet.\textsuperscript{59} The problem with a dead prophet is that the prophet’s work becomes subject to interpretation just as much as the biblical materials do. At the 1919 Bible Conference there was an awareness of this problem, but that awareness does not seem to have filtered down into general church practice.

The material in the \textit{Our Firm Foundation} volumes (1953) indicates that the Adventist Church arrived at this half of the century with essentially the same approach to Revelation as the 19\textsuperscript{th} century pioneers.\textsuperscript{60} The assumption was made (but never argued) that the sevenfold sequences of the churches, seals, and trumpets represented stages of history from NT times to the second coming.\textsuperscript{61} The method of study was systematic and text-selective rather than exegetical. The goal seemed to be conclusions compatible with the church’s traditional positions rather than fidelity to the text of Revelation itself.

As the 1950s wore on, however, at least two major strands within Adventism had become visible, one represented by the work \textit{Questions on Doctrine},\textsuperscript{62} the other by its vigorous opponents.\textsuperscript{63} The traditional Adventist consensus for Revelation was also beginning to break down. There remained a consensus regarding the historicist approach to interpretation, but various individuals were becoming more and more creative in their use of the Bible and Ellen White to offer interpretations that differed from those of Uriah Smith.\textsuperscript{64}

Meanwhile more and more individuals seeking academic degrees were seeing value in subjecting Adventist evangelistic and theological use of the Bible to the standards of exegetical procedures. The approaches to Revelation taught and utilized in societies like SBL and SNTS were greeted with various levels of interest.

The fragmentation that was feared in 1919 and began to be discernable in the 1950s has reached full-blown maturity as we approach the new millennium. Today, there are perhaps a dozen or more different versions of Adventism.\textsuperscript{65} It is now clear to most Adventist scholars, at least, that in the absence of a living prophet, the traditional Adventist hermeneutic cannot do the job.\textsuperscript{66}

The church seems to have taken two approaches over the last half-century to healing the rift in Adventist

\textsuperscript{59}See the transcripts published in \textit{Spectrum}, vol. 10, number 1, May, 1979, pp. 27-57.


\textsuperscript{61}Along the lines of the historical sequences in Dan 2 and 7.


\textsuperscript{63}M. L. Andreasen, \textit{Letters to the Churches: Series A} (Baker, OR: Hudson Printing Co., [1959?]).


\textsuperscript{66}By traditional Adventist hermeneutic, I mean the systematic, allegorical approach to the Bible still exhibited by the more egregious proof-text-type Bible studies and in many evangelistic approaches to the Bible.
hermeneutics. One approach is to call conferences in which Bible scholars, pastors and administrators are brought together to develop a more careful approach to the Bible and Adventist doctrine. The first such conference in 1952 resulted in the two volumes entitled Our Firm Foundation. The second, more scholarly conference, was the committee on Daniel that met back in the early 1960s, but failed to publish its results. The third, more general, conference, was the Bible Conference held at Andrews University in 1974.

The most significant of these conferences, the fourth, was the Daniel and Revelation Committee, which brought top scholars from around the world together for eleven years (1981-1992) in an attempt to iron out some of the most intractable problems of Adventist interpretation. The first five volumes (based on the committee’s work from 1981-1985) were largely a reaction to the work of Desmond Ford presented at Glacier View in 1980. But in 1986 a shift in the committee’s perspective could be detected. The committee turned away from a reactive approach to a more exegetical, forward-looking approach to the Bible. The last two volumes in the series (on Revelation) are more reflective of the latter approach. Thanks in part to the work of this committee, scholarly exegesis of the Bible in general, and Revelation in particular, is more widely accepted among Adventists than ever before.

The other approach taken by the church to heal the rifts resulting from fragmented interpretation is to give more attention to hermeneutics and exegesis in the training of its ministers and scholars. The development of a Ph.D. program in Religion at Andrews University and the general encouragement for religion faculty to gain advanced degrees signaled church leadership’s concern with the allegorical approach. As examination of the Bible becomes more grounded in solid exegesis, there is some hope that unity in the essential core of biblical teaching can be achieved, resulting in an Adventist center. The current rift between the two scholarly societies among us indicates that achieving an exegetical-

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70 The shift was signaled for me by an unopposed speech of William Johnsson.


72 I must confess a certain ambivalence in church leadership’s behavior here. While the commitment to Ph.D. work at Andrews and elsewhere suggests a strong commitment to solid biblical hermeneutics, the strong endorsement for more allegorical methods as commonly exhibited in televised evangelistic series seems to be working at cross-purposes. The methods used by the evangelists to straighten people out are being used by lay people to promote disturbing new theological trends.
based Adventist center will not be easy, but without such a center, there is reason to question whether Adventist unity will survive into the next generation. While not coming together as a result of administrative action, both scholarly societies can play a role in the process of a more responsible approach to the Book of Revelation; hopefully one day we will even listen to each other.

Adventist Apocalypse Now

Where is Adventist interpretation of Revelation going? I'd like to offer a brief perspective from my own experience. In my view the decisive shift in Adventist understanding of Revelation was precipitated by Desmond Ford's Glacier View document, although it devoted relatively little attention to the Book of Revelation. Following up on hints toward a future interpretation first published in his Daniel commentary, the Glacier View document's advocacy of the apotelesmatic principle opened the way to a futurist interpretation of texts that Adventists had traditionally placed in the Middle Ages or at some other point in the history of the Christian era. The implications of Ford's suggestions, however, were largely lost sight of by church leadership in its settled focus on issues related to Dan 8, Leviticus, and Hebrews.

Where the futurist suggestions of Ford made their impact, surprisingly, was in the context of the conservative Adventist "right." The mainstream Adventist Church essentially accepted Ford's soteriology, but rejected his eschatology. The radical right, on the other hand, seems to have rejected his soteriology while opening itself up to the

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73My remarks here should not be interpreted as a slap against systematic theology or theologians. It is simply an appeal for us all to be reading the same texts when we interpret the Bible. Unless we give careful attention to the text's original context, it is all too easy for the interpreter to make the Bible say whatever one wants. Unless one gives careful attention to what the text meant, even conservative biblical interpretation easily loses track of the biblical message in the service of political agendas.

Will exegesis ever bring us into agreement on all issues? Of course not. There are many grammatical and syntactical ambiguities in Scripture that will vex exegesis until our Lord comes. But the goal of exegesis is to help us see where the Bible is clear and where it is not. The emerging Adventist center will avoid establishing doctrine on the basis of unclear biblical texts, but will instead ground our understanding in that which is reasonably clear in the Bible. Such a focus on the clear texts will isolate those who make a living on the unclear texts (like the seals, the trumpets, and Dan 11) by using them to undermine the clear teachings of Scripture.


75The interpretation of Revelation is actually rarely addressed in the Glacier View manuscript: Desmond Ford, Daniel 8:14, the Day of Atonement, and the Investigative Judgment (1980), published by Evangelion Press, PO Box 1264, Casselberry, FL. Concerns about traditional interpretation of the trumpets are aired on pages 211-215. Pages 282-284 suggest a Day of Atonement context for Rev 8:2-6, a major cornerstone of SDA futurist interpretation. Page 363 states that an historicist interpretation of Rev 11:1-13, such as espoused in The Great Controversy, is exegetically unsustainable, but fortunately, E. G. White also applies the passage to its true place in the very last days (which opens the way to a literal-day understanding of the 1260 days). Ford's Glacier View hints were fleshed out a couple of years later in Crisis: A Commentary on the Book of Revelation, vol. 2 (Newcastle, CA: Desmond Ford Publications, 1982). On pages 415-417 and 458 Ford expresses the belief that Rev 9 is about the last crisis of earth's history, not Islamic attacks throughout the Christian era. On pages 430-432 he fleshes out the Day of Atonement context that he sees in Rev 8:2-6. On page 490 he indicates that the 1260 days of Rev 11:3 are future and literal.

76I remember Dr. Gerhard Hasel addressing this issue with students and faculty after Glacier View. He commented (more or less) that we were in essential agreement with Ford's soteriology, but that the issue between Ford and church leadership was focused in the area of eschatology.
futuristic aspects of Ford's eschatology.\textsuperscript{77} Whereas conservative elements of the church tended to be very defensive of church authority and administration before Glacier View, we have now entered an era in which many of the most conservative elements of the church are in a hostile relationship with the mainstream church. Significant elements of this conservative wing have applied traditional systematic and allegorical approaches to Revelation with a resulting conviction that most of the book, including the seals, the trumpets, and Rev 13, actually apply to our present and future rather than the broad sweep of Christian history. An allegorical approach to the relationship between Ellen White and Revelation is a major component of this development.

In 1986, the Daniel and Revelation committee turned its attention to the book of Revelation. As the committee became more and more aware of "end-time" applications of Revelation, it became less and less focused on Des Ford and more and more focused on the book itself. Since allegory cannot be countered by allegory, the committee became more and more open to serious, scientific exegesis as the best way to demonstrate the weaknesses of upcoming alternatives to SDA thought. This also made the committee more open to creative approaches to traditional Adventist thinking than it might otherwise have been.

In 1989, Bill Shea and I were invited to a gathering known as the "End-Time Committee" near Nashville, Tennessee. Attending were some 40-50 students of Daniel and Revelation, mostly lay people, but including some pastors. These were in agreement that the interaction between Ellen White and Revelation, combined with attention to contemporary world events, compelled them to a futurist application of Revelation as being the only truly "adventist" one.\textsuperscript{78} It seemed that no matter what text we were looking at we saw something completely different in it. No matter what approach I took to explain, there was no meeting of the minds.

A devotional by one of the members helped me to understand what was going on.\textsuperscript{79} She showed a series of slides in which she had set up Barbie dolls in such a way as to illustrate various themes in the Song of Solomon. The devotional expressed her conviction that the Song of Solomon was not a celebration of human sexuality, or even an allegory of the Messiah, but rather a prophecy of Christian history from the cross to the second coming.

I confronted her later that evening and indicated that what she had done fit into the category of allegory, along the lines of Origen and Philo. Her presentation really had nothing to do with the intention of Solomon's Song and everything to do with her own needs and imagination. She argued in return that she had not read Christian history into the Song, but that the history had emerged naturally from the text. I argued back that she had simply read her understanding of Christian history into the text. I asserted that if we took an English teacher from each of our colleges and showed them the presentation they would unitedly agree that her use of the Bible was allegory in the classical sense, not an attempt to understand the biblical text itself.

She was not ready to give in. She brought out her clinching argument. "When I first got this out of Song of

\textsuperscript{77}The widespread use of the terminology "New Theology" in the Adventist right is directed as much at elements of Ford's soteriology as it is at deviations in the areas of sanctuary, christology, and worship style. In fairness, the elements of the Adventist right represented by the journal Our Firm Foundation and the 1888 Study Committee are strongly supportive of traditional historicist interpretation of Revelation; the groups I am referring to from here on in the paper lie outside of those two groups.

\textsuperscript{78}Major examples of this perspective are Larry Wilson, Warning! Revelation is About to be Fulfilled (Brushton, NY: Teach Services, 1992); Robert W. Hauser, Give Glory to Him: The Sanctuary in the Book of Revelation (Angwin, CA: by the author, 1983); idem, Daniel, Revelation and the Final Generation (Angwin, CA: Morningstar Publications, 1987); and Harry Robinson, "The Seven End-Time Trumpets of Revelation" (manuscript presented to the End-Time Committee, Nashville, TN, 1989). Among the mainstream proponents of all or part of the futurist perspective are Marvin Moore (The Seven Trumpets of Revelation: A Crisis About to Happen? [unpublished paper, mid-1990s]) and Erwin Gane (Heaven's Open Door: The Seven Seals of Revelation and Christ Our Heavenly High Priest [Boise, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1989]). To be fair, Gane asserts the historicist view of Rev 5 and 6, for example, but then suggests a "double fulfillment" of the same material in the future. Rather than a futurist, he might prefer to be categorized as a proponent of dual fulfillment of prophecy (a more moderate version of Ford's apotelesmatic principle).

\textsuperscript{79}She was a pastor's wife named Marian Berry.
Solomon," she said, "I was only 19 years old. I didn't know any Christian history. How could a 19-year-old girl come up with all of this?"

I asked, "Had you read Great Controversy by then?"

"Yes," she replied.

"Had you read Froom's Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers by then?"

"Yes," she admitted.

"Case closed," I said, "You may not have known secular historians, but your presentation makes it clear to me that you read Great Controversy and Froom's Prophetic Faith back into Song of Solomon. What you are doing is a classic case of allegorical imagination."

She thought for a moment and then moved in for the kill. She said, "I interpreted the Bible that way, because that is how I was taught, in our Adventist schools. I read the Bible the way Adventists always have. You Ph.D.s are the ones who are changing things. It is this exegesis business that is the new thing. I'm studying the real Adventist way."

This was one of those enchanted moments when everything becomes clear. I suddenly realized that she was right, that the way I study Revelation is radically different than the previous generation, radically different than what the pioneers did. This insight led me to the brief outline of history I shared above.

Is the change of scholarship for the better? I believe it is. The trouble with allegorical methodology is that the results depend on the interpreter much more than the text. As long as the interpreter is reasonably reliable, the results will not be damaging. But in modeling an allegorical method, pastors and evangelists train people in a method which, in the hands of unstable people, can produce wild-eyed speculations and even life-threatening obsessions, such as those of 16th-century Münster.

In the absence of a living prophet, allegorical method leads to fragmentation. Each interpreter reads into the text according to his or her needs and expectations. For years administrators in the church have tolerated eisegetical abuse in evangelists and pastors because there was general agreement on the main points. But the days of Adventist unity are now in the past. Evangelists are increasingly diverging from the approaches of the past without the safeguard of a clear understanding of Scripture. Lay people of a variety of educational backgrounds are asserting their right to interpret the Bible in general and the Book of Revelation in particular in the way they see fit.

I predict the church will soon discover that there are only two remedies for interpretational chaos. One of them is the voice of a living prophet. Lacking such a voice we are left with the second remedy, a sober and rigorous attention to original meaning of the text. It is only when we are all looking at the same text that there is any hope for unity of understanding in our study of Revelation.

In the time of interpretational trouble that lies ahead the church will need its biblical scholars more than ever before. Sometimes tolerated, often ignored, Adventist biblical scholars can provide the means to counter the cacophony of voices the church faces in interpretation today. As far as the scholarly study of Revelation goes within the Adventist Church, it is my conviction that the best days are just ahead.

In a dialogue by mail with Harry Robinson, another follower of this end-time interpretation of the seals and the trumpets of Revelation, I came to the conclusion that he interpreted the Book of Revelation as if it were written in 1990 and I interpreted it as if it were written in 95 AD. I expected that this insight would bring him to his senses. Instead he responded that I was right in my analysis. He did interpret Revelation as if it were a contemporary book, and furthermore, he believed that that was the correct way for Adventists to approach the book of Revelation! At this point I could see that there would never be a meeting of the minds between these two divergent methods.
TRINITARIAN EVIDENCES IN THE APOCALYPSE

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Wesleyan New Testament scholar Rob Wall of Seattle Pacific University has suggested that if there is a doctrine of the "Trinity" manifest in the Apocalypse, it is quite "primitive." By "primitive" Wall clearly suggests that it is very elementary and not very sophisticated.¹

While Professor Wall might be onto something, there definitely appears to be a "trinitarian" backdrop (at bare minimum), if not a major theme which permeates the Revelator's expression of the "Godhead." In this paper I will attempt to marshall evidence for three important factors in support for some basic aspects of the Trinitarian concept of God: 1) the Godhead manifest as a personal and profoundly united threesome, 2) the full deity of Christ and 3) the personhood of the Holy Spirit. The most apparent evidence comes from chapters one, four, five, twelve—fourteen, twenty-one and twenty-two.

God as a United Threesome

Evidence from Chapter One

The trinitarian nature of the God of the Apocalypse is immediately apparent in the introduction to the book: in 1:4-6 the entire vision is said to be "from him who is and who was and who is to come; and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, and from Jesus Christ."²

It is quite evident that we have here the Father, Spirit and Son. What is impressive about these verses is that they are so straight forward in introducing the heavenly Threesome. The expressions "Seven Spirits" and "him who is and who was and who is to come," however, merit some brief commentary.

The most obvious reasons why the Holy Spirit is presented as the "seven Spirits" has to do with:
1) The numerology of the book (seven, along with twelve, three, four, and eight, have obvious symbolic significance)—seven most likely denoting the perfecting and creative power of God.
2) The implication that the Spirit speaks and is available to all of the seven churches and
3) The Spirit's involvement in the providences of God working through the numerous series of seven in the book—seven seals, trumpets, thunders, plagues and so forth.

The appellation given to the Father, however, is a bit more complex. In vv. 8 and 10 the same being "who is and who was and who is to come" is also called "the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End" "the Lord," and "the Almighty." Who is this "Lord" of verse 8? Is He the Father or the Son?

What is interesting about these titles is that in the succeeding verses (10-13, 17, and 18) the expressions "Alpha and Omega" and "the first and the last" are also applied to Jesus. What are we to make of the use of these titles?

The first suggestion is that quite obviously the profound oneness of the Father and the Son is evidenced by the stunning fact that they are both described with a title which is most obviously drawn from the prophet Isaiah (44:6) to describe the self-existing Yahweh (more on this later when we deal with the evidences for the full deity of Jesus).

What is most important to note, however, is that in the Apocalypse the expressions "Him who is and who was

¹Opinions expressed during a discussion on the manifestations of the Holy Spirit in the Apocalypse at a recent Joint Meeting of the Wesleyan Theological Society and the Society for Pentecostal Studies held in Cleveland, TN in late March 1998.

²All biblical citations in this paper are from the New King James Version, unless otherwise noted.
and who is to come" and "the Almighty" are never applied explicitly to Jesus (compare 4:8; 11:15, 17; 16:5, 7). This is rather strong, implicit evidence that the one called "Him who is and who was and who is to come" (NJKV) in v. 4 refers neither to the Son nor the Spirit, but exclusively to God the Father.

**Evidences from Chapters Four and Five**

I would urge that these chapters contain the most dramatic (possibly compelling) evidence for a Trinitarian consciousness in the Apocalypse (implicit at the very least, if not explicit).

Ranko Stefanovic has persuasively argued that the best way to understand these chapters is to see them portraying the enthronement of Christ as spiritual Israel's king at the time of the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). This arresting vision draws on the imagery of the inaugural ceremony of the kings of Israel. In these ceremonies the king was invested with covenant authority by virtue of the fact that he held the Law of Moses (the covenant book) in his right hand.

The thrust of all this seems to denote (in Revelation four and five) that the covenant privileges of the people of God are being restored through the rule of the Triune God who reigns not only by virtue of the creative power of the Father, but through the redemptive exploits of the "Lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David" (5:5) Who has become a bloodied, sacrificial Lamb (5:6).

This stunning and comprehensive vision of the heavenly enthronement scene unfolds in the kind of Trinitarian manifestation which is so reflective of the early church's growing convictions of the eternity and Triune oneness of the God of Israel. There is little doubt that the central figure of chapter four, called "the One who sat on the throne" (v. 2) and who is worshiped as "Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come," has reference to God the Father.

These apppellations in 4:2 are clearly congruent with the scene given in 1:4 and 8. Once more it should be pointed out that while Jesus shares the title the "first and the last" with the Father in chapter one, in the book of Revelation He is never called the "Almighty" or the "One Who was and is and is to come" (4:8).

Furthermore, it should be duly noted that before the throne (and closely associated with the twenty-four elders of v. 4 and the four living creatures of vv. 6-8) are "the seven lamps of fire which were burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God" (v. 5). The very strong implication of this scene of the close association of the "seven Spirits" with the "twenty-four elders" and the "four living creatures" is that the Holy Spirit is the inspiring catalyst which provokes the hymns of praise found in vv. 8 and 11.

This vision of the Spirit is consistent with the later trinitarian convictions of the church that the Spirit has willingly subjected Himself to the Father (and the Son) to proceed forth from Them and to inspire the intelligences of the created order to acknowledge the "worthiness" of the Father as the Almighty Creator/Lord of the universe.

The Spirit, however, is not merely content to provoke hymns of adulation to the Father: He is also presented as profoundly bound up with the Son in His work as the chief Agent of redemption—the Lion/Lamb of Revelation five.

There is little doubt that 1) chapter five is a continuation of the vision begun in chapter four and that 2) the Son is the key figure in focus as this great covenantal/inaugural scene climaxes. The kingly facet of the Son's person is denoted through the imagery of the Lion (v. 5), yet the key imagery which mainly provokes the great hymns of worship (vv. 9, 10, 12, 13) in this chapter has to do with the scene which presents the Son as the atoning, sacrificial Lamb (vv. 6, 9-12).

A number of trinitarian features of this vision must be carefully noted. First of all it should be observed that the "seven Spirits," pictured as "seven lamps of fire burning before the throne" (4:5), are now envisioned in chapter five.

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3It should be carefully noted that in 11:17 the expression "who is and who was and who is to come" (NKJV) should, according to the best manuscript evidence, not have the phrase "who is to come." This manuscript evidence is reflected in the NIV: "We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, who is and who was." Stefanovic suggests that the reason for this is that the scene here depicted is one where the Father has come—"The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ" (NIV, v. 15).

as the "seven eyes" of the slain "Lamb" and are called the "seven Spirits of God sent out into all earth" (v. 6).5

Such a close identity of the Spirit with the Son is quite congruent with the great Johannine understanding of the relationship between the Son and the Spirit outlined in the Gospel of John (especially chapters 14-17): it is the Spirit which reaches out to enlighten the whole world, the One Who "will glorify Me (the Son), for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you" and "take of Mine and declare it to you" (John 16:14 and 15).

Thus it seems fair to conclude that the powerful intent of the vision of chapter five is that the sacrificially redemptive exploits of the Lion-Lamb enable the Spirit to penetrate with convicting power a laser beam of spiritual and redemptive light "into all the earth" (5:6).

Second, it should be carefully noted that the equality of the Father and the Son is strongly implied through the fact that it is only the Lion/Lamb who is deemed worthy to open the seals of the book held in the right hand of the Father. Most certainly the reigning Father, described as seated on the throne in chapter four, could have opened the seals; but the Son, especially envisioned as atoning Lamb, is declared "worthy" to unseal the book of the covenant and thus restore the covenant kingdom and its title deeds to God's chosen—Israel. The covenant privileges of the kingdom had been forfeited through Israel's sinful unfaithfulness to the gracious and covenant-keeping God; but the slain Lamb, sent as the Father's coregent Lion/Lamb, effects salvation and covenant restoration.

Third, the equality of the "Lord God Almighty" of chapter four and the Lion/Lamb of chapter five is strongly suggested by the fact that the worship of the Lord God Almighty by the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures in chapter four (vv. 8, 9) is now (in chapter five) directed to the Lion/Lamb (vv. 8, 9, 10, 14).

Fourth, not only do we have the praise and adulation of the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures, but this transcendent scene of heavenly worship is now augmented in chapter five with the praises of "ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousand of thousands" of angels (v. 11) and "every creature" in heaven and earth (v. 13)—all being directed to both "Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb" (v. 13).

As the implications of the redemptive exploits of the slain Lamb become apparent to all the orders of the created beings of the universe, there is an almost spontaneous manifestation of worship which is indiscriminately directed to the Father and Son. Needless to say, this is powerful evidence of their profound equality as the divine co-regents of the restored kingdom. Yet, we have not yet gotten to the most compelling implications of these scenes of worship.

Fifth, the most compelling evidence for the equality of the Father and the Son is contained in the hymns of chapters four and five. As has been pointed out, the hymns contained in 4:8 and 11 are directed to the Father, the "Lord God Almighty." The first two hymns of chapter five are directed to the Son (vv. 9, 10 and 12) and the final hymn is directed to both the Father and the Son (v. 13). It should be carefully noted that the hymn of 5:12 is addressed to the Son and the final hymn of v. 13 is addressed to both the Father and the Son. What is truly compelling, though, is that both of these last two hymns ascribe predicates to the Son which, in chapter four, were ascribed to the Father. Though a bit repetitious, carefully observe how these predicates are used in these hymns:

First, in v. 12 the "Lamb" is deemed "Worthy" "to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing." In v. 13, however, the final hymn ascribes to both the Father and the Son many of the same predicates (or characteristics and privileges) addressed to the Son in v. 12—especially "Blessing and honor and glory and power"—characteristics which have been ascribed to the Father in chapter four.

J. Ramsey Michaels has forcefully expressed the implications of these "paean(s) of praise." Initially commenting on 5:12, Michaels says that

Again it is the Lamb that is worshiped, but what he "receives" is now more than the sealed scroll. To him are ascribed the very predicates (glory, honor, and power) which in 4:11 were reserved for God himself. Indeed the list has more than doubled in length. God and the Lamb are the recipients of precisely the same kind of homage from the heavenly court.

5Once again, we here have evidence of the Pentecostal setting of chapter five as the moment in redemptive history when Christ is enthroned as spiritual Israel's king. One of the powerful effects of this enthronement is that the Spirit of God is "sent out into all the earth" (v. 6); this phrase is absent in 1:4 and 4:5, strongly implying that the moment of enthronement was not to be portrayed until 5:6.
This equality between God and Christ reaches a crescendo in the fourth and last hymn, a paean of praise from "every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, even all things that are in them" . . . Thus, using the vocabulary of worship rather than of speculative thought, the Book of Revelation has succeeded in elevating the familiar Davidic Messiah to the level of deity.6

Evidences from Chapters Eleven-Fourteen

Before we speak directly about the issue at hand, a few observations about the overall organization of the Apocalypse are in order. Recent scholarship has persuasively argued that the book is organized along the lines of a chiastic structure.7 There also seems to be a rough division in the book, with chapters 1-11:14 covering the historical overview of God’s providential oversight through the history of the church, and chapters 11:16-22:21 unfolding the dramatic events of the eschatological climax. Thus the three major series of sevens—the seven letters (chapters 2 and 3), the seven seals (chapters 6-8:1) and the seven trumpets (chapters 8:2-11:15) fall within the first half—the historical overview.

The letters deal with the internal events of God’s dealing with His covenant people—the church, the Israel of God; the seals envision the exploits of the Lamb evangelizing through the church; and the trumpets present the dire results of rejecting God’s redemptive offer given in the church’s proclamation of the "everlasting gospel"—beginning at Pentecost (chap. 5) and climaxing in 14:6-12.

While the first half of the book is introduced with a dramatic Trinitarian scene (1:4-8), climaxing with the vision of Jesus, the covenant priest of the Israel of God, walking among the lamp stands (1:11-20), the second half of the book also opens with a dramatic presentation of the Trinity. The introduction of the second half of the book is climaxed with the birth and ascension of Jesus, the "male Child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron" (11:16-12:17).

The trinitarian evidence in these three chapters is both positive and negative. There is not only a clear presentation of the true Trinity, but also an arresting portrait of a counterfeit trinity which seeks to foment a great false spiritual revival to counteract the genuine revival of Gospel proclamation spearheaded by the true Trinity.

Chapters 11:16-12:17 give a magnificent overview of the eschatological crisis, introducing the main protagonists—the Father, the Son and the Spirit of the True Trinity and the "fiery red dragon"—the counterfeit father of the counterfeit trinity. Chapter thirteen presents the great revival of false religion provoked by the false trinity—the false father "dragon" now goes off to seek the revivalistic support of the leopard-like sea beast (the false son of vv. 1-8) and the lamb-like, land beast (the false holy spirit—the unholy spirit of vv. 11-18).

God’s response to the false revival in chapter thirteen is the great true revival of chapter fourteen with its climactic gospel proclamation and the subsequent manifestations of the righteous judgments of God on the allies and devotees of the false trinity. The entirety of chapter fourteen is permeated with the force of the Triune God actuating the proclamation of the everlasting Gospel through the three angels of 14:6-12.

We turn first to the evidence for the true trinity in these four chapters. The entire second half of the book (like the first half) opens with a grand vision of the "Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was and who is to come" (11:17). Then is pictured the "great, fiery red dragon" who seeks to "devour" the "male Child" of the woman clothed with the sun. The "male Child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron" and "who was caught to God and His throne" is clearly the Son, Jesus Christ. Now the key trinitarian question has to do with the identity of the Holy Spirit in these chapters.

While the Spirit is not expressly mentioned in chapters 11 and 12, I would suggest that His presence is strongly

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8See Jon Paulien, What the Bible Says About the End-time (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1994), 105-108.
suggested in 12:17 where God's final people not only keep the covenant law, but also are furnished with the "testimony of Jesus Christ." This "testimony" is plainly defined elsewhere as the fruit of the mighty workings of the "spirit of prophecy"—a clear reference to the office of the Holy Spirit as the divine power which inspires and makes effectual the work of the holy prophets (see 19:10 and 22:8, 9).

Thus I would urge that the entire final half of John's apocalypse is introduced against the backdrop of Trinitarian involvement in the settling out of the great controversy between the forces of the Gospel and the Satanic opposition.

The Trinitarian revelation, which has been again introduced in chapters 11 and 12, is further elaborated in chapter 14. The eschatological host (the 144,000) are pictured as triumphant on "Mount Zion" with the "Lamb" (14:1) before the "throne of God" (v. 5) as the "firstfruits to God and to the Lamb" (v. 4). The balance of the chapter is filled with the story of the working of the Lamb and God the "Father" whose name is in the foreheads of the 144,000. But where is the Holy Spirit in the portrayal of the great final revival of Gospel religion and proclamation?

I would suggest that the presence of the Holy Spirit is both implicit and explicit in this chapter.

First of all it must be carefully noted that the great revival of Gospel religion finds its climax in the proclamation of the three angels of vv. 6-12. The ripened characters of the 144,000 (vv. 1-5 and 12) are implicitly the fruit of the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit which "seals" them with the very character of God in their foreheads (minds) and actions ("without fault before the throne of God" [v. 5]; compare with Ephesians 4:30).

Second, the person of the Spirit is further implicitly suggested in that the proclamation of the three angels' messages is the event which ripens "the harvest of the earth" (v. 15). Such ripeness not only involves the wheat (the righteous), but also the grapes (the rejecters of the "everlasting Gospel"). Behind all of this imagery are the phenomena of the former and latter rain, especially the latter rain—a clear allusion to the converting and transforming work of the Holy Spirit (Joel 2).

The explicit presence of the Spirit in the prophet is found in v. 13: Here we see the "Spirit" speaking blessings on the martyrs, comforting them so that they may now "rest from their labors." Finally, the people of God are assured that "their" heroic "works" of witness will not be lost in the sound and fury of the last great crisis, but will "follow them."

Now what about the negative evidence for the Trinity? Here I have reference to the fact that in chapters 12-14 the opposition to God, the Man Child of the woman, the comforting work of the Spirit, and God's covenant-keeping people is a powerful counterfeit trinity—the beast, the dragon and the false prophet (16:13).

This portrayal finds its climax in chapter 13. Clearly the "Dragon" is a parody of God the Father. The leopards-like beast who receives a deadly wound and comes back from the dead is surely a parody of the person and the work of the Son. The lamb-like land beast with the draconic nature and speech is most certainly a parody of the Holy Spirit as He seeks to exalt the Leopard-like sea beast with the deadly wound.

Furthermore, another arresting feature of this unholy trinity is their relentless opposition to the covenant law of God—especially the commandments contained in the first table of the covenant code.9 The great crisis of chapters 13 and 14 has to do with worship and the great principles of divine worship are contained in the first four of the ten commandments. The counterfeit trinity is all about false worship, which always denigrates the law of God—especially the first four commandments (14:6, 7 and 12).

In notable contrast, the Holy Trinity is presented as fomenting a great true revival in chapter 14 which eventuates in the worship of the creator God through the deep experience of the 144,000 obeying the first four commandments of the covenant code. Thus the entire eschatological crisis is a Trinitarian crisis of cosmic proportions!

So here we have both the positive and negative evidence, the implicit and explicit portrayals of the great Triune God in the eschatological center of the book. All of these scenes prepare the way for the final disposition of sin and sinners and the establishment of the everlasting covenant kingdom of the restored Israel of God. Let's get on to the climax in chapters 21 and 22.

**Evidences from Chapters 21 and 22**

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9See Paulien's excellent portrayal of the unholy trinity's severe and subtle opposition to the law of God, especially the commandments of the first table of the decalogue, in Section Four of his *What the Bible Says about the End-Time.*
In 21:1-6 there is one of the most touching scenes of the entire book. The "first earth had passed away" and "a new heaven and a new earth" had come forth with their "New Jerusalem" capital. The One "who is and who was and who is to come" (1:4 and 4:8) has now literally "come" to the earth with the New Jerusalem and is dwelling with His people.

These verses undoubtedly have reference to the Father God who is portrayed as doing the fatherly thing----wiping "away every tear from their eyes." His very comforting presence seems to have completely banished "death," "sorrow," "crying," and "pain." Furthermore, it is instructive to compare this scene with that found in 7:17: here the "great multitude" of the redeemed are pictured as before the throne and "the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

I would suggest that what we have here is a telling picture of the close working relationship between the Father and the Son in bringing comfort to the redeemed after their pilgrimage through the kingdom of Satan and sin. At the very least, this is suggestive evidence for the profound "oneness" in purpose of the first two members of the Godhead.

Yet once more in 21:22, 23 we are presented with a vision of their profound oneness: referring to the glorious "New Jerusalem," the revelator "saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple." Here the oneness of the Godhead is portrayed primarily through cultic imagery of the temple. The OT temple finds its antitypic significance coming to its culmination with the compelling suggestion that all the temple imagery ultimately points to triumph of redemption through the united efforts of the Father and the Son.

But not only are the united Father and Son displacing the temple, they are also now envisioned as bringing to culmination their complete triumph over the forces of evil and sin. In the pentecostal coronation scene of chapter five, the vision climaxes with the worship of "every creature" being directed to "Him who sits on the throne [the Father] And to the Lamb" (v. 13). But now this theme of the throne reaches its fullest consummation in 22:1-3: the throne is called, for the first time in the book, "the throne of God and of the Lamb." Now it is explicit: the Father and the Son are full coregents, both seated on the throne sharing all of the covenant prerogatives which had been secured through their common redemptive efforts in vanquishing the usurping forces of evil and restoring the covenant blessings of the redeemed.  

10 Most certainly the enthroned Father and Son are in focus in the chapters, but is the Holy Spirit completely absent? Is the Spirit in this scene of glorious triumph? I would suggest that the Spirit is once again doing the two things in this setting which are very typical of the redemptive functions He has exercised all along:

1) He is drawing lost humanity back into covenant relationship with the Godhead, especially as He works through "the bride," the church in its gospel mission: "And the Spirit and the bride say 'Come!' And let him who hears say 'Come!'" (v. 17).

2) The Spirit works, but He works as He finds currency in proceeding forth from the throne of the Father and the Son. Is it going too far to suggest that the "river of Life" which proceeds from the throne (22:1) is emblematic of the life-giving power of the Spirit who bestows the grace of God on a world in desperate need of restoration? This might be stretching it a bit, but in the setting of Johannine literature, "water" is one of the more notable metaphors for the workings of the Holy Spirit (compare John 7:37-39).

Again, it must be emphasized that this scene is fully congruent with the Trinitarian claims of the church and the thrust of Scripture that the Spirit gladly comes in redemptive procession from the Father and the Son.

Evidences for the Full Deity of Christ

Three lines of evidence seem to be the most convincing:

1) In chapter 1, both the Father and the Son are referred to as the "Alpha and the Omega, The Beginning and the End," "the First and the Last" (vv. 8, 11, 17. As was previously pointed out, these expressions are drawn from Isaiah 44:6: "Thus says the LORD [Yahweh], the King of Israel, And his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: 'I am the First and I am the Last; Besides Me there is no God.'" This passage, addressed to Yahweh and applied by the Revelator to both

Stefanovic suggests that until this scene in the book, there is the subordination of Christ to the Father. Now, however, with the full triumph of the Gospel of the true Trinity over the false gospel of the counterfeit trinity, Christ is no longer subordinated to the Father.
the Father and the Son, is compelling evidence for their equality in nature and purpose.

Furthermore, such a seemingly easy application of the identity of the OT God with the Jesus of the New Testament is stunning evidence for the almost unconscious and spontaneous ascription of all characteristics of the Father to the Son. This is an arresting phenomenon in Scripture which presents a constant source of consternation for the Arians.\textsuperscript{11}

2) The second, and probably most compelling piece of evidence, comes from the hymns of chapters 4 and 5. These hymns of praise are climaxed with the "creatures" of the world ascribing the same royal prerogatives ("Blessing and honor and glory and power" [5:13]) to both the Father and the Son and most of these expressions had already been ascribed to the Father in 4:11.\textsuperscript{12}

3) The final piece of compelling evidence comes from the vision of the shared throne of chapter 22:1. Clearly the Son shares all of the royal prerogatives of the eternal Father on the throne of the universe. This is the climactic scene of the entire book and the Father and the Son are one and equal. What you say about the nature and the authority of the One can be said about the Other.

The Personhood of the Holy Spirit

The final issue that is usually contested by the anti-trinitarians is the personhood of the Holy Spirit. Arians typically give the impression that the Holy Spirit is some sort of celestial internet which serves as the communications network for the Father and the Son. There is certainly an element of truth in such analogies, but they do not portray the fuller personal picture.

The Apocalypse does present some evidence which, while not as compelling as the evidence for the full deity of Christ, is still appealingly suggestive.

First, the letters to the seven churches in chapters 2 and 3 all conclude with the same exhortation: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (2:7, 11, 17, 29 and 3:6, 13, and 22). Speech in the context of spoken messages in Scripture is almost always associated with communications that go on between persons. Thus the Spirit's speaking to the churches suggests the personhood of the Spirit. Very similar instances of the Spirit speaking are found in 14:13 and 22:17.

Second, in chapter 5 the "seven Spirits" become the "seven eyes" of the Lamb "sent out into all the earth" (v. 6). Eyes are most often associated with personal intelligence and thus another suggestive evidence for the reality of the personhood of the Spirit.

Conclusion

The evidence for the oneness and the equality of the Father and the Son and the close association of the Spirit with them is quite compelling and strongly suggests that one of the great permeating themes of the Apocalypse is the Triune nature of the Godhead. Certainly the evidence for the divine unity of the Three and the full deity of Christ is more compelling than that given for the Personhood and full deity of the Holy Spirit. But the close association of the Spirit with the Father and the Son in these four major settings (chapters 1, 4 and 5, 11--14 and 21 and 22) and the trappings of personhood ascribed to the Spirit (speaking and intelligent, personal eyes) provide credible evidence of the Spirit's full deity and personality.

\textsuperscript{11}Compare this usage in Revelation 1 with Hebrews 1:10-12 where the author of the book of Hebrews easily applies to Jesus a Psalm (102:1, 25-27) which was originally directed to the LORD (Yahweh). This is also very strong evidence that, in the mind of the author of the Book of Hebrews, the Christ of the New Covenant is the Yahweh of the Old Testament.

\textsuperscript{12}Stefanovic presents strong evidence that these prerogatives or predicates were those ascribed to rulers and emperors in the ancient world, including those of the Roman Empire during the First Century C.E. (\textit{Backgrounds}, pp. 167--195 and 211-217).
FREEDOM SONS:
THE APOCALYPSE AND THE ATONEMENT OF CHRIST

Charles Scriven
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"Follow, poet, follow right
to the bottom of the night,
With your unconstraining voice
Still persuade us to rejoice"
—W. H. Auden

The first followers of Christ rose up under "the shadow and the frown of Caesar." When they could achieve prosperity through silent collaboration, they mainly did so, finding Roman cities congenial to a faith that was soft and unobtrusive.2 But the most alert and visionary in their number recognized the lineaments of evil empire: the avarice and duplicity, the sophistication and high culture, the contempt for life, the spurious peace. John's Apocalypse gives voice to the visionary viewpoint. Here poetry confronts unexpurgated fact. It addresses conflict; it foments awareness of injustice and oppression. Yet the rage that flows easily from such awareness neither fizzes into resignation nor explodes into violence; it resolves instead into joyful, revolutionary song. A dream springs alive, and the kingdom of evil seems neither benign nor invincible. The faithful of God receive new stamina and ardor for marching onto the field of conflict under a new banner and a new strategy.

That banner, and that strategy, is the cross. It is the blood atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the redeeming action of the Lion who is the Lamb. In chapters 4-7, John explores all this in his account of a vision that begins, "After this I looked, and there in heaven a door stood open" (4:1). In retelling what he sees, John first of all discredits Caesar's power and authority. Then he upholds Christ as liberator, and declares His sacrificial death the key to victory. Finally, he makes the work of Christ the work of the church: blood atonement is the founding of a new people who keep Christ's will and way alive until conflict ends and peace—true peace, the divine shalom—begins.

John's speech about God had offended the Roman authorities and led to his exile on the island of Patmos. There, John tells us, he was caught up one day in dream. He saw the risen Lord with eyes "like a flame of fire" and heard from His mouth words like "a sharp, two-edged sword." Dazzled, he "fell at his feet as though dead." The Lord put His hand on him and said, "Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last" (1:10, 14, 16). Then He told him the conditions and prospects of seven churches that John loved in seven Asian cities (chapters 2 and 3).

Now he is peering into the dwelling place of God; around God's throne is a rainbow, and along with the rainbow twenty-four elders and a ring of living creatures, all immersed in flashing light and thundering sound. The four living creatures sing the first of the freedom songs—that is what I will call them—recorded in chapters 4-7:

"Holy, holy, holy,
The Lord God the Almighty, who was and is and is to come" (4:8)

Then the twenty-four elders chime in with the second of the freedom songs:

"You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power,
for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created" (4:11)

These songs declare the basis for the work of Christ. The heavenly worshipers sing the fundamental affirmation of the biblical community: that God is the beginning and the end of all things, the maker of heaven and earth. Thus no past or present power, nor any that looms ahead, can frustrate the will of the One whom Christians praise and heed. Whereas both pagan myth and secular ideology conceive a universe that is essentially violent—an amalgam of chaos, fatality and conflict brought about by violent gods or happenstance—the Gospel conceives a good creation, a universe whose maker is worthy to be praised. If conflict has intruded, it is still an intrusion: it was not there to begin with. Instead of assuming, then, that violence is inherent and inevitable, the Gospel assumes the "ontological priority of peace"; it envisions, in other words, an "overall providential design" conducive to harmony and joy.3

If this is the most fundamental affirmation of faith, it is also, perhaps, the most outrageous. With nature red in tooth and claw, and humanity so often inhumane, it is easy to doubt or dismiss. Yet belief in God as Creator is the key to overcoming resigned or violent rage. So when John, in the midst of evil empire, hears the heavenly creation
songs, he hears the drumbeat of hope. Caesar, for all his pomp and power, cannot be the last word, nor can his deceits, his corrupt sophistication, his ruthless peace. The God who is the first word is also the last, and all who long for harmony and joy may take heart and take action. With God as creator, it makes sense to dream; it makes sense to attempt bold transformations of the fallen world.

After the two freedom songs that celebrate divine creation, John sees a scroll in God’s right hand that contains the secrets of the universe. He longs to know these secrets, but the scroll is shut with seven seals, and no one can open it. John breaks into tears. Then an elder points to someone he calls “the Lion of the tribe of Judah” (5:5). This Lion “has conquered,” the elder says, and he can open the scroll. When John looks again the Lion is a Lamb, “standing as if it had been slaughtered” (5:6). Now, at the sight of this strange conqueror—though bloodied to death, he still stands tall—the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fill the throne room with sung praise.

“You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slaughtered and by your blood you ransomed for God saints from every tribe and language and people and nation; you have made them to be a kingdom and priests serving our God and they will reign on earth” (5:9,10).

Again, this is a freedom song. For the heavenly choir, the death of Christ is a means of ransom; it is the price paid for liberation of a people who themselves become mediators of divine blessing and who themselves stand tall at the end, victors over evil empire. Although in popular piety the death of Christ satisfies the divine demand for punishment of sin, here that is not at all the case. Here the death of Christ confronts evil power and meets human need. The song’s ransom metaphor evokes the experience of emancipation for slaves and prisoners of war, and the point is that the Lamb, by means both strange and courageous, defies and subverts the forces responsible for human bondage. Whatever limits or destroys a child of God meets with resistance, and finally defeat, at the hands of the Christ who sheds blood for humanity.

How can exposure to slaughter be a strategy for conquest of evil? How can a defenseless Lamb vanquish His adversaries like a Lion? John’s greeting to the seven churches provides one clue. “Grace to you and peace,” he says as the Apocalypse begins, not only from God but also “from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, the ruler of the kings of the earth” (1:4,5). Here the death of Christ finds a context: His resurrection, to be sure, and His destiny as conqueror, but also His life. Mere death is not the point, and mere death could not effect the ransom. Death as the capstone of faithful life—death as the cost of the radical compassion and peacemaking portrayed in the Lamb’s life story—could effect the ransom. According to the testimony of the first Christians, it did.

But still, how? The second clue is that the freedom song expresses the sense that the Lamb is worthy. In His compassion and peacemaking, Jesus adopted the practice of service to all and violence to none. Thus He averted, in a phrase from Martin Luther King, the “descending spiral” of coercive violence; He engaged the evil powers without becoming (and begetting) what He was trying to defeat. Not only, then, did He accost evil, He discredited evil. He exposed it and made of it, as Paul would later say, “a public example.” Through His defiant, yet non-coercive love, Jesus embodied an alternative both to the indifference that leaves evil uncontested, and to the violent resistance that contests it all too superficially. Even if it cost Him His own life, He determined, in language Mahatma Gandhi would one day use, to actually be the change He wished to see in the world. His strategy would be persuasion, not coercion. His worthiness—His admirable example and its arresting consequences—would baffle and finally exhaust the evil powers.

The freedom song next declares that those ransomed for new life through the death of the Lamb become a new people. Drawn from every tribe and language, they become a “kingdom,” a community of “priests” who serve God now and will one day “reign on earth.” Popular piety, aping modernity’s obsession with the individual, overuses the singular in both its praise of God and its exposition of the Gospel. The Apocalypse, on the other hand, thinks mostly in the plural, and imagines the shared life of those who benefit from Christ’s atonement. The ransomed link themselves as one, a kind of “anti-kingdom to the Roman empire.” Together, they become mediators of divine blessing and, in the end, victors over evil power.

Now John hears the angels join the heavenly choir in another hymn to the slaughtered Lamb; then he hears every creature, every voice in the universe, fuse into climactic affirmation:

“To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever” (5:13)!
Here, against the orthodoxy of the ages, the singers identify God with nonviolent love; they identify God with the Lamb who journeyed to Jerusalem and faced in that great city the consequences of boundless compassion.

Worship, as commentator Leonard Thompson puts it, declares "what is truly real and therefore what is true." Apocalyptic worship establishes the truth of the cross, a truth that subverts kings and emperors and ascribes "blessing and honor and glory and might" to the God of the Lamb. It makes the creator and redeemer one, and certifies that "painful embodiment of forgiving love—even to the point of Gethsemane" is what achieves lasting liberation, is the one best and the one God-ordained strategy for permanent peace.

The truth of apocalyptic worship is by no means mindless optimism. In chapter 6 John's vision represents human history through images that come into view as the Lamb opens the scroll that contains the secrets of the universe. The breaking of the first four seals exposes four cavaliers who evoke the evils of military conquest, lost peace, economic upheaval and death by violence, famine and pestilence.11 When the Lamb opens the fifth seal, the souls of those who, like the Lamb, have been "slaughtered" for their loyalty to God (6:9), enter the picture; these martyrs symbolize persecution. Then, with the opening of the sixth seal, still more images of natural catastrophe appear. So if the Apocalypse imagines the way to permanent peace, it also acknowledges the setbacks, the atrocities, the terror. It even acknowledges the spiritual agony that comes into play: John hears the suffering faithful, as impatient as Habakkuk, wondering "how long" the ordeal must go on (6:10).

If the suffering faithful have no illusions about adversity in human history, neither do they withdraw into the false spirituality of escape. As the image of the slaughtered martyrs already implies, they take the risk of involvement rather than wringing their hands on the sidelines: their hope is as engaged and courageous as the Lamb's. Chapter 7 even suggests that the faithful approach their mission with the focus and discipline of an army; they are the "one hundred forty-four thousand" (7:1-8; cf. 14:1-5,12), those who know, that is, that following the Lamb and obeying the commandments of God means readiness for battle.12

Now John sees another multitude, as diverse as all humanity, standing before God and the Lamb, "robed in white" (7:9). They give voice to their grateful adoration, as do the angels. Then one of the elders approaches John to say (7:13), "Who are these, robed in white, and where have they come from?" John returns the question, and the elder himself provides the answer: "These are they who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." (7:14).

As perspective on the work of Christ, this is truly striking. It turns out that the faithful may resemble the Lamb even to the point blood of atonement. Some spill their own blood in the field of conflict, their loyalty tested even unto death. They thus share, to the nth degree, in "the agony, the tribulation, and the patience" of Christ, and so have a share in His "redemptive action." They experience, in a word, what Jesus experienced, and like Him they become the victors for it, and their white robes signify that victory.13

All this sheds light on the first song to the Lamb that John hears in his vision. There the "slaughtered" lamb is said to have "ransomed" a new people, from every tribe and language, to be a priestly kingdom for God (5:9,10). They become, that is, mediators of divine blessing, and now it is clear that their work fully resembles the work of Christ. They throw themselves, as He did, into the "ordeal" (7:14) of history, refusing either to fall into lockstep with imperial evil or to withdraw into complacent private piety. They meet human need through service to all and violence to none. They embrace, by means the Lamb pioneered, all that is good; they resist all that is evil. They themselves participate, in other words, in the ransoming work of Christ. They become liberators; they suffer death, if need be, on behalf of others.

John Howard Yoder wrote: "The confessing people of God is the new world on its way." John the Revelator certainly sees the new people of God as being the change that is needed, and he certainly holds out the prospect of the new world on its way. It's no wonder that now, at the climax of his vision, he soars again into poetry. Seeing the ransomed of the Lord before the throne, worshiping God, he imagines their future like a blazing prophet:

"They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat; for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes" (7:16,17).

This is the freedom to which all the freedom songs look forward. Yet here freedom surpasses mere emancipation from powers that limit or destroy: it becomes the divine shalom, the sweeping wholeness of life that, after all, is the whole point of God's atoning work. Here John, building on Ezekiel, foresees the day when the bloodied Lamb, now
resurrected and enthroned, is the people’s shepherd, and the long-venerated “covenant of peace” finds fulfillment in shared prosperity.15

All this John sees through the open door of heaven. The Creator puts Caesar in his place. The Lamb ransoms a people to perform a ransoming work themselves. All creatures, confident and glad, celebrate before God. In chapters 4-7, John’s vision is no puzzle for sleuths and debaters, no calendar for the merely curious. It is food for the praying imagination. It is a summons to atonement and peacemaking. It is the song that stifles rage and resignation and gives birth to generosity and joy.

For the Apocalypse, atonement is liberation achieved under the banner and strategy of the cross. The point is not punitive and the means neither violent nor abusive.16 Nor is the agent Christ alone. Here Jesus is the representative man, the man who, in ransoming the victimized and making peace instead of conflict, realizes what everyone can have a share in.17 When Martin Luther King preached the 1963 funeral for two girls killed in a Montgomery, Alabama, church bombing, he said their “innocent blood may well serve as the redemptive force that will bring new light to this dark city.”18 In holding that “unmerited” human suffering can have an effect like Christ’s, he was faithful to the Apocalyptic vision. Here evil is overcome by goodness and violence by non-violence, and here the faithful share both in the payment of the price and the winning of the victory. Here the church, like the church’s Lord, performs a priestly function and is “the bearer of reconciliation.”19 Here the disciples’ story is the Jesus story.

These are points Adventist thinking, captive, perhaps, to the spirit of modernity, has often missed. Almost nothing of John’s vision comes through in the (highly individualistic) dispute over the theology of the cross that racked the church in the 1970s and 80s.20 During the 1960s many church leaders were aloof to the civil-rights movement; in 1965, for example, F. D. Nichol, editor of the Review and Herald, criticized clergy participation in freedom marches.21 Still, hints of openness to John’s vision of atonement appear in both the older and the more recent history of Adventism. Ellen White long ago evoked the conflict image with her talk of the “great controversy,” and spoke of the “Redeemer” (my italics) as “enlisting” His followers in redemptive service; their calling, she said, is to be “co-workers with Christ.” Between the 1960s and the outbreak of the disagreement concerning the cross, Gottfried Oosterwal proposed that the “church’s mission” is to “participate in God’s own mission.” In 1983, Bert Beach affirmed the ransoming work of the faithful with his argument that the “Christian Church is the peacemaking link between the first and second advents.”22

What has yet to emerge in popular Adventism, however, is the perspective that John’s vision addresses the praying imagination today as it confronts the evils of today. When the South African pastor Allan Boesak was contending with apartheid, he came to see that “John, in describing his own time, is describing the times in which we live.”23 That same perspective—the sense that “the cliche called Rome is never quite finished with”24 and that John’s vision has no single referent—might have blunted Adventist complicity, not only with Jim Crow in North America, but also with Nazi terror in Europe and tribal genocide in Africa. In any case, it could now generate new devotion to Christ, new insight into the ransoming work of the church, new stamina and ardor for the present field of conflict.

No one would call this easy. Yet according to the faith inscribed in John’s Apocalypse, Christ’s atoning work, despite setbacks, atrocities and terror, achieves victory in the end. Of Jesus it has been said, indeed, that killing Him was like trying to destroy a dandelion seed-head by blowing on it. The faithfulness of those who follow Jesus’ pioneering footsteps is also seed. It is the seed of peace for all humanity.

ENDNOTES

2. The quoted phrase is from Daniel Berrigan, "War in Heaven, Peace on Earth," Spirituality Today 40 (Spring, 1988): 42. Leonard Thompson has argued influentially that toward the end of the first century, most Christians in Roman cities were living "quietly, peacefully, and prosperously." See, e.g., Revelation (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), p. 22.


6. This is the language that Paul, looking back on Jesus' life, would use in Colossians 2:15.


12. In Revelation 14, the celibacy of the one hundred forty-four connotes holy warfare. See David E. Aune, Revelation 6-16, pp. 443-447.


16. See Kathleen Ray Darby, *Deceiving the Devil: Atonement, Abuse, and Ransom* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1998) for an excellent effort to rehabilitate atonement doctrine from feminist criticism that orthodoxy makes the Father an abusive parent.


20. I refer to the controversy surrounding Desmond Ford.


APOCALYPTIC PERSUASION AND THE LAODICEAN CONTINUUM

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Much of scripture is rhetoric—that is, literature in which the author seeks to effect a specific change on the reader. On many occasions the change sought by the biblical author in his readers is repentance—metanoia. Analysis of such passages can provide insight into the relationship between the text, the reader and the authorial intent. Further than that, the study of their reception by, and influence on, readers can help explain why scripture retains its mystery, power and authoritative status within interpretative communities.

The call to repentance in the Laodicenean pericope of Rev 3:14-22 has a dynamic rhetorical structure which conforms to Aristotelian rhetorical conventions. It also draws on an Old Testament prophetic device, known as Disputation Speech, for its rhetorical structure as well as on early Christian repentance preaching, such as that of John the Baptist, for its content, attitude to audience and style. Archaeological and text-critical approaches have tended to obscure the rhetorical power and theological focus of all of the seven letters (Rev 2:1-3:22). The seminal work of William Ramsay at the beginning of the present century established beyond a doubt that the messages contained clever references to the social, historical and geographical milieu of John’s seven original city congregations—but Ramsay does not explore the rhetorical reasons for John’s approach or any textual indicators as to what specific responses the Seer was looking for in his audience. R. H. Charles, though having the opposite view of the value of the letters within Revelation as a whole, tends to undermine their literary and rhetorical impact by considering them to be a rather awkward addition to the Apocalypse proper. The letters’ place within Revelation has been recovered in more recent literary and sociological approaches. However, these also focus almost entirely on the text-audience relationship at or around the period of Revelation’s composition. This is usually where the rhetorical analysis of the text-audience relationship ends.

Few biblical researchers have delved into the postcomposition arena of “textual influence”—i.e. the influence a text has had since its composition and canonisation. This kind of research—or Wirkungsgeschichte as it was termed by Hans-Georg Gadamer—is more than just the study of the history of interpretation of a passage. It goes beyond where most ecclesiastical history stops and beyond a mere listing of hymns that quote, or paintings that depict, a particular passage. Rather, Wirkungsgeschichte is research designed to answer questions concerning how the text has influenced those who have read, interpreted, and applied it within interpretative communities throughout the nineteen centuries since the end of the period that New Testament scholars usually address.

Despite the vast area of research that Wirkungsgeschichte might be thought to open up, not a great deal of scholarship has been produced since Gadamer’s interest in it legitimized it as an area for biblical scholars to work in. However, calls have been made for it to be further explored. In a 1992 paper entitled "A Neglected Field," Heikke Räisänen called for much more work to be done in this area of biblical studies, and from 1989 To 1997 Ulrich Luz led the way by producing a multi-volume commentary on Matthew in the Evangelisch-katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament series. This whole series was supposed to have had a history-of-influence component to it, but apart from Luz’s work, it failed to do so. Within the body of Revelation scholarship L. L. Thompson acknowledges the legitimacy of this type of research in Apocalypse and Empire but does not delve into it himself. Some work has been done in the Old Testament sphere namely John Sawyer’s The Fifth Gospel: Isaiah in the History of Christianity and there is also Cowley’s work on the influence of certain aspects of the Apocalypse within the Ethiopic tradition. I have recently learned that a commentary series with a specific focus on the history of influence is in the early stages of production by Blackwells.

The sheer range of research into which a full-on Wirkungsgeschichte project would take you is indeed daunting, and has no doubt intimidated many scholars. Perhaps there is also an unavoidable problem with doing a systematic history-of-influence commentary on a biblical book. Some passages of Scripture have had a much more dramatic effect on interpretative communities than have others. The somewhat uneven nature of Luz’s commentary bears witness to this problem.
Therefore it is my contention that a more productive route to take is to focus on passages that are clearly intended to have had an influence—such as calls to repentance where a rhetorical strategy within the text indicates the effects that the author hopes to have on his readers. And this brings us to the Laodician letter.

The message to the Laodicceans in Revelation 3 with its call to repentance has a fascinating history of influence. It clearly seeks to illicit change from its readers and has done so to great effect. It has inspired great works of art—such as Holman Hunt’s painting “the Light of the World” – a painting that has become one of the most recognized and reproduced icons of Protestant religious imagery. Likewise the epithet “Laodician” is still utilized in many European languages. In these two examples alone therefore one can see evidence of a Laodiean continuum.

However, the exploration of the relationship between authorial intent and actual influence becomes most focused when we examine an interpretative strategy that connects the reader to the text in a more dynamic way than usual true claims of canonical Scripture upon the believer—that strategy is historicism.

Two communities in particular have believed themselves to be prophetically, historically and eschatologically identified by the Laodiean pericope. These were Thomas Brightman and his followers in seventeenth-century England and the early Seventh-day Adventist Church in nineteenth-century America. In both of these interpretative situations it can be clearly demonstrated that the text motivated readers to repentance, eschatological hope and an awareness of divine election.

Thomas Brightman was a radical Puritan scholar who worked on Revelation at the end of the sixteenth century. He is best known for his elect-nation millenialism which anticipates the kingdom of God being issued in via the Calvinist branch of the Reformation. However, Brightman’s unique contribution to the interpretation of Revelation was the historicist interpretation of the messages to the seven churches. Prior to the publication of Brightman’s magnum opus, Apocalypsis Apocalypsis, all of Revelation except the churches was interpreted by historical events —past, present and future. Brightman established the hermeneutical concept of applying the text of each of the seven messages to the true church within history. Eventually this historicist interpretation of Rev 2-3 became the norm within Protestant interpretation. Crucially Brightman applied the Laodiean pericope to his own Church of England. Brightman’s work was thus somewhat critical of the established church—of which he also was a part. It was unable to be published in England until 30 years after his death, but nevertheless was well-known via editions published in Europe. On the eve of the Civil War, in the early 1640s, a slew of pamphlet and sermons were produced which declared Brightman’s identification of England as Laodiea to be prophetically inspired. His view was particularly popular among the Puritan gentry and within the Long Parliament.

The key factors in terms of the history of the influence of the Laodiean letter in this period was how both Brightman’s own work and that of those who declared him to be a prophet were both antiselect and in favor of an elect-nation identity for England. The rhetoric of the call to repentance, the lukewarmness and spiritual arrogance from within the text do not allow for any spiritual conceit in those who believed themselves to be Laodiea. Yet the promise of Rev 3:20 that Christ will enter in and eat with those who repent and vs. 21 where they are promised a seat on Christ’s throne promise an extremely exalted future. This rhetorical check and balance—or carrot and stick mechanism—produced a spiritual revival in those who were influenced by Brightman as well as significantly contributing to the concept of England as God’s own commonwealth, that helped in turn to lead to the success of Oliver Cromwell.

The most crucial ecclesiastical significance of Brightman’s hermeneutic was the resistance to separation from the Church of England. Late sixteenth and early seventeenth century Puritanism was generally in favor of separation from the state church, but Brightman’s interpretation of England as Laodiea does not allow for this. The Laodiean letter condemns all equally—there is no spiritual distinction between clergy and laity. Because of what the letter promises that England can become, Brightman, utilising the cleansing and repentance terminology of Rev 3:15-19, urges for radical reform from within the church—not separation from it. It is significant to note that separatist Puritans, including some who were later associated with the Pilgrim Fathers, were critical of this appeasement (as they saw it) of the state church. Brightman and his apologists were quick to point out that it was that text that constrained them from separating from lukewarm Anglicanism—lukewarm but nevertheless elect of God. “Those whom I love I rebuke and chasten”!

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William Miller’s interpretation of Rev 2-3 can be traced through Puritan and Free Church roots to Thomas Brightman. However, early Seventh-day Adventists did not initially identify with the Laodicean message. In the process of cognitive dissonance that inevitably followed the Great Disappointment the search for a biblical identity was an urgent one. The official interpretation of the seven churches that emerged within the Sabbath keeping former Millerites was that they were Philadelphia; the non-Sabbath -keeping former Millerites were thus labeled as Laodicea and non-Adventist Protestants were Sardis.

This position was maintained—though without much real interest or hermeneutical application—until it was dramatically and unilaterally changed by a series of short but devastatingly effective articles by James White in late 1856.

Within early Adventism this shift in self-identity from Philadelphia to Laodicea clearly marks a point of rejuvenation and dramatically-increased missiological vision. Prior to this change no more than twenty articles exploring the church’s Philadelphian identity were printed in the church’s papers over a ten-year period. Most of these were by Joseph Bates and they generated little interest or response from the readership. In contrast, White’s articles identifying the church as lukewarm Laodicea caused a deluge of positive response from the readers of the Review and Herald. In the fourteen months that followed the original series, over 300 letters and articles affirming the new hermeneutic were published. Many contained testimony of the rejuvenating effect that the text was having on Adventist individuals and communities. They also include numerous examples in which the respondents are clearly identifying with the details of the passage and utilizing the linguistic material accordingly.

In short, the carrot-and-stick rhetorical dynamic kicked in as the powerful motivating engine that Seventh-day Adventism needed. From the isolationism of the Shut-Door and the self-congratulatory identity of Philadelphia, Adventism moved up a gear thanks to the chastening and election implicit within Rev 3:14-22.

The narrative hierarchy of the text was also adopted by those (specifically James and Ellen White) who vigorously applied the text to the Adventist community. Yet, as with the previous case, this did not result in the development of clerical elitism. This was due, in part at least, to the constraining effects of the text. All are condemned equally—and thus all who repent are promised a glorious elect future. None are yet lost—though they are on the eschatological verge of being violently ejected from God’s mouth—and equally none have yet been given any special place or privilege.

(It is interesting, and probably pertinent, to note that critical subgroups within Adventism, such as the Firm Foundation, that have held to a historicist interpretation of Revelation 2-3 have been nonseparatist. Those that have moved away from this hermeneutic, such as the Branch Davidians, have sought separation from the mainstream SDA denomination.)

The rhetorical structure of Rev 3:14-22 itself prevented either Brightman or the early Seventh-day Adventists from developing spiritual arrogance or separatism. Lukewarm Laodicea is always in need of repentance and has no good or bad subgroup or individuals as other churches in Revelation 2-3 do. The historicist application of the passages means that the text was allowed an influence akin to the original text-audience dynamic. The passage’s influence on these communities, its linkage with repentance motifs throughout Revelation, and its dependence on Old Testament rhetorical devices demonstrate that it is a link in a long chain of influences in religious thought—a Laodicean continuum, so to speak.

The Laodicean call to repent achieves its rhetorical power via a "carrot and stick" dynamic, with threats and promises, acting as a self-renewing motivator. This is supported by the "Leitmotif recurrence" of repentance motifs occurring throughout Revelation and a structure that recalls previous Judeo-Christian repentance calls. Its effect on audiences is considerable because readers readily recognize themselves in the descriptions of spiritual conceit and lukewarmness. Equally it does not allow for either moral complacency or spiritual defeatism to set in. The fact that the text is replete with a sense of great urgency and is of course the last of the churches adds a helpful eschatological element. The church that Laodicea can become is the remnant church that Christ will acknowledge as his own.

The influence of Rev 3:14-22 demonstrates the rhetorical genius of the text and is illustrative of the dynamic nature of certain text-reader relationships.
THE GREAT CONTROVERSY AND THE PROBLEM OF EVIL
ELLEN WHITE’S APOCALYPTIC VISION AS A THEODICY

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I once heard someone say you could outline the history of Christian thought by tracing the various interpretations of Romans down through the years. This certainly seems true if we recall the impact of Paul’s letter on the lives of Martin Luther, John Wesley and Karl Barth, to mention just a few. I suspect that biblical apocalyptic has played a similar role in Adventist history. From their beginnings, as the commentaries of Uriah Smith and others show, Adventists have found in Daniel and Revelation a philosophy of history, a chronology of final events, and a mandate for our existence as a religious movement. More recently, John Paulien cautions us against an unhealthy preoccupation with these writings. And Roy Adams, Roy Branson, Keith Burton, Chuck Scriven and Charles Teel summon us to the ethical challenges they contain. By announcing the end of the present order, they expose the pretensions of principalities and powers, and summon us to live as citizens of God’s kingdom, not the kingdoms of this world.

The cosmic struggle depicted in Revelation provided Ellen White with her most important theological concept. She employs the theme of the great controversy to interpret the essential elements of Christian faith, as well as the distinctive concerns of Adventists. She also applies it to the problem of evil. According to the preface, one of her objectives in writing The Great Controversy was to "present a satisfactory solution of the great problem of evil." Our goal here is to examine the contours of Ellen White’s "theodicy." What understanding of evil does she derive from biblical apocalyptic? How does it compare to other types of theodicy? And what questions does it raise?

The devil appears infrequently in contemporary philosophical discussions of the problem of evil. Alvin Plantinga and, following him, Stephen T. Davis, describe the figure of Satan, the fallen angel Lucifer, as a potential explanation for natural evil. (The expression "luciferous" is that of Stephen Davis.) But their descriptions of Lucifer’s demonic activity are rather brief and incidental to the overall position they develop. A recent discussion seeks to correct this lack of emphasis. In God at War, Gregory A. Boyd argues that a "warfare worldview" overcomes the shortcomings of classical theodicies. But I know of no one who develops the idea more extensively than Ellen White.

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1 GC xii. The great-controversy "vision" of 1858 provided the basis for a series of volumes entitled Spiritual Gifts. It was later enlarged to form a second four-volume series, The Spirit of Prophecy, and ultimately expanded into the five-volume Conflict of the Ages Series, which Adventists widely regard as her magnum opus and the definitive expression of Adventist thought. "The Great Controversy" is the title of the fifth and most influential book in this series.

2 I am using the word "theodicy" rather broadly here, in contrast to other uses of the term, such as the one involved in Alvin Plantinga’s careful distinction between "theodicy" and "defense" in God, Freedoms and Evil (Harper & Row, 1974), p. 28. As Plantinga describes them, a theodicy seeks to establish that a particular response to evil is true; a defense, only that it is possible (ibid., p. 58).

3 In spite of its overarching importance in Ellen White’s thought, Adventists have not given the concept of the great controversy a great deal of scrutiny. In a rare book-length study of this theme in Ellen White, Joe Battistone identifies it as her central theological idea, the comprehensive framework in which she deals with all her important concerns (The Great Controversy Theme in E. G. White’s Writings [Andrews University Press, 1978]). However, Battistone’s study is by and large a summary of Ellen White's narrative from the origin of evil to the restoration of the earth. It does not offer a critical assessment of the concept. This paper is a modest step toward that goal.


6 Gregory A. Boyd, God at War: The Bible and Spiritual Conflict (InterVarsity, 1997). Boyd’s work represents an extensive analysis of biblical materials rather than a philosophical discussion per se.
An overview of Ellen White’s theodicy

In brief, Ellen White interprets evil within the framework of a cosmic conflict in which the figure of Satan plays a central role. The background of the conflict is God’s creative love and its ultimate resolution will be the fulfillment of God’s loving purpose for creation.

Because He is infinite love, God created beings with the capacity to appreciate His character and to love Him freely in return. This action involved a risk, however, because creatures who are free to love are free to withhold love, and rebel against their maker. Sadly, this is what happened, and this creaturely rebellion is the cause of all suffering. The rebellion is temporary, however. Eventually, sin and sinners will be eradicated and as a result of this "terrible experiment" with evil, no one will ever again question God’s love and authority. The universe will be secure from all further rebellion.

The devil plays a central role in every phase of this scenario. As Ellen White describes it, evil originated in the universe sometime before the creation of the earth with the rebellion of Lucifer, the highest created being. Lucifer was the head of the angelic host and the covering cherub who served in the very presence of God. Given his lofty position and great intelligence, he had deep insight into the nature of God. Yet at some point in time, Lucifer mysteriously began to resent God’s authority. He nursed his dissatisfaction until he was convinced that God was unfair, and then decided that he could no longer serve God. Lucifer also aroused the suspicions of his fellow angels. He portrayed God as a tyrant unworthy of their loyalty and eventually persuaded one-third of the heavenly host to join him in rejecting God’s authority. When their opposition ripened into open revolt, they were cast out of heaven.

With this expulsion, the central stage in this cosmic drama shifted to this earth, where Satan sought to spread his rebellion by getting Adam and Eve to reject God’s sovereignty. God endowed humans with essentially the same freedom the angels enjoyed, forbidding them to eat from "the tree of knowledge of good and evil."8

Speaking through the serpent in Eden, Satan persuaded Eve—and through her, Adam—to question God’s benevolence and to eat the forbidden fruit. With this act of disloyalty to God, human beings lost their sovereignty over the earth to the devil. Since then, Satan and his angels have been busy wreaking havoc on the earth. So, the devil is ultimately responsible for everything that threatens human life and well-being. He is the original source of all suffering—from natural disasters and organic diseases to personal sin in all its manifestations, including pride, self-indulgence, cruelty, crime and war. Beneath the veneer of human activity, the essence of history consists in the conflict between God and Satan as they pursue their contrasting objectives for the earth and each attempts to counteract and undermine the work of the other.

An obvious question is why God allowed the devil to persist in his rebellion. Why didn’t God destroy him, or at least prevent him from harming other creatures? Why was he permitted to extend his rebellion, to foment dissatisfaction among other angels, to tempt Adam and Eve and wreak havoc on the newly created earth?

This question brings us to the most important aspect Ellen White’s luciferous theodicy—the idea of an onlooking universe. As she conceives it, this earth is an arena where God and the devil are vying, not just for the souls of human beings, but for the allegiance of the entire universe. The universe contains a great number of moral beings. The unfallen angels and inhabitants of other worlds are carefully watching the conflict between good and evil in human history in order to determine whether or not God deserves their complete loyalty.

7 He was particularly resentful of the Son of God, who in certain respects was a being somewhat like himself. And the specific occasion of his resentment was his exclusion from the councils where God the Father and God the Son were planning the creation of the earth.
8 "God might have created man without the power to transgress His law... but in that case man would have been, not a free moral agent, but a mere automaton. Without freedom of choice, his obedience would not have been voluntary, but forced " (PP 49).
So, Lucifer’s rebellion had farreaching consequences. He not only succeeded in getting many others to join his revolt, his charges against God had a powerful effect on those who did not. Though not outwardly rebellious, they harbored lingering doubts about God’s character. Perhaps Lucifer was right, they wondered, and God really is a tyrant. Perhaps they were serving God only because they didn’t know any better. Perhaps human misery was the result of divine mismanagement or, worse, divine cruelty.

Even though Lucifer’s direct assault on God failed, he achieved a victory of sorts anyway. His accusations put God in a bind. If God summarily destroyed him, this would confirm Lucifer’s accusations. God would then appear to be just what Lucifer claimed He was, a despot who keeps His creatures submissive by concealing His true character. So, instead of destroying Lucifer, God had to let him live. The only way to relieve the doubts of the onlooking universe was to allow the principles of rebellion to ripen until their self-destructive consequences were clear for all to see.

The central issue in the great controversy, then, is the character of God, or, more precisely, the creaturely perception of God. To bring the controversy to an end, God must not only eradicate evil, He must do it in a way that is clearly consistent with love. What the onlooking universe needs, then, is a vivid display of the nature of sin and the character of God. When the host of unfallen beings finally see that Lucifer’s charges are unfounded, that God is supremely loving and worthy of worship, Satan’s cause would lose all its sympathizers and God could finally destroy it. In order to provide "an eternal basis of security," God gave Satan time to develop his principles, "that they might be seen by the heavenly universe."  

The plan of salvation represents God’s response to Satan’s charges. The incarnation and the crucifixion of God’s own Son clearly manifest God’s love and show that Satan’s charges against God are a lie. It is his dominion that rests on cruelty and tyranny. His accusations against God are but the projection of his own qualities.

For Ellen White, the cross was the turning point in the great controversy, and it benefits the entire universe. Before Christ’s death, Satan’s deceptions were so effective that none of the creatures fully understand the nature of his rebellion. But his hostility to Christ tore away Satan’s disguise and revealed him as a murderer. When he shed the blood of God’s Son, "The last link of sympathy between Satan and the heavenly world was broken." So, "All heaven triumphed in the Saviour’s victory. Satan was defeated, and knew that his kingdom was lost." Even with this, however, the onlooking universe had things to learn, so the controversy continues. "The angels did not even then understand all that was involved in the controversy." As human history runs its course, however, the nature of rebellion will be fully understood, and when that happens, God will eradicate sin forever. "Satan and all who have joined him in rebellion will be cut off. Sin and sinners will perish, root and branch." The concept of the great controversy thus explains the final judgment. It shows that the destruction of the wicked "is not an act of arbitrary power on the part of God," but "the inevitable result of sin."  

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9 In a few passages, Ellen White indicates that the moral universe includes not only unfallen angels, but also the inhabitants of other worlds.
10 "God could have destroyed Satan and his sympathizers as easily as one can cast a pebble to the earth; but He did not do this. Rebellion was not to be overcome by force. Compelling power is found only under Satan’s government. The Lord’s... authority rests upon goodness, mercy and love..." So, "Satan led men into sin, and the plan of redemption was put in operation." For thousands of years, "Christ was working for man’s uplifting, and Satan for his ruin and degradation. And the heavenly universe beheld it all." They watched Christ’s passion with particular interest. They saw His suffering, Satan’s frantic attempts to induce Him to sin, and His total submission to God and steadfast resistance to the devil’s wiles (DA 758-761).
11 As the covering cherub, he had been "the highest of all created beings," "foremost in revealing God’s purposes to the universe." It was difficult to unveil his character because he was so deceptive, and "because of the exalted position he had held" (ibid.).
12 "Not until the death of Christ was the character of Satan clearly revealed to the angels or to the unfallen worlds" (ibid.)
13 The Desire of Ages, pp. 758-761.
rejecters of His mercy reap that which they have sown." So, the final judgment is not a display of divine vengeance, but the natural destiny of those who remove themselves from the source of all life.

God could not destroy Satan and his followers when the controversy began without leaving doubts in the minds of the unlooking universe. But when the plan of redemption is complete, God's character will be revealed to all created intelligences, and then "the extermination of sin will vindicate God's love." We have in Ellen White, then, an emphatically luciferous theodicy. The figure of the devil is not just one feature in her response to the problem of evil, it is central to it. He instigated a conflict of cosmic proportions, and he bears final responsibility for all evil and suffering. He is to blame for all the ills we experience. At the same time, human suffering serves an important purpose. It contributes to the cosmic drama that will eventually vindicate the character of God and insure the eternal security of the universe.

What does the great controversy represent as a theodicy? How does this sweeping account of the world's history compare to other responses to the problem of evil? To etch its contours a bit more sharply, it may be helpful to view it in relation to the familiar types of theodicy that John Hick develops.

Ellen G. White's theodicy compared

Ellen White's views on evil resemble both Augustinian and Irenaean theodicies in certain ways. On the Augustinian side, she affirms the absurdity of sin and attributes its origin to the exercise of creaturely freedom. On the Irenaean side, she places great emphasis on character development and construes evil as the occasion for a valuable learning experience.

One Augustinian element is the idea that evil originated in a historical fall from perfection, indeed, from the highest level of creaturely perfection. Another is the idea that sin is inexplicable and incomprehensible. "Sin is an intruder," she asserts, "for whose presence no reason can be given. It is mysterious, unaccountable..." We find a third Augustinian element in the value Ellen White places on creaturely freedom. A universe containing morally free beings, she maintains, is superior to one without it. "God desires from all His creatures the service of love—homage that springs

14 "By a life of rebellion, Satan and all who unite with him place themselves so out of harmony with God that His very presence is to them a consuming fire. The glory of Him who is love will destroy them" (ibid., p. 763, 764).
15 [W]hen one chooses the service of sin, he separates from God, and thus cuts himself off from life. "At the beginning of the great controversy, the angels did not understand this. Had Satan and his host...perished...it would not have been apparent to heavenly beings that this was the inevitable result of sin. A doubt of God's goodness would have remained in their minds as evil seed, to produce its deadly fruit of sin and woe." Then, when the plan of redemption is complete, God's character will be revealed to all created intelligences, and at that point, "the extermination of sin will vindicate God's love and establish His honor before a universe of beings who delight to do His will" (DA 763-764).
16 In fact, Ellen White also provides an emphatically luciferous theology. The devil plays a major role in all the central doctrines of Christian faith, including creation, salvation and last things. Her approach belies Jeffrey Burton Russell's statement that "belief in the Devil's existence is not part of the core of Christianity" (Mephistopheles: The Devil in the Modern World, p. 299).
17 John Hick's book, Evil and the God of Love (rev. ed.; Harper & Row, 1978) is one of the most influential discussions of evil to appear in this century. It outlines two responses to the problem: Augustinian theodicy, which is essentially the free-will defense in its various forms, and Irenaean theodicy, the perspective Hick favors, which emphasizes the contribution that suffering makes to character development, or "soul-making."
18 "It is impossible to explain the origin of sin so as to give a reason for its existence... God was in no wise responsible for the entrance of sin;...there was no arbitrary withdrawal of divine grace, no deficiency in the divine government, that gave occasion for the...rebellion" (GC 492-493). "In the final execution of the judgment it will be seen that no cause for sin exists" (GC 503).
from an intelligent appreciation of His character. He takes no pleasure in a forced allegiance, and to all He grants freedom of will... \(^{19}\)

There are also elements in Ellen White’s account that resemble John Hick’s "Irenaean" or "soul-making" theodicy. As she describes it, human beings were created sinless, but not mature. They needed a period of time to develop their characters and become everything they were meant to be. "God made [them] free moral agents, capable of appreciating ... His character and ... with full liberty to yield or to withhold obedience.... [B]efore they could be rendered eternally secure, their loyalty must be tested."\(^{20}\)

For Irenaean theodicy, according to Hick, the fall was inevitable. And instead of a catastrophic catapult from perfection to perdition, the fall was more like a learning experience, an important step in growing toward maturity. As we have seen, Ellen White condemns sin as inexcusable and rejects the notion that God is in any way responsible for it. But she maintains that the fall of Adam and Eve was different from that of Lucifer. It was disastrous, but not quite as disastrous. Lucifer enjoyed a full revelation of God’s character. He knew the full depth of God’s love and goodness, so his rebellion was irreversible. There was nothing God could do for him. But Adam and Eve did not know God in the same way. Furthermore, their picture of God was clouded by Satan’s deceptions. So, for them there was hope. A fuller revelation of God’s love could win them back.\(^{21}\)

Another Irenaean feature in Ellen White’s theodicy is the contribution that a challenging environment can make to moral development. For her as for John Hick, character development was essential to God’s design for human beings.\(^{22}\) Though the fall was not inevitable, it resulted in an environment that was beneficial to moral growth. When Adam and Eve yielded to temptation human nature was depraved, and they needed the discipline that only hardship could provide.\(^{23}\) Filled with sorrows as it is, this world is a "vale of soul-making."

Ellen White comes closest to an Irenaean theology with her view that evil leads to benefits that would not otherwise have been realized.\(^{24}\) And the primary benefit involves the onlooking universe. As a result of the great controversy, she maintains, God’s creation achieves complete security. Once sin has been tried, and everyone can see how terrible it is, God will destroy it with everyone’s approval, and no one will ever be foolish enough to try it again. At the same time, however, she never says that evil is inevitable—that in a universe of morally free creatures, someone is bound to rebel sooner or later. Nor does she say that the net effect of evil is positive, that the gains outweigh the losses in the final analysis. It is not her view that evil is somehow "worth it," no matter how bad it is. (She consistently refers to it as a "terrible experiment.") Nor does she say that the universe could not have achieved security in any other way. All she says is that the universe is immune to rebellion now in a way that it was not before. The plan of redemption "vindicate[s]...\(^{19}\)

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\(^{19}\) GC 493; cf. PP 34. Along with these prominent Augustinian features, Ellen White’s thoughts on evil also contain some obviously non- or antiaugustian elements. She does not believe that God predestines anyone to eternal damnation. Nor does she believe that the wicked suffer in unending torment.

\(^{20}\) PP 48.

\(^{21}\) "Lucifer in heaven had sinned in the light of God’s glory. To him as to no other created being was given a revelation of God’s love. Understanding the character of God, knowing His goodness, Satan chose to follow his own selfish, independent will. This choice was final. There was no more that God could do to save him." In contrast, "man was deceived; his mind was darkened by Satan’s sophistry. The height and depth of the love of God he did not know. For him there was hope in a knowledge of God’s love. By beholding His character he might be drawn back to God" (DA 761-762).

\(^{22}\) "Without freedom of choice, ... [t]here could have been no development of character" (PP 49).

\(^{23}\) A "life of toil and care" was "part of God’s great plan for man’s recovery from the ruin and degradation of sin" (PP 61, 60).

\(^{24}\) One is that human beings are more closely united to God through the incarnation than if they had never fallen. ("By His life and His death, Christ has achieved even more than recovery from the ruin wrought through sin. It was Satan's purpose to bring about an eternal separation between God and man; but in Christ we become more closely united to God than if we had never fallen. In taking our nature, the Savior has bound Himself to humanity by a tie that is never to be broken" [DA 25]).

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the character of God before the universe. And [a] tested and proved creation will never again be turned from allegiance to Him whose character has been fully manifested ... as fathomless love and infinite wisdom.

Ellen White’s theodicy also differs from Irenaeus versions in several important ways. For her, the fall was not inevitable, and God is in no sense responsible for sin. Moreover, not everyone will be saved. The universe will eventually be populated with beings who serve God freely. But unlike Hick’s account, this is not because God finally wins everyone over. It is because he destroys all opposition. As we have seen, He can do this without arousing suspicion, because He waits until the loyal followers have no sympathy left for rebellion.

Like most Christian theodicies, Ellen White’s combines the notion of a fall that originates in creaturely freedom with the idea that evil contributes to the achievement of something good. What distinguishes her theodicy is the way she seems to expand the threat that evil poses to the universe while narrowing the likelihood of its occurrence. For many theodicies it is understandable, if not excusable, for evil to arise in a universe where there is freedom. Sooner or later rebellion is bound to occur somewhere, and many people think it was part of God’s plan that it do so. But the consequences of evil are “manageable.” Either all evil is ultimately redeemed, or there is at least a guaranteed preponderance of good over evil.

For Ellen White, in contrast, universal catastrophe was a real possibility: conceivably, creation could reject God’s sovereignty entirely, join in rebellion, and leave God’s plans in tatters. If we ask why God would go ahead and create in the face of this possibility, the answer may be that the original likelihood of evil was very small. God created beings with a capacity to love, God knew that they could rebel, but it was never God’s plan that they actually would, and God did everything He could to prevent it, short of eliminating freedom.

_Ellen White and the book of Revelation_

Ellen White’s luciferous theodicy raises a variety of interesting questions—biblical, historical and philosophical. Given the theme of our conference, an obvious question is the relation of her apocalyptic vision to the vision of the Apocalypse itself. For both, human history is the stage for a divine-demonic conflict of cosmic proportions. And the final phase of this struggle will bring human history to an end and establish God’s reign on the earth forever. But Ellen White’s interpretation of the conflict differs from the book of Revelation in some interesting ways.

To the original readers (hearers) of Revelation, as to the biblical communities of faith in general, God’s very sovereignty appears to be at stake. Their question was whether God has the power to overcome the evil forces that dominate human life and wreak havoc with God’s people. The book’s answer is a resounding Yes! God will defeat His foes in a climactic battle and utterly destroy them in a lake of fire. A related question is why, if God has the power to destroy the wicked, He doesn’t go ahead and do it. How much longer can He tolerate the persecution of his people? For Ellen White, in contrast, the crucial question is not whether or when God will destroy the wicked, but why God destroys them at all. How can a God of love end the existence of any of His creatures? From Ellen White’s perspective, there is no question that God is infinitely superior to His opponents. Since God’s power is the ultimate source of every creature’s life, the fundamental force that upholds everything, He could end anyone’s existence in an instant. For her, the fundamental issue of the great controversy is not God’s power at all, but God’s character, or more precisely, God’s reputation.

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25 PP 68.
26 GC 504. “Satan's rebellion was to be a lesson to the universe through all coming ages, a perpetual testimony to the nature and terrible results of sin.... Thus the history of this terrible experiment of rebellion was to be a perpetual safeguard to all holy intelligences, ... to save them from committing sin and suffering its punishment” (GC 499; cf. PP 43).
27 This seems to be Alvin Plantinga’s view. “A world containing creatures who are significantly free (and freely perform more good than evil actions) is more valuable, all else being equal, than a world containing no free creatures at all” (God, Freedom and Evil [Harper Torchbooks, 1974], p. 30).
28 “How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?” (Rev 6:10).
29 I am indebted to Ernest Bursey for prompting me to raise this question.
Ellen White’s reluctance to attribute judgment to God also appears in her account of human suffering at the end of time. According to Revelation 16, angels sent from God pour out their vials on an unrepentant world. But in her description of the time of trouble, Ellen White asserts that “Satan will then plunge the inhabitants of the earth into one great, final trouble.”

Ellen White’s cultural context

It would also be interesting to explore the relation between Ellen White’s concept of the great controversy and the social and religious environment in which she lived and thought. Without suggesting derivation, we note certain similarities between her concerns and those of others in her time. In nineteenth-century America the image of a vivid, well-populated spiritual realm played a prominent role in a number of emerging religious movements. For Spiritualists, the dead survive as spirits who sometimes contact the living. For Mormons, humans exist as spirit beings before their life on earth and will continue their journey after death in other parts of the universe. For Christian Scientists, humans are essentially spirit beings; physical existence is an illusion. Like many around her, then, Ellen White believed that spirits populate the universe.

A similar inquiry involves the contours of Ellen White’s Satanology, or diabolology. There are some striking similarities between her view of the devil and the portrait of Satan in Milton’s Paradise Lost. In each case, the devil is a magnificent being who, though fallen, retains a great deal of his original majesty and intelligence, and who is engaged in a long struggle to defame God’s character and undermine God’s authority. Just where her perspective fits in the long history of diabolical images is an inquiry for another occasion.

The great controversy as a theodicy

From a philosophical perspective the crucial questions for any proposal concern its plausibility and coherence. What happens when we apply these criteria to Ellen White’s luciferous theodicy?

Does the great controversy concept make sense today? Is the universe populated with intelligent beings? Are we surrounded by invisible personalities? In the thinking of many people today the answer is yes. Angels have grown in popularity in recent years. They have been featured in national news magazines, major motion pictures, and network television series. Millions of people also believe in the devil. He is a familiar character in movies and novels. He figures prominently in a wide range of religious phenomena, evoking varied responses, from fear, revulsion and defiance to admiration and even worship. And he has even made an appearance in popular psychology.

In contrast, most philosophical treatments of evil today do without the devil. In his extensive writings on theodicy John Hick makes no use of the idea of a prehuman angelic fall or the notion that the world is in the grip of demonic powers. Similarly, in an article on “horrendous evils,” which she calls “the deepest of religious problems,” Marilyn McCord Adams never even mentions the devil. But in spite of its negligible philosophical influence, the idea deserves consideration.

Some examples of suffering are of such duration, intensity or magnitude that they require a cause of superhuman, indeed, near-cosmic proportions to be remotely comprehensible. The Holocaust has made the idea of the devil plausible for many in the twentieth century. For recent examples, we have only to think of ethnic cleansing in the former Yugoslavia, the massacre of millions in Rwanda, and in the United States, of the dozens who perished in Waco, Texas and Oklahoma City, and in the shootings that now seem to occur with brutal regularity in schools and workplaces around the country. Coming closer to home, we can all recall instances of cruelty and violence to those we know and care about that cry out for some sort of cosmic condemnation. Certain instances of suffering are such that we cannot begin to account for them in any proximate context of meaning. Their inspiration must come from something other than human.

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30 GC 614.
The devil provides a way of coming to terms with such phenomena. Indeed, given the current state of human affairs, a luciferous theodicy may be sorely needed.

A philosophical position must be coherent as well as plausible, and this is where two important questions about Ellen White’s theodicy arise. The first concerns the devil's relation to God. The idea of a being whose revolt against God engulfs the entire universe and seriously threatens God's government conflicts with traditional views of divine sovereignty. In fact, it almost looks like a version of dualism. For orthodox Christianity, everything owes its existence to God, who alone is all-powerful and self-existent. God brought all creatures into being, and God's power sustains them moment by moment.34 Ellen White accepts this concept. "All created beings live by the will and power of God," she asserts. "They are dependent recipients of the life of God..."35

But if everything owes its existence to God, why does the devil enjoy such enormous power in the great-controversy scheme? How could any created being become a credible rival to God? And what would intelligent beings hope to gain from contesting God's supremacy, if they knew that God could instantly annihilate them?

There may be an answer to this in the central issue of the great controversy, which concerns perception rather than power. The central question is not whether God will reign, but whether God deserves to reign. To be precise, it is whether the creatures perceive that God deserves to reign. This blunts the force of the dualistic objection, but it does so by placing immense emphasis on the notion of the onlooking universe—the populace of moral beings who need to be convinced that God fully deserves to be God. And this raises some questions of its own.

One is the very possibility of distrusting God. In the great controversy scenario the devil accuses God of tyrannical behavior. God provides evidence of His true motives over the long course of human history. God's creatures weigh the evidence and conclude that God is who He claims to be—a benevolent, loving parent who really cares for His children. With this conclusion the devil loses his argument and the conflict is over—case closed.

But what should we make of the notion "God on trial"? The idea of God's creatures evaluating Satan's charges in light of the evidence and concluding that God is truly benevolent after all is a difficult one. For one thing, it clearly presupposes some independent standard of goodness by which God is judged, and people will question this for a number of familiar reasons.36

The notion that God’s creatures can investigate and come to a conclusion about God’s character is also problematic given God's ontological status. To conduct a reliable investigation, we must be confident that the evidence before us has not been tampered with. We must also be confident that we have the capacity to weigh the evidence impartially and reach our own conclusions. In other words, we must have confidence in the structure of reality and in our own cognitive processes.

The fact that God is creator, however, means that God is involved in every aspect of reality. There is evidence to examine only because divine power sustains it. And our minds work the way they do because God has designed them that way. As a result, every claim to know something implicitly expresses confidence in God. It rests on the presupposition that God is trustworthy. Yet this is precisely what is at stake in the great controversy. It seems, then, that we cannot determine if God is trustworthy unless we assume that God is trustworthy. We find ourselves begging the question.

Even if we grant the possibility of impartially investigating God's trustworthiness, we have to wonder just why it takes the onlooking universe so long to see that sin is self-destructive and that God deserves to be God. If, indeed, God is love and the sufferings of this world are the consequences of abandoning God, it is hard to understand why it should take superior minds thousands of years to reach this conclusion. After all, human beings are supposed to make their decisions for eternity in far less time and with less intelligence.

34 Paul's quotation of a pagan poet is often cited in this connection: "In him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28).
35 DA 785.
36 Is something good because God says it is, or does God say it is good because it is? If God is goodness itself, the idea of evaluating God's behavior against some other standard of goodness makes no sense.
A further question about the coherence of this luciferous theodicy concerns its concept of a morally secure universe. As Ellen White describes it, the great controversy begins in Lucifer’s unwarranted self-exaltation and ends when the inhabitants of the universe are completely loyal to God. So much evidence accumulates to support the love of God and expose the absurdity of sin that no reflective creature will ever again entertain the idea of rebelling against God. But this account seems to shift the premise of rebellion from perversity to ignorance. Sin was absurd to begin with. It originated with the one person in the universe who had the least reason to rebel, one who knew God better than all other creatures. His sin was an act of sheer perversity. It defied all the evidence. As Ellen White describes the end of the conflict, however, sin seems to be a matter of ignorance. No one will ever sin again because the accumulated evidence to support God’s claims is too great. Now, if Lucifer could rebel against God with all that he knew of God’s character, how can we be sure that in future ages no other being will do the same? On the other hand, if enough evidence could prevent someone from sinning, why was it Lucifer, of all creatures, who started it?

We seem, then, to face a dilemma. If sin is a matter of ignorance, we have a basis for confidence in the ultimate security of the universe, but we cannot explain Lucifer’s heavenly revolt. On the other hand, if sin is essentially an act of perversity, then we can identify Lucifer’s rebellion, but we have no guarantee that some other being will not make an irrational, wholly unjustified, decision to rebel against God.

These questions may be nothing more than philosophical quibbles, but they show that the concept of the great controversy could use some careful reflection. And I hope that these comments in general show that the theme merits discussion. The great controversy is a rich and provocative concept. It plays a central role in traditional Adventist thought. It speaks to popular consciousness today. And it has something to offer to current discussions of the problem of evil. It deserves more attention from Adventist scholarship.
WORLDS AT WAR, NATIONS IN SONG:  
DIALOGIC AND MORAL IMAGINATION IN REVELATION’S HYMNS

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The Waco tragedy on April 19, 1993¹ has had an enormous influence on my approach to the book of Revelation. During the months and years Vernon Howell (who called himself David Koresh) acted as leader of the Mt. Carmel community, he approached biblical prophetic texts monologically. That is, as words interpreted by a solitary, authoritative voice who alone provided a closed, finalized meaning. Howell was able to hold thoughtful people captive, both literally inside a surrounded compound, and for hours in Bible study. Mt. Carmel is an example of a single voice dominating all conversation.²

During and after the tragedy, the focus of criticism by many Seventh-day Adventists was revealing. That Vernon Howell proposed a closed reading of Revelation was rarely challenged within Adventism. It was his particular closed reading that was challenged with, it should be noted, equally closed readings.³ It seems to me that April 19, 1993 is an extreme example of the inherent inadequacies of monologic interpretations of the book of Revelation. What Adventists need is a dialogic approach to this final book of Christian Scripture. We need an approach that would challenge Howell’s reading as an exclusive reading; an approach which would also challenge many of Howell’s opponents who offer exclusive readings of Revelation. Adventism, a community that has long valued the book of Revelation, can make the text live by inspiring worship and ethics through its vision of a just world.

A dialogic approach to the book is a helpful way to renew Revelation. The work of Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin (1895-1975) provides a particularly rich example of this approach. A champion of the dialogic⁴ approach to texts, Bakhtin spent his lifetime in dialogue with people and their ideas.⁵ Conversation embodied Bakhtin’s conviction

¹The standoff began on February 28, 1993, fifty-one days earlier, when AFT agents entering the compound were met with gunfire. See James D. Tabor and Eugene V. Gallagher, Why Waco? Cults and the Battle for Religious Freedom in America (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 3.


⁴“Dialogism” is a way of understanding language, and the entire world, as a matter of relationships. Human beings do not “enter into relationships,” instead, relationships are the very essence of our existence. A dialogic sense of language highlights its communicative qualities; it needs at least two voices, is dynamic, occurs in a specific context, and is unfinalizable. In contrast, monologic language is a proposition divorced (supposedly) from context; a “universal truth.” Only a solitary voice is necessary. There exists no conversation. Meaning is closed.

⁵Immediately following the Russian Revolution, Bakhtin, a recent graduate of Petersburg (later Leningrad) University, joined other intellectuals who had taken refuge in the towns of Nevel and Vitebsk. This “Bakhtin Circle” explored philosophy, art, language, literature, and the social sciences. Even in his final years, Bakhtin relished conversations with a new generation of students.
that meaningful language involves a “sideways glance” toward the other. Every text and every reader is involved in this on-going, unfinalizable exchange. Language understood as conversation or dialogue acknowledges its social context, its connection to others, and its responsibility. In recent years, Bakhtin’s works have become available in translation by the academy. His strategies for reading texts offer alternatives to monologic approaches. In this short paper I will briefly discuss one such reading strategy: the chronotope.

The literal meaning of “chronotope” is “time-space.” For Bakhtin, this concept acknowledges the connectedness of time-space relationships as expressed in literature. At every point of its existence, the text is grounded in a social and historical context. The text, as an utterance, was a specific meaning in a specific situation. It is therefore unique and unrepeatably. The chronotope also provides a way to notice images of time and space within a given text. Narrative genres explore the relation of people and events to time and space. They construct pictures of timed-places (Berkeley in the 60s) and placed-times (the 60s in front of the White House) that are the ground for activity, the ground of human action in a cultural context. Some narratives portray real time and space, other narratives (like epics) include time-space that has no specificity. In an epic, a sea is not the Sea of Galilee during the time of Jesus, nor the Mediterranean Sea during World War II, but the Sea. Narratives can be classified by the type of time-space they construct. For Bakhtin, the narratives of most value are those that best acknowledge and incorporate the complexities of real historical time-space. Such narratives allow characters to be people with ideas who can act, not just pawns for the author’s ideas. With real historical time there is the possibility of creativity, conversation, and ethical responsibility. Bakhtin criticizes utopian literature for lacking these very qualities.

Although Bakhtin would be wary of apocalyptic literature, identifying it with utopian literature, his strategy still allows us to better analyze the nature of Revelation’s time-space. It seems to me that the hymns in the book of Revelation, elements often neglected in monologic interpretations of the book, provide a collision of times and spaces within the narrative. In the hymns, past, present and future time “dialogue” with each other. In the hymns, earthly space and transcendent space appear simultaneously.

For example, in Revelation 7 a great multitude is described in the narrative as impossible to count. People from all over the earth stand “before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands” (7:9). The narrative’s apocalyptic chronotope places this multitude in future time before a transcendent space (the Lamb’s throne). However, the moment readers of Revelation 7 continue, they enter a potentially new, or at least unstable, timespace. The multitude cries out: “Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!” (7:10). Immediately the angels and other heavenly beings join in singing: “Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen” (7:12). The reader repeats words that cannot be pinned down to one specific time-space. The hymns refuse to be locked in the past or relegated to the future. The hymns also cry out in the present!

By including hymns, the writer of Revelation creates a unique, unstable situation where different times and spaces are in dialogue with each other. The readers’ real historical time-space is introduced into the apocalyptic narrative. The future-transcendent space collides with the present-earthly. In Revelation 7, the future, global multitude is partially embodied in the present collection of voices. Readers are pulled into the text. A monologic approach is no longer possible. This aspect of dialogic imagination is not only a “sideways glance” at another’s voice; it is a vision

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6Bakhtin argues that the history of the novel is the gradual development of “real historical time” (real time, real space, and real people within that time and space). For Bakhtin, this chronotope is the best chronotope because it makes possible human actions that are free, ethically responsible and creative. See Bakhtin’s “Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel,” in The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin, edited by Michael Holquist, translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 84-258.


8States David Lodge, in After Bakhtin (London: Routledge, 1990), 86: “Instead of trying desperately to defend the notion that individual utterances, or texts, have a fixed, original meaning which it is the business of criticism to recover, we can locate meaning in the dialogic process of interaction between speaking subjects, between texts and readers, between texts themselves.”

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of a chorus of unique, united voices! The time-space of the Asia Minor congregations collide with all Christian communities who have repeated these words, this hymn. Revelation's unique time-space, highlighted in the hymns, draws the reader into the narrative. During the hymns, the lofty realm of apocalyptic literature touches the earth. The future vision appears in the flesh of present people who join the choir. And the choir dare not let the moment go until it blesses.

Throughout a lifetime of writing, Bakhtin demonstrated that the dialogic imagination is how we think, speak, read, write. 9 Texts are times and places where word and deed, conviction and action come together. In Revelation the future vision lands in the present. Creativity, conversation, and ethical responsibility are not only possibilities in Revelation, they are demands! Applying Bakhtin's strategies to Revelation's hymns results in new ways of reading and seeing this apocalyptic text, and of seeing our present world. Bakhtin's insight of open, unfinalized texts gives Revelation an entrance into the ethical discourse of vision and moral imagination.

While ethical discourse typically uses the language of virtues, values and obligations, an additional important ethical category is captured by the language of vision. 10 To experience vision is to be able to see, perceive, recognize. Only after moral imagination can individuals and communities discern how to act. Vision is powerful in that it can be both rooted in a specific location and connected to vast horizons of potential meaning.

While resisting any attempt at finalizing its interpretation, the vision invites its readers into a new time-space. The hymns draw its singers into a strange, new tension between past-future temporal movement, and earth-transcendent spatial movement. The vision expands to fill the whole of human history, and the universe of space. The act of worship draws its readers into a new world, a world that remains in close connection with the reader's world.

Year after year, the Adventist Society for Religious Studies gathers together in a unique time and space: the weekend before Thanksgiving, a hotel hall in a major U.S. city. We share and debate ideas. Over meals we catch up on each other's families and mutual friends. We discuss church politics and academic challenges. We laugh and disagree and support each other. Then, we sing. Usually we sing hymns in celebration of our salvation through Jesus Christ. Always we sing hymns in anticipation of the Advent. Even though the delay has now included another year, we sing "soon and very soon we are going to see the king" as if we have never been more convinced. The conversations, the differences, the dialogues of the previous days do not cease when we sing. They are all present within the chorus our different voices create. We are simultaneously unique and united. We bring much to our singing. We bring chemo treatments and marital problems and loneliness, and losses of all kinds. We bring lack of understanding. We bring ongoing racism, classicism, sexism. We bring doubts and convictions. We bring the memories of voices no longer with us—Gayle Saxby's voice and Paul Landa's voice and all those who have gone before, our teachers, our colleagues. We sing. And in the song, the time-space for which we all long—the future gathering before the throne of the Lamb—merges with our present.

The singing is a vision of what can be; a time of being reunited with loved-ones. A time of equality and unity and justice. A time when God will wipe away every tear from our eyes. The song, full of layers of meaning and experience in various times and places, provides a specific place from which to consider ourselves and our world. The song touches our moral imaginations. Because of the song we can envision a time when justice reigns. Because of the song we can imagine a place free of oppression and violence and hunger and death. We can imagine because we experience—for a moment, just a moment—the end of oppression and violence and hunger and death. The experience of singing sparks our moral imaginations so that we leave this place enthusiastically considering ways the vision can be lived out in our particular churches and schools and neighborhoods.

When we sing, we enter a great dialogue of words, stories, time-space locations. We join our voices in a most amazing conversation, which is also a song:

After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes

9 A brief list of works not included in the footnotes is given at the conclusion of this paper.

10 In his book, What Are They Saying About Scripture and Ethics? Rev. ed. (New York: Paulist Press, 1995), William C. Spohn discusses three phases of moral experience: (a) perception (that is, the ability to see morally significant features, situations); (b) motivation (that is, the how of moral action, including affections and dispositions); and, (c) identity of the individual/community.
and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice, saying,

"Salvation belongs to our God
Who is seated on the throne,
And to the Lamb!"

And all the angels stood around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, singing,

"Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom
and thanksgiving and honor
and power and might
be to our God forever and ever! Amen."

Brief list of books by and about M. M. Bakhtin

Bakhtin, M. M. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Translated by Caryl Emerson. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984. Here Bakhtin explores the dialogic strategy of "polyphony." This strategy refers to the author's point of view when the author is sensitive to dialogism. Such authors create novels with many voices, many points of view. Bakhtin's most revered polyphonic author is Dostoevsky, who allows his characters to speak in their own voices with minimal interference from him as author.


THE IMPERIAL CHRIST IN REVELATION 1:13-16

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In Rev 1:13-16 the reader encounters the first vision given to John the seer which contains a description of Jesus as a heavenly being. The description uses terms and language that were commonly used to describe divine beings in antiquity and, more particularly, language that had been used to claim divine status for the emperors. The language and images used to describe Jesus may be a direct response to imagery that had been used to describe two emperors in particular, Nero, known as the first emperor to persecute Christians, and Domitian, the emperor during whose reign Revelation was written. The aim of this paper is to show the ways in which such images were used as symbols of the emperors' divinity and to demonstrate that such images would have been prevalent enough to be among of the primary referents of John's description of Jesus. Studying the relationship between Revelation and emperor cult is not new for scholarship on Revelation. My task is to synthesize some of the previous suggestions and to focus specifically on the introductory vision of Revelation.

The images in Rev 1:13-16 are often explained as a combination of allusions to passages in Daniel, Ezekiel and other books of the Hebrew Bible. In his commentary on Revelation, Leonard Thompson uses Rev 1:13-16 as an example of the way in which the writer of Revelation weaves passages from Hebrew scripture into a new composition. Thompson argues that in this inaugural vision John draws from the language of Exodus 25, Zechariah 4, and Daniel 7 and 10. However, in Revelation, elements from those separate passages are combined to create a novel figure whom John encounters in his first vision. Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza believes the author of Revelation has used Daniel 10 as his pattern and has altered that traditional text with features from Daniel 7. For both Thompson and Schussler Fiorenza, what is new about the passage in Revelation is the weaving together of the various descriptions from the Hebrew Bible.

John M. Court discusses Hebrew Bible usage of sun imagery to describe God, such as Ps 84:11, in his attempt to explain Rev 1:16, which he argues is a quotation of a passage in Judg 5:31. However, Court goes on to suggest that this may not be the only text influencing this passage. The author "may conceivably have chosen these images to paint some ideal picture which his readers could contrast with, or recognize as a striking parody of the trappings of the worship of the Emperor and the spirit of Rome. . . ." This point is significant in that it recognizes the widespread use of the imagery and the possibility of its function in Revelation as something more than echoes of Hebrew Bible tradition. The genius of the choice of images used in Rev 1:13-16 may lie precisely in their ability to recall or make reference to the long tradition of the use of such imagery, which for a reader or hearer of Revelation in the late first

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1 Tacitus, *Annals* XV.44.


8 Bruce J. Malina notes that descriptions similar to Rev 1:13-16 were not uncommon in antiquity. He acknowledges that Hebrew Bible imagery may be a source for such imagery in Revelation, but asks where such imagery might have come from. He argues that descriptions of divine beings similar to Dan 7: 9-10, 13-14 and 10:5-6 were quite common in antiquity. Malina's purpose in referring to such descriptions is not to claim that they are sources, but to "illustrate how 'normal' the figure of the cosmic, constellational son of man would be in the ancient Mediterranean within the context of astronomic perception." (Bruce J. Malina, *On the Genre and Message of Revelation: Star Visions and Sky Journeys* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995), 68-69.
century CE must have meant recalling the imagery in the prophets as well as the way similar astral imagery was being used within the imperial cult.

Since the form of the description was common, it may prove more helpful to assess the description in this initial vision from the point of view of its function at the time of its writing.

The Book of Revelation and Imperial Persecution

Revelation is commonly understood to be a reaction to widespread official persecution of Christians by the office of the emperor. This is essentially the position of Schussler Fiorenza, whose understanding of imperial cults in the first century is representative of many scholars’ approach to the topic. For Schussler Fiorenza Christians in Asia Minor, under the Flavians and particularly under Domitian, were increasingly under pressure to participate in imperial cult activity or suffer the ultimate punishment.9 Within such a framework, Revelation is understood to have been written in an attempt to alienate the churches from imperial cult, particularly Domitian’s extravagant religious practices, and traditional Greek cults by creating a symbolic universe that reinterpreted reality. This symbolic universe gave the churches the strength to decide between worshipping “the anti-divine powers embodied by Rome” or worshipping God.10

This view has recently come under significant criticism, particularly from Leonard Thompson, who argues that the imperial cult in Asia Minor played no role in the book’s production or theology. According to Thompson, Domitian was no mad tyrant and he did not make exaggerated claims to divinity. He was an able administrator who tried to improve the life of provincials. The imperial cult was no doubt objectionable to some Christians during his reign, but no more than during the reign of any other emperor.11

David De Silva also points out that the traditional view of the excesses of Domitian within the imperial cult has paid too much attention to only one of many factors that may have occasioned the writing of Revelation.12 While other aspects of life in Asia Minor in the first century CE cannot be overlooked, De Silva nevertheless concludes that after the oracles to the seven churches:

The imperial cult thus forms an important part of the background to John’s Apocalypse. Participation or non-participation becomes determinative of eschatological destiny. While it is only one among several factors contributing to the tension between the churches and their surrounding environments, the imperial cult stands out in importance.13

The position taken in this paper is, like De Silva’s, that the role of the imperial cult in Asia Minor is of great importance for the writer of Revelation. One need not posit that there was an empire-wide persecution of Christians in order for the imperial cult in Asia Minor to be problematic for Christians in the late first century CE. In fact several authors have argued that it was excesses of Domitian in claiming divine status that served as the catalyst for the writing of Revelation.14

How one understands the relationship between Revelation and the imperial cult depends on how one conceives of the nature and function of imperial cult in the first century CE. And although this study is not the place to lay out a history of the development of the imperial cult, a few words can be said about the nature of imperial-cult worship.

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9 Schussler Fiorenza, Revelation, 193-194.
10 Schussler Fiorenza, Revelation, 191.
11 Thompson, Revelation, 95-115.
Background of the Imperial Cult

The worship of rulers as it existed in the Greco-Roman period was primarily a Greek innovation harking back to the dynastic cults for or of Hellenistic monarchs, a phenomenon which itself probably came from benefactor veneration and hero worship.\textsuperscript{13} Alexander the Great's conquests were a turning point, if not a beginning of sorts, in the development of ruler cult. In the spring of 324 BCE, after his return from the East, Alexander sent word to the cities of Greece that he desired divine honors from them.\textsuperscript{16} Another possible important contributor to the development of ruler cult may have been Egyptian tradition, where the divinity of the Pharaoh was understood to be a part of royal sovereignty. Upon conquering Egypt Alexander was received as the son of Ammon Re by the priest at the oracle of Ammon in the Lybian desert.\textsuperscript{17}

It is also possible that the initiative came from the Greek cities, not from Alexander himself. Since the real test of divinity was more pragmatic than theological, within the context of hero worship and benefactor veneration, Alexander's achieving of divine status is not that much of a jump. The primary rationale for worshiping the gods in Greek religion was the gods' power to benefit or harm them. Therefore, if a man performed great deeds like the gods and was able to benefit people in ways similar to the gods, he might be called a god and eventually be honored like a god.\textsuperscript{18} Furthermore, the fine line between actual and functional divinity was blurred by the polytheistic nature of Greek religion and the human appearance of the gods. The whim of the gods was such that one could never be sure when a god might manifest him- or herself in the guise of a human being.

It was with Augustus's bringing to an end the Roman civil wars, thereby establishing the \textit{pax romana}, that ruler cult took the decisive changes toward the phenomenon of imperial cult as it existed in the first centuries CE. The apotheosis of Julius Caesar took place in 42 BCE in a bill sponsored by the Triumvirs and passed by the senate, thus beginning a long tradition of emperors who were voted into being \textit{divus}\textsuperscript{19} by the senate after their death.\textsuperscript{20} Near the year 29 BCE the assembly of the province of Asia decided to offer a crown "for the person who devised the greatest honors for the god (namely Augustus)."\textsuperscript{21}

There was a difference, however, between the way the imperial cult functioned in the East and in the West. Although it became common practice in the first century CE to deify emperors after their death, there were boundaries which were not to be crossed by emperors, particularly in the West.\textsuperscript{22} Augustus set certain limits for the claims to divinity made by rulers, generally followed by his successors, that were in line with Roman sensibilities on the topic. For example, in the imperial cult at Ephesus the aspects that were the responsibility of Rome were generally more conservative in the depiction of the living emperor as a deity than aspects that were the responsibility of the province.\textsuperscript{23}


\textsuperscript{17} Helmut Koester (\textit{Introduction}, 36) suggests that it is "possible that at the time Alexander accepted that he was indeed the son of the god Ammon Re (whom the Greeks identified with Zeus), and this event could have inspired him to solicit token of divine veneration for himself."

\textsuperscript{18} Fredricksmeyer, "Background," 148.

\textsuperscript{19} The terminology for divinizing an emperor was different in Rome and in the East. An emperor was not a \textit{deus} during his lifetime, but could be accorded the status of \textit{divus} after his death. In the republican period \textit{deus} and \textit{divus} were used interchangeably, but from the cult of Augustus onward, \textit{divus} referred exclusively in official terminology to former emperors and members of their family. For a discussion of the terminology associated with imperial cult in the East and West see S. R. F. Price, "Gods and Emperors: The Greek Language of the Roman Imperial Cult," \textit{JHS} 54 (1984), 79-95.

\textsuperscript{20} Aune, "Imperial Court Ceremonial," 21-22.


\textsuperscript{22} Barnett, "Revelation in its Roman Setting," 61.

\textsuperscript{23} Steve Friesen, \textit{Twice Neokoros: Ephesus, Asia and the Cult of the Flavian Imperial Family} (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1993), 166.
Nature and Function of Imperial Cult in First Century CE Asia Minor

The exact nature and role of the imperial cult in Asia Minor during the first century CE has been difficult to understand. Most discussions focus on either the political or the religious nature of the cult, with much of early scholarship choosing to emphasize the political aspects.

Several perspectives on the nature of the imperial cult have been put forward. Bowersock suggests that the imperial cult served as a means of building relationships between the central power in Rome and the provinces, particularly the eastern province of Asia. The development and nature of ruler worship and benefactor worship in return for benefactions continued with the Roman governors or charismatic generals with such events as the restoration of freedom to Greek cities. In Bowersock’s model imperial cult was basically an extension of diplomacy: “The Greek world was accustomed to dynastic cults for ruling families as well as cults for Roman magistrates. The cults of Augustus had their roots in those for Roman magistrates, but they took on the character of dynastic cults during the long reign of the first princeps, or emperor.” In this sense the imperial cult belongs to the natural evolution which Augustus encouraged in Greco-Roman affairs. Initiative from Rome was not required, only modification and adjustment. This model is limiting in that it reduces religious phenomena to political categories.

S. R. F. Price suggests that imperial cults were a way of understanding power relationships. Arguing that rituals were more than just a system of honors, he posited that the imperial cult was a system whose structure defined the position of the emperor. For Price, worship of the emperor arose out of the tension between Greek traditions of civic autonomy and the reality of Roman authority. Incorporating the worship of the Roman emperors into a system already in place that worshiped the Hellenistic dynasties was a way of incorporating Roman imperial authority into the Greek world in an acceptable manner. In this way imperial cult served as a vehicle through which the people from the provinces were able to make sense of an otherwise incomprehensible intrusion of power. For Price the imperial cult was one of the ways in which power relationships were articulated in the Greek world. By placing the emperor at the focal point between the human and divine, an intermediate position was created that was appropriate to the emperor’s power and Greek religious traditions.

Although Price’s model is one of the few to take imperial cult as a religious phenomenon seriously, his critics point out that he presupposes static civic institutions in order to describe the imperial cult as a phenomenon. Friesen argues that in Price’s theory “the function of imperial cults remains frozen in time, as if Roman authority remained foreign and was always in need of rationalization through ritual. By the time the Temple of the Sebastoi was built in Ephesus, however, Roman authority was not in question in the province of Asia; the social system was founded on this authority.”

It is only in relatively recent scholarship of the imperial cult in Asia Minor that scholars have begun to point to the all-encompassing nature and presence of the cult. It is difficult to talk about the political versus religious nature of the cult, or to refer only to the social dimensions of the cult. It is becoming clear that the imperial cult involved all of these inseparably.

Some of the social and economic factors that were part of the imperial economy often go overlooked and may have been a significant aspect of the writer of Revelation’s critique of the imperial cult. J. Nelson Kraybill argues that commercial relations are a central concern to the author who saw participation in the economy as an “important discipleship issue for people who confessed Jesus as Lord.” Kraybill argues that Christian nonparticipation in cultic life would have resulted in economic strain, since Christian withdrawal from the imperial cult would have entailed a diminished expression of loyalty to Rome. Furthermore, nonparticipation of Christians in cultic aspects of Greco-Roman life by not honoring the emperor brought on the suspicion of not only the imperial government, but perhaps

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29 Friesen, *Twice Neokoros*, 244-245. Friesen dates the temple to 89 or 90 CE.
30 Kraybill, *Imperial Cult*, 34.
31 Kraybill, *Imperial Cult*, 53.
more importantly, of fellow provincials who recognized Rome as a source of their prosperity.\textsuperscript{32} Kraybill argues that despite the lack of any hard evidence for empire-wide persecution during the reign of Domitian, "there is reason to believe that in the late first century Christians experienced social and political pressure to join the imperial cult or other pagan rituals."\textsuperscript{33} Since impiety could arouse the anger of the gods, any group's refusal to participate in the accepted religions could threaten the stability of the empire.

A central part of Kraybill's analysis is his understanding of the complex web of patron-client relationships that formed the basis of much of the social and economic activity of the empire.\textsuperscript{34} One of the primary ways a person could rise in social and economic status was to access this web of reciprocal relationships within which there were three principal avenues of social mobility: military service, attaining enough wealth, and expressions of loyalty to the empire.\textsuperscript{35} At the center, or rather at the top, of the network of relationships stood the emperor. Rome was the center of the empire and was the recipient of the majority of the materials and goods produced by the provinces. Kraybill argues that John's objection was as much ideological as it was economic.\textsuperscript{36} The writer of Revelation objected to the flurry of activity surrounding the imperial cult for economic gain, improvement of social status, and the messages conveyed through much of imperial propaganda.

**The Extent of the Imperial Cult in Asia Minor**

Before looking at the images of the emperors that can serve as a backdrop for understanding the choice of imagery in Rev. 1:13-16, it is important to recognize the extent to which the imperial cult was a part of the first-century-CE urban life in Asia Minor.

There were imperial temples in all seven of the cities to which Revelation was written. Four of the seven cities had imperial altars, and six of the seven cities had imperial priests.\textsuperscript{37} Further evidence of imperial presence in Asia Minor has been pointed to by Aune, who argues that the heavenly court in Revelation 4-5 is a parody of imperial-court ceremonial around the time of Domitian.\textsuperscript{38} Aune offers five reasons why people in Asia Minor who were well removed from the seat of the emperor would have been familiar enough with imperial-court ceremonial to understand the parody. First, emperors often visited the provinces, and when they did so, they did not travel alone; their court traveled with them. Second, the main task of the Roman emperor was to dispense justice through "reading written petitions, hearing cases orally, and receiving embassies from various cities. Firsthand exposure to the imperial court was therefore, over the years, experienced by hundreds and thousands of provincial residents."\textsuperscript{39} Third, through such literature as the Acts of the Pagan Martyrs (Acta Alexandrinorum) popular images of the imperial court and its protocol circulated through the provinces. Fourth, basic notions of what the imperial court and the emperor were like circulated in both Greek and Latin panegyric and in the rhetorical works of the Second Sophistic. Fifth, Roman art and coinage were important vehicles for imperial propaganda. Through these different ways, Aune argues, "residents of Asia Minor (the most important center for rhetoric and one of the areas in which the imperial cult was strongly entrenched) could have absorbed a combination of real and ideal images and conceptions of the character and function of the ceremonial of the imperial cult."\textsuperscript{40}

Of particular interest to understanding the influence of imperial imagery and imperial-cult practice on Revelation is the increase of building activity related to the imperial cult that took place in Ephesus during the reign of Domitian.\textsuperscript{41} The size, importance and significance of the building projects undertaken for the imperial cult during


\textsuperscript{33} Kraybill, *Imperial Cult*, 52.

\textsuperscript{34} Patron-client relationships were an exchange between people of unequal status. Benefits given by the patron might include business contracts, appointments to political office, legal services, money gifts or dinner invitations. In return the client would give political support, salutatio, and public displays of gratitude.

\textsuperscript{35} Kraybill, *Imperial Cult*, 72.

\textsuperscript{36} Kraybill, *Imperial Cult*, 64.

\textsuperscript{37} Price, *Rituals and Power*, xvii-xxvi.

\textsuperscript{38} Aune, "Imperial Court Ceremonial," 5-26.

\textsuperscript{39} Aune, "Imperial Court Ceremonial," 6.

\textsuperscript{40} Aune, "Imperial Court Ceremonial," 6-7.

\textsuperscript{41} Some authors have suggested that the author of Revelation was actually from Ephesus (Aune, "The Social Matrix of the Apocalypse of John," *Biblical Research* 26 [1981] 27).
the reign of Domitian were fundamental, since they changed the physical face of the city in significant ways and would have been an obvious and ever-present reminder to residents of the importance of the imperial cult for the city of Ephesus. In addition, the city of Ephesus claimed for itself the honor of having twice "hosted" or been the seat of a provincial temple: one for Artemis and one of the Sebastes. This second temple is dated on the basis of inscriptions to 89/90 CE.

Although the inscriptions do not refer to Domitian as theos, the use of the term sebasts for Domitian makes him an object of worship in this particular temple. From the text of the inscriptions there is no suggestion of extraordinary cultic honors for Domitian or for any other imperial figure. Nevertheless, the message articulated in the architecture and the imagery of some coins of the period is evidence of an effort to stretch Roman piety with regards to divine honors given to a living emperor.

Of particular consequence to understanding the effect that the imperial temple had on Ephesus is the fact that the construction of the temple terrace of the Cult of the Sebastes significantly affected an already well-developed central area of the city. This temple also contained a façade of gods over which the statues of the Sebastes towered. The architecture and sculpture in a temple precinct are one way of defining the relationship between the emperor and the gods. Price took the evidence from the area where the gods and emperors were present in the temple at Ephesus as a deliberate attempt to classify the emperors among the divine without claiming divinity for them. Friesen, on the other hand, points out that the temple is problematic for Price's theory because the emperors "towered above the ranks of the gods and the statues of the gods were smaller than those of the emperors." Friesen's interpretation of the façade in front of the Temple of the Sebastes in Ephesus is that the symbolism was indeed related to positions of the gods relative to the emperors:

The entire complex was not an attempt to articulate a comprehensive hierarchy of the divine world. Rather, we should take the position of the divine beings lined up across the length of the massive terrace. Behind this row of deities was the temenos of the Sebastes. The message was clear: the gods and goddesses of the peoples supported the emperors, and conversely, the cult of the emperors united the cultic systems and the peoples of the empire. The emperors were not a threat to the worship of the diverse deities of the empire; rather, the emperors joined the ranks of the divine and played their own particular role in that realm.

Another important aspect of the presence of the imperial cult in Ephesus was the strong imperial component in the reintroduction of Olympic games in Ephesus under Hadrian and again in the short-lived Olympic games under Domitian. Numismatic evidence indicates a significant association between Domitian and Zeus Olympios. One coin contains the image of the head of Domitian, the words DOMITIANOS KAISAR GERMANICUS on the obverse and an image of Olympian Zeus on the reverse. The ideological claims made by such a coin go beyond the claims made by "twice neokoros" coins that sought to elevate the relationship between Ephesus and the emperors to the status of the city's relationship to Artemis. Two new statements were made with the Zeus Olympios coin. First, it assimilated the emperor to Zeus, and, second, it placed the emperor in a direct relationship to Ephesian Artemis. Friesen notes that this represents "a major reorganization of the city's divine hierarchy, but it is not unexpected, for this is essentially the same

42 Friesen, Twice Neokoros, 160.
43 Friesen, Twice Neokoros, 56. The term used as a title in these inscriptions is Neokoros. The term appears as a city title in the late first century CE, where it refers to a city's provincial cult. For a history of the use of the word and its significance for the study of the imperial cult, see Friesen, Twice Neokoros, 50-59.
44 Friesen, Twice Neokoros, 49. These dedications indicate that Domitian was a predominant figure. He was not, however, the only recipient of worship at the temple. The temple was dedicated to the Flavians, probably including Domitian, a fact that allowed the cult to survive the Senate's condemnation of Domitian upon his death.
45 The Latin Augustus, as a title for the Roman Emperors was rendered in Greek as Sebastes.
46 Friesen, Twice Neokoros, 34.
47 Friesen, Twice Neokoros, 68.
49 Friesen, Twice Neokoros, 75.
50 Friesen, Twice Neokoros, 75.
51 Friesen, Twice Neokoros, 118.
52 Friesen, Twice Neokoros, 119.
message designed into the terrace of the Temple of the Sebastoi where the emperors, housed above the ranks of the deities, presided supreme over the world.53

Yet another important building project associated with the imperial cult during the reign of Domitian was the Harbor Bath-Gymnasium, which was the largest building complex in the ancient city of Ephesus and has been dated to the reign of Domitian. The size and location of the complex indicate its importance to the city of Ephesus. The complex, which was probably known as "the Baths of the Sebastoi," was built to provide the buildings needed to conduct the Ephesian Olympics instituted in honor of Domitian and established in conjunction with the provincial Cult of the Sebastoi in Ephesus.54

The imperial cult in Asia Minor in the late first century CE was an all-encompassing phenomenon that involved social, political, economic and religious aspects. We can now look at the initial vision of Revelation, focusing on what meaning some of the language and images take on against the backdrop of the imperial cult.

The Initial Vision of the Revelation of John and Conventions of the Greco-Roman World

As mentioned above, most commentators have argued that this initial vision is a reworking of Daniel 7 and 10 and passages from Ezekiel, and rightly so. Placed alongside each other, Rev 1:13-16 and Dan 10:5-9 display remarkable similarity in structure. However, this should not suggest that the Hebrew Bible is the only source for this imagery or the only referent. The fact that a very similar structure is displayed in a description of an angelic being by Apoc. Zeph. 6:11-13, as well as in the so called Mithras liturgy, suggests, as Malina has noted, that the use of such imagery to describe heavenly or otherworldly beings was a rather common convention in antiquity.55

With the possible exception of the image in 1:16b, the seven different images used to describe Jesus in the initial vision all use conventional Greco-Roman and Semitic metaphors for describing someone from the divine realm. The long robe and golden sash around the chest of Jesus in v. 13b may allude to Dan 10:5 and Ezek 9:2. It should be noted, however, that there are similar descriptions of Mithras slaying a bull while wearing a gold belt around his chest.56 Epiphanic language of Greek and Roman poetry emphasizes the golden appearance of the gods.57 The description of the head and white hair of Jesus like white wool or snow in v. 14a relies on a Near Eastern convention wherein angelic or divine beings are described as having hair like white wool.58 Passages similar to the description of the eyes like a flame of fire in v. 14b are found in Jewish literature.59 Similarly, in Greek and Latin literature, comparison of the eyes to fire is a metaphor indicating special or divine nature and was used in contexts that describe humans in ways characteristic of the gods, such as descriptions of emperors.60 Aune notes that one of the interesting features of v. 15a, where Jesus’ feet are likened to bronze, is that He is barefoot, just like statues of the emperor which typically depicted him barefoot.61 According to Hannestad, depicting a character barefoot indicates that the person or being depicted is in the sphere of the divine.62 The seven stars in Jesus’ right hand in v. 16a, which the author of Revelation explains in 1:20, have been variously identified with different constellations. It should be noted, however, that in Greek and Roman coinage stars were often used as a "symbol of the idea of divinity or of mortals who have joined the stars, as it were, and become gods."63 Unlike the other images, the image in v. 16b does not as readily ascribe divinity to the being depicted. However, reason, effective speech and the word of God are often compared to a sword or dagger in Jewish and Christian literature.64 In Heb 4:12 the word of God is described as "sharper than a two-edged sword." If one takes

53 Friesen, Twice Neokoros, 119.
54 Friesen, Twice Neokoros, 123, 137.
55 Malina, Genre, 68-69.
56 PGM IV.475-834.
58 Dan 7:9, 1 Enoch 46:1; 71:10; 106:2,10 and Apoc. Abr. 11:2.
60 Il. 13, 474; 19.366, Statius, Silv. 1.1.103 (a description of the eyes of Domitian’s equestrian statue) and Suetonius Augustus 79.2 (the eyes of Augustus).
61 Aune, Revelation, 95.
62 Niels Hannestad, Roman Art and Imperial Policy (Moesgard, Denmark: Jutland Archeological Society, 1986), 51.
64 Ps 52:2; Ps 57:4; Wis 18:15-16; Eph 6:17.
the two-edged sword to symbolize the word of God with which Jesus will smite the nations (Rev 19:5) and slay the armies of the kings of the earth (Rev 19:21), then one would have to regard this sword, the word of God, as an otherworldly thing, meaning that it then belongs to the same category as the other images in the complex. Finally, the image of Jesus’ face shining like the sun in v. 16c can be seen in the context of the widespread Jewish and Christian tradition that used the comparison as a metaphor for sanctity, divinity or transcendence.

The images in Rev 1:16 have a particularly striking correspondence to images used to deify the emperors. For some time before the writing of the book of Revelation, the same types of images had been and were being used in the context of ruler worship and emperor worship. Of particular interest in the context of the study of Revelation is the use of astral imagery in imperial propaganda from the beginning of the principate as well as the fact that comparison of the living ruler with the sun was a well-known theme in Hellenistic panegyric and it remained an important theme in imperial encomia. Horace says of Augustus, "And happy at Caesar’s coming home, I’ll sing: ‘O glorious day (sol), with honour to be mentioned.’" Manilius says of Tiberius, regarding his withdrawal from public life to the island of Rhodes, "The whole island is consecrated to the Sun, and Rhodes was in very truth its house at the time when it received into its care the light of the mighty universe in the person of Caesar." And Statius says of Domitian: "He rises with the rising sun and the mighty constellations." Fears further notes that the celebration of the ruler as sidus and light bearer to the world was a frequent topos of imperial panegyric. Augustus, Tiberius, Gaius, Claudius, Domitian, and Trajan, among others, were all celebrated in these terms.

Writers often described the dawning of the day as dependent on the appearance of the emperor rather than the sun. An example can be found in Martial regarding Domitian: "Now Caesar, come thou, even by night, let the stars stand still; the people, when thou comest shall not want for day." This type of description is particularly interesting with regard to the way in which Revelation seems to be appropriating these common images, for in Rev 21:23 and 22:5 the same theme is used.

The association of the living ruler with the sun was, then, a common topos. Furthermore, we can look more closely at a few of the images associated with the emperors Nero and Domitian. Many scholars regard Domitian’s policy toward his own divinity as the catalyst for writing the book of Revelation. Nevertheless, for the Book of Revelation it is to some extent Nero who is the primary symbol of evil. Nero and his reincarnation, Domitian, seem to fuse together into an archetypal symbol of evil. Relying on the myth of Nero’s return, Barnett argues that "Nero/Domitian are portrayed in Revelation as a parody of God’s true king, the Lion of the Tribe of Judah (5:5)." Nero is a natural focus of Christian fear because he was no doubt remembered as the emperor who first systematically persecuted Christians. And, though Nero did not claim divine status directly, as our sources indicate Domitian did later, there is enough evidence to link Nero with claims to divinity, particularly regarding associations with the sun.

65 An interesting parallel to this image is the description of Zeus’ thunderbolt as double-edged in Cleanthes’ Hymn to Zeus.


Carleton has noted the close connection between imperial cult and Hellenistic kingship traditions and, particularly, Nero's affinity to things Greek.73 Aune74 notes Suetonius' mention of Nero's "Golden House," built by Nero after the fire in 64 CE: "The main banquet hall was circular and constantly revolved day and night, like the heavens."73 Suetonius also reports that Nero had statues made in which he was represented as Apollo-Helios and he describes a cloak on which were golden stars.76 Both images have the function of associating Nero with the divine, thereby claiming divine status for him. This imagery may have contributed to the description of Jesus in Rev 1:16 in which he is depicted with seven stars and his facing shining like the sun.

Another description of Nero that hints at his divinity and associates him with the sun is found in the poetry of T. Calpurnius Siculus. Carleton's article, "The Nero Kerygma," argues that in the poetry of T. Calpurnius Siculus, one of a circle of poets sponsored by Nero which was composed of poets who contributed to the cult of the deification of Nero, the poet works out a systematic doctrine of Nero's divinity. In Calpurnius' Elegues, "credal content is evident from the frequently repeated ascribing of divinity to Nero by means of the phrase 'a very god' (deus ipse)."77 Nero is also described as incarnate (praesentia numine) at IV.84 and as the 'youthful god' (juvenis deus) in VII.6. Carleton argues that credal content also includes the four virtues of Neronism, beauty, song, love, and youth,78 present because of the peace that the divine Nero brings.79 In Eclogue I the divine shepherd states: "Let all the herd stray: its guard will be untroubled; let the shepherd refuse to lock the pens at night with ashen hurdle: no robber will attack the sheep or drive the bullocks off with loosened halters."80

Faunus also states that with Nero "the Golden Age is reborn with peace"81 and "peace in her fullness will come."82 Similar claims are made of Nero as the bringer of justice and fulfillment. Finally, Carleton points out that Corydon, in Eclogue VII, describes Nero as combining the looks of Mars and Apollo,83 "The god brings peace to his devotees, but he is Mars to his opponents."84 Nero is also described as comitatus Apolline (IV. 87), both Apollo citharoedes and Apollo god of the sun.85 Although many of the separate claims made of Nero in Calpurnius' poetry have parallels in Revelation, at the moment what is interesting are the repeated claims to divinity, which were apparently sanctioned by Nero, and the Apollo-Helios imagery. Another association of Nero with the sun is found in Tacitus Annales 15.74 where he refers to a conspiracy against Nero the sun god is thought to have saved the emperor.

A few scholars, including Aune and Ernest Janzen, have suggested that the imagery of Rev 1:16 has its primary referents in the images used in imperial propaganda during the reign of Domitian. In particular, Janzen has suggested that the seven stars in Rev 1:16 may be closely connected to a coin issued during the reign of Domitian.86 Janzen argues that two unprecedented claims were made by Domitian. First, the divinity of the emperor's family was alluded to in images in which Domitian's wife was presented as the mother of the divine Caesar.87 Second, there are references to the divinity of Domitian's infant son while the emperor was still alive. One such coin, that Janzen shows was well

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74 Aune, "Imperial Court Ceremonial," 11.
75 Suetonius, Nero, 31.2.
76 Suetonius, Nero, 25.
77 I.46 and 84; IV. 48,100, 165.
78 II.100.
79 Carleton, "Nero Kerygma," 77.
80 I.37-41.
81 I.42-44.
82 I.63.
83 VII.84.
84 Carleton, "Nero Kerygma," 81.
85 Carleton, "Nero Kerygma," 82.
87 The inscription reads: DIVI CAESAR Matri and DIVI CAESARIS MATER (Janzen, "Emperor's Clothes," 644).

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known in Asia Minor,\textsuperscript{88} contains a bust of Domitia on the obverse and on the reverse, a naked infant boy sitting on a globe, marked with cross zones, surrounded by seven stars, with hands stretching out at the sides and with the inscription DIVUS CAESAR IMP DOMITIANI. The message of the coin appears to be straightforward: "like father, like son and like son, like father."\textsuperscript{89} Astrological representations such as the globe and stars were not uncommon on coinage. The globe was representative of world dominion and power, while stars typically indicated the divine nature of those they accompanied.\textsuperscript{89}

Every one of the images used to describe Jesus in Rev 1:13-16 alludes to His divinity using some kind of stock image or metaphor for depicting a divine being. Since the images and metaphors used were not unique to Jewish tradition, as shown by the parallels cited above, but were part of the common language of the period, attention should be paid to the way in which images like the ones used in the initial vision of Revelation would have elicited connections to other beings or persons described or depicted with this mythic/symbolic language.

For the Christians in Asia Minor who lived their lives against a backdrop of festivals, rituals, and architecture that drew on the same types of images to describe the power and divinity of the emperor, the initial vision of Revelation would have likely conveyed to them that Jesus was the true divine ruler and authority, since He was, to all extent and purposes, wearing the emperor's clothes.

\textbf{Conclusion}

Scholars have already made a strong case for viewing the presence of the imperial cult in Asia Minor as a catalyst for the writing of the Book of Revelation. A few scholars have begun to identify specific imagery used to ascribe divinity to the emperors as the image or object to which the author of Revelation objected. We may not always be able to identify the specific coin or statue that served as a catalyst for some of the images in Revelation, but, we should note the way in which the same language and imagery was being used in late first-century-CE Asia Minor. A resident of one of the seven cities addressed in Revelation would easily have expected a being's identification with the sun and other astral imagery to take place in the context of praising or worshiping the emperor.

While the imagery was not limited to Greek and Roman religion, the pervasiveness with which it was used in the praise of emperors, combined with the overwhelming presence of the imperial cult in Asia Minor, makes it nearly impossible for the imagery in Rev 1:13-16 not to have been intended as a counter image of the emperor. Bauckham has described the use of images in Revelation as a kind of "purging of the Christian imagination, refurbishing it with alternative visions of how the world is and will be."\textsuperscript{91} Though Bauckham does not begin to identify the images against which the alternative vision of Revelation is placed, he does state that the resonances of the images in Revelation need to be understood in the "specific, social, political, cultural and religious world of the first readers."\textsuperscript{92} While the use of astral imagery may simultaneously allude to Hebrew Bible traditions, in late first-century-CE Asia Minor such imagery was most vividly, and for some Christians most threateningly, used in the context of the imperial cult.

The Book of Revelation's own focus on Nero and Domitian through the myth of Nero redivivus allows us to pay closer attention to the ways in which imagery in Revelation parallels, or rather, trumps images used to describe divine beings in antiquity, and particularly, the deified emperors.

\textsuperscript{88} Janzen, "Emperor's Clothes," 644-645.
\textsuperscript{89} Jean-Luc Desnier, "DIVVS CAESAR IMP DOMITIANI F," REA 81 (1979), 61.
\textsuperscript{90} Janzen, "Emperor's Clothes," 645.
\textsuperscript{92} Bauckham, \textit{Theology}, 19.
ADVENTIST APOCALYPTIC FERVOR:
BLENDING THE PAST WITH THE PRESENT

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It can be safely argued that no current major denomination has more nurtured itself from the milk of apocalyptic fervor than has the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Rising from the ashes of great disappointment and driven by a conviction that they had a message for the world, our forebears willingly sacrificed time, wealth, and sometimes their lives. The speed and growth of this movement into its worldwide presence is perhaps surpassed only by the zealous passion of the early apostolic church. Successive generations born to these Adventist pioneers carried forward an expectation that all anticipated apocalyptic events would be fulfilled shortly before their eyes. There was a strong tendency to believe that to leave the "truth", meaning the church and its teachings, was to be "lost". Preparation for the perceived final crisis included an emphasis on perfection with well-defined rules of individual and group conduct. This era also produced congregations that tended to stand aloof from society fearing corruption from a sinful world. Worship styles, church literature, and methods of evangelism, often reflected this worldview. There are many in the church today that still see this era as the "Golden Age" of Adventism.

However, the headwinds of change are blowing hard on the Western parcels of this now global body. Western Adventism is today moving from a membership that has in the past exhibited a rather uniform adherence of apocalyptic beliefs to now include many members showing strong eclectic tendencies when it comes to their belief, acceptance, and appreciation for the historic prophetic positions. Many members today are resistant to what they deem to have been an unhealthy cultic frenzy of the previous era. As a result, we now see a new assemblage of Adventists emerging within our ranks that has been greatly shaped by the social trends of our modern era. One only has to be around Adventist young adults or a collegiate group to quickly sense the intensity of the changes upon us. This new generation puts an emphasis of value on integrity, unconditional love, and an egalitarian equality for all. One finds an emphasis on respect for other’s religious beliefs along with an appreciation for world cultural diversity. This group possesses a high interest in environmental and social issues. They want to discover and experience their world; they freely traverse the globe exploring other peoples, cultures, and ideas. They do not see the church as the sole possessor of truth. They are not shy to explore new explanations for the causes of human behavior. Many of this generation tend to shun some of the churches’ traditional hymns that sound to them like a call to war or judgment. They prefer praise songs that stress worship and relationships. Many of the churches’ past apocalyptic voices seem to fit awkwardly into this new generation’s modern social and religious constructs. As a result, the once rather tight knit Adventist communities of the past are now awash in a sea of varied ideas, moods, worship styles, codes of conduct, and conflicting world views.

The Western church is at an important crossroads. If the present church too rigidly clings to the moods and views of the past it will likely only hasten the departure of many of the next generation. Should the church embrace the new changing worldviews and religious ideologies, it can expect to only further motivate those who wish to withdraw and start communities and ministries that preserve their cherished understanding of what the church must be and remain. Many traditional minded members tend to feel a right of ownership on the church both in respect to its identity and its physical plant properties. This is the church they built and they ask, "why should they give it up". Still, many in the new post-modern generation may just leave and not contend for their church inheritance. They are not afraid to walk away from traditional Adventist Churches and start up new contemporary congregations. Should they remain in a conventional church and become dominate in numbers and influence, those holding traditional views may become highly resistant and resentful. The result is often much pain for both parties, the vitality of the church is drained, some members drop out entirely, and the resultant hostility usually breeds further hostility.

However, there is reason for hope and not despair. Let us now look at suggestions that can be effective in bringing healing to the church and restoring its vitality.

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1. Corporately we need to promote the use of "blended" services that deliberately use a well-planned format with varieties of music, worship moods, preaching and teaching styles, and cultural tastes. Separate services and churches will only continue to divide us. Blended worship teams can unite a church.

2. Since Sabbath School attendance for adults has dropped from 80% to 40% in a generation, we must develop new quarters and materials specifically for the needs of the membership of the Western Church. It is time for a whole new study format that also takes into consideration the latest research on individual learning styles.

3. The corporate church must become more active in promoting the awareness of the need of healthy interpersonal relationships. The membership should not have to turn to the world for help in this area. The world should look to us as a leader in teaching life skills. This too is a holy work.

4. The influence of Ellen White in the life of our local congregations is steadily diminishing. ABC's report declining sales of her books. We need new approaches toward understanding inspiration. We need to discuss if it is time for a whole new generation of compilation books and materials. Ellen White needs to be seen as an inspired guide and counselor, not merely as the final answer.

5. We need to encourage our members into being active in the function of the communities in which they live. This must include the teaching of social skills needed for such function. It is time for us to become the head not the tail when it comes to being leaders of our communities. We have stood aloof for too long. Our answer to the world's problems needs to be more than Jesus is coming again, however, wonderful that message might be.

6. The youth of our church have never been more interested in doing mission work. The spirit of the pioneers is upon these youth. We need to seize the opportunity and give even more attention and money into the preparation of the youth and the coordination of these programs. It is time to hold a world youth mission summit.

7. We need to be more open with all age groups about what the Bible does and does not say about dress, adornment, and personal lifestyle conduct. The church speaks with such a mixed voice today on these matters that our youth turn a deaf ear to us and choose for themselves. The youth are asking for a rational approach on this topic that is both Biblical and practical.

8. We have today a graying workforce in the NAD. Some conferences report that in 10 years 50% of their workforce will retire. At the same time teachers at our colleges and seminary report that we are generally not attracting into training students from the upper levels of talent and academic abilities. If we act now, we can avoid a crisis.

9. The final crisis might not be the end of time; it might be how we learn to live in the time preceding the end. We do not have fewer divorces, fewer addictions in our youth, and our families are not emotionally healthier than the general public. We need to be more open and talk about our problems. Other churches are ahead of us on many of these matters. Part of our mission must be to grow healthy family dynamics in our homes.

10. We need to address the nature of the impact of our presentations of our apocalyptic beliefs. Let us present a judgment with grace, a culmination of time with hope and joy, and a Sabbath that is not a test of obedience but a rest in Christ. Let us realize that a delay in His return is an opportunity to make a difference in the quality of life for all that live on this earth.

Destiny will drive the church into the twenty-first century; we cannot by choice back up into the eighteenth century. The keenness of our apocalyptic awareness is still the engine that can and should drive our church. We still have a message for the world and we have an army of youth eager to take it to the world. We must unite the hearts of parents and grandparents with the hearts of their children. This will not happen without leadership and in this we must be united. The time to act is now. The next ten years is a critical right of passage for the Western Church. We need to remind ourselves of what Jesus said in Matthew 24, that we should not unduly be shaken by any sign, wonder, disaster, or event. He admonished that when this gospel of the kingdom is preached into the whole world for a witness unto all nations that then only will the final end come. Let us be honest, we have much work to do and that will include having emotionally healthy families and churches at home and abroad. If the twenty-first century will be able to use and appreciate us, we must blend our apocalyptic fervor with an attractive quality of life that includes making a difference in this world and in society before the end comes.
1999 AGAIN: THE POST-ADVENTIST APOCALYPTIC MUSIC OF PRINCE

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Introduction: The Emergence of Post-Adventist Cultures

During this fast-closing century, not only missionaries, evangelists, school teachers and nurses but also painters, musicians, screenwriters and film directors, novelists and poets, psychologists and healers, researchers and politicians have spread Adventist ideas, images and practices. But the story of the impact of Adventist artists and cultural agents on American, Australian, Asian or African thought, culture and life has not begun to be written. If, as is beginning to be announced, Adventists are abandoning the old "Christ against culture" view and replacing it with "Christ transforming culture", then the kind of narratives and other forms of expression appropriate to this change will soon follow.

The paradigm of historic Adventism assumes the message of Revelation 14 goes one way, "to every nation, kindred, tongue and people" and does not transform that culture, but brings people "out of" their cultural milieu. The "conversion story", the kind which tells of someone "out there" who comes "over here" to "our side", usually climaxing with baptism—"who knows or cares what really happens after that?"—which privileges a stable center of power and promotes the community’s identity as an object of desire, will soon be accompanied by the stories of the influence of selected aspects of Adventist values on world education, world politics, business, cultural practices. For example, the recent movie "The Insider" which dramatizes the legal and cultural demise of big tobacco.

I want in this way to draw a distinction between Adventist and post-Adventist cultures. As long as they remain conscious communicants of a faith community, we can refer to Greg Constantine as an Adventist painter in the same way we read Flannery O’Connor or Muriel Spark as Catholic novelists. Some are members in good and regular standing; others grew up in Adventist families, still others only indirectly reflect the church’s influence through early experiences with the Church. However, when we speak of the post-Adventist, I mean that the artist has some, even slight, historical connection to the principles or images of the church, and uses them to inform her productions and performance, but that, as a result, new cultural forms have been created which are no longer under the control of the church. We still recognize in these works certain themes and images, elements of the Adventist eschatology and ethos, sometimes in conformity with sanctioned interpretations, often in reaction to them.

Now it would be easy for us to restrict the significance of post-Adventist works by classifying their creators as bad or good Adventists, faithful or heretical, but a closer examination of Adventist history would show this finally to be impossible. For example, the Kellogg family’s influence on American lifestyle and culture is considerable, yet it is also in part the power of post-Adventist thinking and acting. So, as a result of the influence of individual creative persons, we also see other post-Adventist cultures arising; the list might include William Sadler’s rapidly-growing Utahia Fellowship, based in Chicago; Scientific Creationism and its growth among fundamentalists; the Branch Davidians of Waco fame, and the movement toward independent congregationalism emerging over the last two decades.

The Music and Message of Prince

In this paper, I want to examine a small slice of a phenomenon in popular music, one that perhaps began with the career of Little Richard and continues with The Artist (Formerly Known As Prince), a cultural lineage that has been noticed by critics for some time. (I will refer to him as Prince.) Little Richard, for example, claims that "Prince is me for this time" and that they are friends. My claim is something more, that their uniqueness as artists, in particular their prophetic stance or capacity to maintain a critique of contemporary mainstream American culture from a distinctly apocalyptic and Christian perspective comes from their contact with Adventism.

For almost a quarter century, the music of Prince Roger Nelson, a blend of R&B, funk and new wave pop, has shocked, delighted and preached a synthetic salvation of apocalypticism and sexuality, twin legacies of his childhood. Not only has his music gathered nineteen gold albums, fourteen platinum, and twelve gold singles, but he is the only artist of

any type or time to simultaneously hold the top-grossing album, movie and single on American pop charts. He has written number one hits for Stevie Nicks, Sheila E., Sinead O’Connor, and dozens of successful songs for Sheena Easton, Madonna, Chaka Khan, Patti LaBelle, George Clinton, Joe Cocker, Celine Dion, Carmen Electra, and many more. I cite these accomplishments to establish the significance and increasing influence of Prince, now The Artist to you. He reportedly has at least a thousand recorded but unreleased songs in his artistic vault, guaranteeing him many years of exposure and recognition. Even more importantly, he has helped launch the careers of dozens of successful artists and, in his struggle against Warner Brothers for artistic control of his work, has pioneered new ways of doing business in the music industry.

Prince’s music is also post-modern: an androgynous, eccentric style, ambiguous identity, culturally impure, transgressive, and transformative of the dominant culture rather than merely reflective of it. "This musical virtuoso embodies so many of the contradictions of modern life—seemingly all-powerful, yet powerless—that he is, in our estimation, a most relevant human metaphor for the myriad questions awaiting a response from contemporary religion" says a musicologist in Black Sacred Music.4

Three Creative Conflicts in Prince’s Music

Now I would like to speak of his music by asking: What are the dominating conflicts that I see in his art? What is their relation to Adventism? What is the significance of his recent moves to form a distinct community of artistic freedom and advocacy, a kind of Utopia to herald the coming kingdom? Finally, I want to ask: How does one evolve spiritually from hedonism toward ethical life, as I see Prince doing, and I invoke part of Kierkegaard’s ethical analysis to help us understand this transition. In answering this, I want to focus on the apocalyptic elements in his music, especially those taken from the Book of Revelation. I see three distinct conflicts in Prince’s work: 1) Flesh and Spirit, apparent in his eroticism, 2) Present and Future, in the distinctly apocalyptic tone of his lyrics and 3) Freedom and Slavery, in his political-economic battles with elements of the music industry.

Flesh and Spirit. The first conflict or contradiction, powerfully present in songs which either promote human sexuality or lament its failure to bring happiness, such as in “When Doves Cry” (1984), marks the first stage of Prince’s career. Although his celebration of sex has marked religious dimensions, I will simply read to you Cornel West’s conclusions about the relation between sexuality and spirituality among the post-Vietnam younger generation and point you to further reading:5

... as I listened to Prince’s albums Purple Rain and Around the World in a Day. These recordings by one of the leading contemporary pop artists articulate the deep conflicts and contradictions experienced by young people today. Their major theme is sexual liberation, but within the framework of a narrow version of apocalyptic Christianity. Although the Christian quest for transcendent meaning in life and history is rejected in Prince’s lyrics, the idea of divine intervention in the form of eschatological catastrophic presence is preserved. In the interim, life is a party, a sustained effort to stay alive by feeling “alive”, keeping the adrenaline flowing for the purpose of frequent climax. This viewpoint, reflected and condensed by Prince in his music and his performance style, promotes and encourages an orgiastic way of life in which sex is the opiate of the people. The major alternatives are drugs and suicide—both strongly rejected by Prince.6

For Prince, the contradiction between sex and religion is resolved in favor of a sexual ethics in which orgasm subjectively resolves any present pains, and a divine intervention that will take care of the future.

Present and Future. In Prince’s mythology, the idealized past is "sunshine", the present is darkness, and the future

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6 Cornel West, "Sex and Suicide", in Prophetic Fragments (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans; Trenton, N.J.; Africa World Press, 1988), pp. 157-58.
is "dawn". In his 1987 album "Sign o' the Times", Prince begins by sketching the hopelessness of current social conditions for America's underclass: AIDS, gangs, crack, heroin, guns, hurricanes. Infanticide—why? They're signs of the times. His lyrics peppered with references to the soon return of Christ. Yet, he persistently refuses to surrender human life before the imminent threats of natural or nuclear destruction or social injustice; his music attempts instead to force a climax or series of climaxes to counteract negative ends of all types: poverty, artificial restrictions, suicide. By contrast, the private world of enjoyment "Without The Help of Margaritas Or Exstacy" is the "Sunshine" to which lovers retreat while the world goes to hell around them. (There is much that could be said here about the "delay of the coming" of the threatened nuclear apocalypse and attempts by the artists of the '60's, '70's and '80's to ritualize the resulting; eilt tension into a series of sensual climaxes and drug-induced states.)

[VIDEO]
In "1999", Prince's signature hit, the penultimate date "1999 is a symbol of the end of history:

I was dreaming when I wrote this, forgive me if it goes astray
When I woke this morning, it was Judgment Day
The sky was all purple, there were people running everywhere
Trying to run from the destruction, you know I didn't even care.

Say, say 2000, zero, zero, party over, oops, out-of-sight
So tonight I'm gonna party like its 1999.

I was dreaming when I wrote this, so sue me if I go too fast
But life is just a party and parties weren't meant to last;
War is all around us, my mind says prepare to fight
So if I've got a dime, gonna listen to my body tonight.

They say 2000, zero, zero, party over, oops, out-of-time
So tonight I'm gonna party like its 1999....

If you didn't come to party, don't bother knockin' on my door.
I've got a lion in my pocket and baby he's ready to roar.
The Party's gotta bump--could all die anyway
Before I let that happen I'll dance my life away.

They say 2000, zero, zero, party over, oops, out-of-time
Tonight I'm gonna party like its 1999....

Fifteen years later, Prince's apocalypticism has begun to peak with more hopeful notes, as we hear in "Welcome 2 the Dawn".

When the things you know are right are far from what they seem,
When the past becomes the future and time becomes a dream,
When the light of God is the only thing in life that will redeem,
Welcome, welcome 2 the dawn!

When the voice you hear commands you to entertain the absurd,
When you do the action that unlocks the apocalypse that you've heard
When the day lies before you, send the darkness with a word.
Welcome, welcome 2 the dawn!

Every piece a puzzle and every name a clue
Every child shall make his karma, be careful what you do.
Welcome, welcome 2 the dawn!

Freedom and Slavery. During his career, Prince encountered his Beast, his Babylon, the slave holder, in the form of Warner Brothers. During television appearances in the 1990's he wore the word "SLAVE" on his right cheek to publicize his attempts to obtain control of his original recordings and campaign for artists' rights to control of their work. As you
may know, a painter will receive perhaps two thirds of the income from the sale of her paintings, but most musical artists receive only cents per copy sold; the balance is divided among the producing studio, the record label, distributors and retailers. [VIDEO] As we see in this interview clip, Prince has joined with artists like Chaka Khan and Larry Graham to create NPG Records and a community of artists with no contracts. Prince’s desire to create a utopian community based upon love and respect also includes religious, political and economic dimensions. After a final settlement was reached, Prince continued to preach the liberation of musicians, especially black artists, from the corporate control of the large music moguls. Prince is consciously striving to counteract the influence of big studios with an ethic of love and respect that is having a definable impact on the record industry. Of course, he is being technologically assisted by the internet which can act as a point of free distribution. But despite the economic interests at stake, Prince’s conversations about this seem persistently religious to me. This is the latest in a series of communities he has tried to create: first the Revolution with their message of erotic apocalyptic rock; then the New Breed, an intermediate and exploratory community based at his Paisley Park Studios near Minneapolis; the New Power Generation; and now NPG Records, an attempt to apply new ethical standards and create a community of trust and freedom. Like many apocalyptic Romantic artists—William Blake, D.H. Lawrence—Prince manifests a pioneering eschatological community of love and respect, a latter-day Garden of Eden prior to an expected divine intervention. His current religious views seem to be a mixture of apocalypticism and a concern for justice and economic freedom.

Of course, it is not often that, only a week before I speak, my subject appears as a whole page interview in TIME. Here Prince adopts the image of “The Matrix” from the sci-fi movie of that name in which the human race is trapped inside an oppressive computer simulation. "People aren’t supposed to go into the studio to make music thinking about ‘How will this look in the video?’ That’s a matrix. That’s dangerous to me...I had to get out of the industry to realize what it’s like to record from a free place."7 I can’t help thinking of the “image to the beast”, and the danger of worshipping copies of copies as Revelation 13 warns.

The Spiritual Growth of a Pop Artist

Through the influence of his mother and another consistently caring Seventh-day Adventist woman in Minneapolis named Bernadette Anderson, young Prince’s spiritual life began. However, his adult hood memory of childhood religion is less generous:

"Spirituality, yes. I never practiced organized religion. I was made to go to church when I was young and the most I got out of that experience was the experience of the choir. As far as a message, most of that was based on fear. I don’t think God is to be feared in that way. I think he is a loving God."8

Traces of his Adventist roots show up in marked ways. Almost from the beginning, Prince publicly opposed alcohol and drugs. His clean living is not a façade, and has dismissed numerous employees of his production crews and Paisley Park Studies near Minneapolis for drugs or drinking on the job, a rarity in the music business. Each album is dedicated to God, and occasionally inserts his religious messages in backward messages. Some tracks point to the death of Christ as the only solution to the horrors of human history.

Black Day, Stormy Night
No Love, No Hope in Sight
Don’t Cry, He Is Coming
Don’t Die Without Knowing The Cross.
Ghettos 2 The Left Of Us
Flowers 2 The Right
There’ll Be Bread 4 All Of Us
If We Can Just Bear The Cross
Sweet Song Of Salvation
A Pregnant Mother Sings
She Lives In Starvation

8 Jones, p. 25-26.
Her Children Need All That She Brings
We All Have Our Problems
Some BIG, Some Are Small
Soon All OF Our Problems
Will Be Taken By The Cross
("The Cross", SIGN O' THE TIMES)

As you can no doubt discern, much of what I have said about Prince can be traced to the '80s. Since the late 80's, Prince has been changing. The sexuality has been toned down, he has married and apparently settled down. "Anna Stesia", with its obvious reference to resurrection, celebrates his turn from sex to a transcendent God as Saviour who will deliver us from the dangers and conflicts of contemporary life:

Maybe I could learn 2 love if I was just closer 2 somethin',
Closer 2 my higher self, closer 2 heaven ...closer to God.
Save me Jesus, I've been a fool
How could I forget that You are the rule
You are my God, I am Your child.
From now on, 4 You—I shall be wild
I shall be quick, I shall be strong
I'll Your story No matter how long
We're just a play in Your master plan
Now my Lord I understand
Love is God, God is Love
Girls and boys love God above.

We turn finally to the question of the relationship between spiritual and artistic growth, which I can only touch upon here. I have found Kierkegaard's concept of the three stages helpful in answering our question about the spiritual development of artists. As Plato complained long ago, the domain of art is first of all sensual and material. Aesthetic life is dominated by impulses, energy, emotion, relatively unguided by moral principles. Expression is about release of impulse, not universal moral law. But the purely aesthetic life eventually tires; experiences of guilt and the desire for "something more" open one to the ethical stage. The individual adopts a more principled life, learns to live with the consequences of his or her actions and seeking happiness in permanence rather than in temporary gratifications. Later in life, further crises may occur which show the limitations of the principled life and a new way opens up--the religious. In this way, the lives of Augustine, Mozart and many others can be see as models for the spiritual transformation of the artist.

I see Prince, and maybe many who have been involved in the exciting and sensual music scene, maturing and searching for stability, spirituality and salvation. Recent television programs such as "Behind the Music" (VH1) have featured the histories of dozens of rock and pop artists over the past three decades. It is remarkable how many have moved somewhat in tandem: early success, access to money and drugs, addiction and near death, recovery and eventual resurrection of their talent in later years. Over the last two decades, Prince's life has mirrored the concerns of his generation, the generation to whom our world is becoming entranced. More than any other popular artist, he has persistently offered a form of apocalyptic music that has challenged cultural stereotypes and attempted to create a last-days community in preparation for the end of time--and our most prominent example of American post-Adventist culture.

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9 Soren Kierkegaard, "The Balance Between the Esthetic and the Ethical in the Development of the Personality", Either/Or, Part II (Edited and Translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong with Introduction and Notes. Princeton University Press, 1987). For the second movement, from the ethical to the religious, see ibid, "Is there a Teleological Suspension of the Ethical?" Fear and Tembling (Edited and Translated by Hoard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong with Introduction and Notes, Princeton University Press, 1983).
HOW AN ADVENTIST SCHOLAR Writes
A COMMENTARY ON REVELATION

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It was about two years ago that an idea to write sort of a brief commentary on Revelation was born in my mind. The conversion of the idea into a decision was prompted by repeated requests from my students as well as my camp and workers' meeting audiences to put my lectures in writing so that they could use them in churches. I did not anticipate that my original 150-page-project plan would turn into a more than 500-page exegetical commentary on the last book of the Bible.

Such a decision was not without much internal struggle. First of all, I was not a big name in SDA scholarship, and my scholarly career was rather short. At this point I would like to express my gratitude to Jon Paulien of the SDA Theological Seminary for his generous encouragement after I had timidly mentioned my decision to him. Since then, he has used every opportunity to encourage me to persist in accomplishing this project. My thanks also go to Larry Herr of CUC for his support and willingness to test ingeniously my ideas during the two-year SS seminar on Revelation that we held together for the faculty and students of CUC. Finally, my deep gratitude goes to the CUC administration for financial assistance in helping me realize my project.

Why Another Commentary on Revelation?

My commentary is a product of my own growth in the understanding of the real purpose and the main theme of the last book of Bible. In my short scholarly career I have come to realize the significance of eschatology in the life of the church. J. R. Ross observes,

Eschatology is not a mere appendage to the Christian faith, Rather, it is at the very heart of our faith, and we cannot do justice to the Bible's picture of the uniqueness and finality of Jesus Christ without relating him to the total picture of God's redemptive work, including the "last things". Contrary to the way we often think, Jesus himself is the most important of the "last things". Or we must put it another way: The Bible, especially the New Testament, is an eschatological document throughout. We are coming to realize that eschatology determines our entire approach to the Bible, and that we must begin with eschatological concerns before we can make sense of the Bible.\(^1\)

An SDA scholar cannot stand aside and remain indifferent with regard to the doctrine of the last things: he can believe and teach it, or deny it, but not ignore it. In either way it will influence his approach to the Bible and the way he presents it.

It is well known that eschatology lies at the very heart of SDA theology. The belief in the soon coming of Christ which marks the end of the world is associated with the origin and foundation of the SDA church. Eschatology has defined the SDA role and mission in the world. No wonder that the Apocalypse has been for the church the main source book from which they have drawn their identity as a prophetic movement with the special message to proclaim and their identity as God's end-time people. Since Uriah Smith, most of the commentaries on Revelation written by SDA authors have been characterized by the historicist school of interpretation of Revelation—a method very popular among Protestants in North America in 18th and 19th centuries. As such, they have resembled more textbooks on European history than commentaries on Revelation. In such a context, the Apocalypse has served as a powerful tool for popular evangelism in creating the atmosphere of sensationalism for the purpose of warning masses of the approaching end of the world, as well as to fight against and to distance themselves from the other Christian groups rather than to preach the gospel and draw people to Christ. As a result, SDAs have been perceived as a militant wing of Protestantism, and that kind of exposition of the Apocalypse has not appealed to the scholarly world.

It is particularly interesting that while the popular expositors of Revelation use Ellen White to endorse their sensational idea, they never pay attention to her appeal to SDA ministers and preachers:

There is need of much closer study of the word of God; especially should Daniel and Revelation have attention as never before in the history of our work. We may have less to say in some lines in regard to the Roman power and the papacy; but we should call attention to what the prophets and apostles have written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit has so shaped matters, both in the giving of the prophecy and in the events portrayed, as to teach that the human agent is to be kept out of sight, hid in Christ, and that the Lord God of heaven and his law are to be exalted. . . . When we as a people understand what this book means to us, there will be seen among us a great revival. We do not understand fully the lessons that it teaches, notwithstanding the injunction given us to search and study it. . . . One thing will certainly be understood from the study of Revelation—that the connection between God and his people is close and decided.  

These appeals to Adventists preachers have apparently fallen upon deaf ears.

The last two decades, however, have witnessed a significant shift in the SDA approach to the book of Revelation. The text-focused approach advocated by certain prominent Adventist scholars has led to a change of perception by the scholarly world with regard to SDA scholarship on the last book of the Bible. At this point it is noteworthy to mention the pioneering contribution by Kenneth A. Strand and Hans K. LaRondelle to SDA scholarship, in particular, and the SDA understanding and interpretation of the Apocalypse, in general. The last decade has witnessed the significant contribution of Jon Paulien to SDA scholarship and to the church in general in the field of eschatological studies. Jon’s presence in scholarly circles on the Apocalypse has contributed in significant measure to the fact that today NT scholars take Adventist scholarship on the Apocalypse in a more serious way. Jon’s scholarly profile, however, has not prevented him from serving the church in a capacity of a loyal Adventist preacher in many local churches as well as camp and workers’ meetings in many parts of the world, by showing his support for the church and its mission.

My approach to the Apocalypse has significantly been influenced by the works of the scholars mentioned above. I hope my commentary will fill the gap in Adventist exegetical approach to the Apocalypse. It will be a scholarly work, yet understandable and with an appeal to lay people. It is an expression of my strong desire to present Adventist pastors and lay people with a fresh approach to the book of Revelation to help learn how to explore the text, instead of history books only or newspaper reports, as well as to apply its message to their life situations. The commentary is also intended for both classroom use and as a good source of material for sermons.

**The Format and Objectives of the Commentary**

My work—which is in the process of completion—will be a verse-by-verse commentary based on an exegesis of the text. The organization of the commentary follows the major thematic sections of the Apocalypse. Before providing a detailed analysis of each section, an overview precedes, dealing with questions of general matters that seem important for a meaningful interpretation of the text. The analysis of each text unit begins with my own translation followed by notes on key words and phrases of the text, allowing an insight into scholarly discussion on the questions regarding the text. Next comes a verse-by-verse exposition of the text. Finally, each chapter concludes with "In Retrospect" that summarizes the findings and attempts to make sense of the text and shows how it relates to the subsequent text.

Here are the objectives and guidelines that govern the writing of my commentary. They might explain my own philosophy of a good SDA commentary on Revelation:

1. Revelation is a book for the church. It was intended by its author to be read in a church setting (Rev 1:3). Therefore, the objective set for my commentary has been to provide an exposition of the Apocalypse that would benefit the church as a whole and serve as a help for the present experience of Christians. I find it very important to make clear to the reader that the author of the commentary on Revelation is a Seventh-day Adventist, yet faithful to the Bible. This has not been an easy task for me. Much of my personal struggle is with regard to how to make the Adventist reader trust that the author is a Seventh-day Adventist who is supportive of the church’s mission and message, and that the commentary is intended for the benefit of the church; yet, on the other hand, as a Seventh-day Adventist scholar I try to be faithful to the Word in allowing the text to speak, rather than imposing my own

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theology or agenda upon the text.

2. The second point has to do with the question of the method of interpretation. The method of interpretation an author chooses normally governs the way he reads and interprets the text. It usually results in forcing the interpretation into the framework of the predetermined idea, regardless of whether or not it fits the context. A good commentator should not favor a particular school of interpretation. My commentary commends the approach of letting the text govern the way to interpret rather than letting a particular method of interpretation govern the way in which the text is to be interpreted.

3. A sound interpretation of Revelation takes seriously the symbolic nature of the book. John the revelator states clearly at the very outset that the contents of Revelation were revealed to him in symbolic language (Gr. sēmainō in Rev 1:1 means to make known by signs). This means that the Apocalypse does not contain photographic presentations of heavenly realities or coming events which were intended to be understood in a literal way. The messages of the book are rather given in figurative or symbolic language. In writing them John gleaned his materials mainly from the Old Testament while responding to the first-century religious, social, and cultural milieu. However, the problems I have often confronted have been with regard to how to draw the line of demarcation between symbolic and literal in Revelation. On which basis, for instance, to interpret "the beast," "the mark of the beast," its placing on "the foreheads," etc. from Rev 13 as figurative, while "buying and selling" as literal. Or, "the key of the abyss," "the dragon," its binding, as figurative, and at the same time argue for a literal "a thousand years" period. Most students of the Apocalypse struggle with the matter.

4. A good commentary, as I perceive it, is more than an academic exercise. My commentary will make its appeal to both students and preachers who look for a fresh approach to the text to use Revelation for their sermons. It employs what can be referred to as "theological exegesis," which Donald A. Hagner defines as "exegesis that shares the faith commitment and priorities of the believing community, exegesis done, so to speak, 'from within,' exegesis concerned with the theological dimension and meaning of the text, and moreover, exegesis done within the context of the canon." Despite its potential dangers, I have found theological exegesis very helpful in making the SDA reader feel at home in understanding the meaning of the text and to use it in preaching and nurturing the church. At this point a warning is necessary: theological exegesis suggests exegesis in service of theology rather than the vice versa.

5. Finally, a sound interpretation of Revelation approaches the book as a letter written in the apocalyptic-prophetic style. This means that the contents of Revelation should be dealt with like, for instance, the letters of Paul. The Apocalypse was originally sent to the Christian communities in Asia Minor addressing their immediate and real life situation and problems. Its figurative language was expressed in terms and images that could most likely be understood by the first-century Christians. In order to derive a meaningful interpretation from the book, the expositor must endeavor to determine how the first-century Christians could understand those figurative presentations. Revelation, however, makes clear that its contents are not limited to the first-century Christians and the Roman Empire. They are much broader than that. As a book of prophecy, its messages extend beyond the first-century setting. Its contents cover the history of this world between the cross and the Second Coming with strong focus on the time of the end. As such, the book of Revelation still speaks to us today as it spoke to the Christians of John's day. It reminds us that God holds the future which he has revealed to us through his servants the prophets. However, the prophecy is not given to satisfy somebody's obsessive curiosity about the future, but to stimulate God's people to right living today. There are some things in Revelation with regard to the future which, probably, we will never be able to understand completely before they happen. Jesus cautioned his disciples: "Now I have told you before it comes to pass, that when it comes to pass, you may believe" (John 14:29; 13:19). The purpose of Revelation is to prepare us to understand God's purpose for us as history approaches an end and to assure us of God's presence with his people at the time of the end.

The Main Theme of Revelation

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4Donald A. Hagner, _Matthew 1-13_, WBC 33a (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1993), xlii.
Finally, let me briefly explain the theological perspective implemented in my commentary. The very title of the commentary, "The Revelation of Jesus," suggests a Christ-centered approach. Christ is indeed the central focus and dominant theme of Revelation. The second dominant theme of the book is "the things which must soon take place" (Rev 1:1; 22:6). These two dominant themes of Revelation suggest definitely that the book is not just about Christ or about the time of the end. Instead, it proves to be the unveiling of Christ's presence with his people in the time of the end. This assumption is based on the threefold structure of Revelation that seems to be critical for this Christ-centered approach: (1) the messages to the seven churches (chaps. 1-3), the seven-sealed scroll (chaps. 4-11), and the eschatological conclusion of the book (chaps. 12-22). It is especially interesting that each of these three major divisions opens with an introductory scene with a special portrayal of Christ. The portrayal of Christ given in the introductory section seems to be the key to the section that follows and defines its theme and content.

Christ as the High Priest (Rev 1:9-20)

The first major division of Revelation opens with the vision of the glorified Christ walking among the seven lampstands as the High Priest (Rev 1:9-20) fulfilling the covenant promise given to ancient Israel: "I will walk among you and be your God and you will be my people" (Lev 26:12). In walking among the churches, Christ is serving them individually. This introductory section gives a list of various characteristics of Christ, that are mentioned again in the messages to the seven churches. Each of the messages begins with a brief description of Christ from the composite picture. The particular characteristic of Christ prefixed to each message relates to the particular situation and need of the church. To each individual church Christ presents himself in a unique way. No two churches get the same aspect of Jesus, because each church lives in a different situation and has different needs. In the same way the sevenfold manifestation of the Holy Spirit—that concludes each of the messages with an appeal to listen to the Spirit—corresponds to the particular situation of each of the seven churches in which he operates (Rev 1:4). Each church experiences a different manifestation of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is manifesting the reality of Christ’s presence among the churches relating to their particular situations and needs. What the churches need to do is to pay heed to the message and recognize the authority of the one speaking to them.

The text presents Christ as the one present with his people, who knows all of them and everything about them. Much more than that, however, he has the solution to their problems and needs. This is the reason why he commissions John to write the things revealed to him and pass them on to the churches (Rev 1:11). Each of the messages to the churches begins and concludes alike, introducing Christ and concluding with an appeal to listen to the Spirit. What is found between is Christ’s special message suited to the actual situation, condition, and needs of the respective church to which the message is addressed, together with the particular historical situation of the city in which the church was located. Christ visits each church to help her be ready to meet the coming crisis. He knows everything about each of the churches. Nothing could escape his discerning eyes which read the secrets of the human heart. If the churches want to know how to live and make a decisive "turning around" in their religion, they need only to listen to the messages of the one who knows them.

It appears that these messages were not intended to be sent separately to the seven churches. They were composed as one letter (not seven letters; cf. 1:4, 11), and, as such, were sent to all seven churches together with the rest of the book of Revelation (1:11). A message directed to an individual church was apparently also intended for the other six churches (cf. 2:23).

While these seven messages were initially intended for the Christian communities of John’s day located in the cities of the Roman province of Asia, they transcend that time and place limitation. They speak to all Christians in every generation and their contents hold implications for everyone who reads them. The fact that each of the messages concludes with an explicit appeal to anyone who will listen to them to "hear what the Spirit says to the churches" suggests that the seven messages were intended for a wider audience than just for the local congregations of John’s day. Through the Holy Spirit’s continual presence, the messages sent to the seven churches are relevant to God’s people everywhere and in every time in the history of the Christian church. They address different people and their different life situations and needs: those persecuted like the church in Smyrna; faithful witnesses like the ones in Philadelphia; spiritually dead Christians like those in Sardis; or lukewarm Christians like the ones in Laodicea.

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5Revel Ezell, Revelation on Revelation (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1977), 35.

While the seven messages must be read with the purpose of understanding what they meant to these seven Christian communities in Asia in their own time and places, their contents can be applied to various conditions of different churches and every individual Christian who is willing to listen to them, regardless of time or place.

Thus the first three chapters of Revelation, together with the special introduction of Christ, provide the foundation upon which the prophetic portion of Revelation (chaps. 4-22) builds. It defines the nature and the purpose of the entire book of Revelation: to reassure the church throughout history of Christ's perennial promise: "Behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matt 28:20).

Christ as the Eschatological Ruler (Rev 4-11)

The second major division of Revelation is introduced with the vision of the seven-sealed scroll (chaps. 4-5). This introductory scene depicts in a figurative language the enthronement of the resurrected Christ on the throne of the universe and the inauguration into his universal dominion and lordship over the world. In other words, Rev 5 portrays the moment when in the throne room of the heavenly temple/palace the resurrected Christ approached the throne of the Father, took the sealed scroll as the token of the transference of all authority and sovereignty to him, sat upon the throne at the right hand of the Father, and subsequently received the adoration and shouts of acclamation which only belong to royalty. The scene is evidently modeled after the enthronement of Israelite kings in the OT in which the taking of the scroll of Deuteronomy was a formal ceremonial act of the inauguration into the kingship (cf. Deut 17:18-20; 2Kgs 12:11).

Rev 4-5 presents Christ as the preordained eschatological ruler of the Davidic lineage (cf. Rev 5:5) "who, on the basis of the saving work completed by him, is called to discharge with authority God's plan for the end of history." The purpose of this introductory vision is to provide God's people on earth with an assurance that, as the history portrayed symbolically in the scenes of the opening of the seven seals and the seven trumpet plagues unfolds, their Savior and Lord rules on the throne over the universe. His faithful followers might experience oppression and trials in this world, but they are provided with a firm assurance that their Lord and King is in control.

Christ as the Apocalyptic Michael (Rev 11-22)

The last of the major divisions of the Apocalypse is introduced with the scene of chap. 12 which portrays Christ in his apocalyptic role as Michael. As the commander of the heavenly armies, Christ is a constant victor over Satan. He defeated Satan in heaven, as well as through his church here on earth. Satan is frustrated by constant defeat, and becomes furious against the "remaining ones of the woman's offspring." With a firm determination to win the final battle, he associates himself with two allies. By forming the counterfeit trinity he uses every available means to prevent the accomplishment of God's plans for the world.

Rev 12 is evidently intended to provide God's faithful people with a firm assurance of Christ's presence during the time of the great tribulation as he has been with them throughout history. The future might at times look gloomy, and the eschatological events frightening; yet the church should know that Christ the Victor will wage war for them until the forces of darkness are finally defeated. The satanic trinity and the oppressors of God's people will find their definite end in the lake of fire (Rev 19:20-21), while God's people will triumphantly find their rest in the New Jerusalem.

The foregoing brief analysis of the three introductory visions to the major divisions of Revelation explains the theological perspective of my commentary. It demonstrates why I believe that the real purpose of the last book of the Bible is not just about the events (whether historical or eschatological), but rather about Christ's presence with his church throughout history in general, as well as during the time of the end, in particular.

In conclusion, I hope that my commentary will be a contribution to the SDA understanding of this often misinterpreted and misused NT book, as we endeavor to reach with the gospel message the lost, suffering humankind. I also hope that, when you get my commentary into your hands, and after it undergoes scrupulous and scrutinizing SDA inquisition, you will not make a sore face and say, "Is it this commentary that we have been waiting for?"

DON'T BE AFRAID

Donn Walter Leatherman
Southern Adventist University

Vesper Sermon

Norm Gulley, who is one of my colleagues in the School of Religion at Southern Adventist University, took a poll a couple of years ago in his undergraduate class on eschatology. He asked the students a number of questions about their religious life and views. Answering anonymously to the questionnaire, students indicated by an overwhelming majority that they regard God as a friend and that they feel that they have a positive relationship with Jesus Christ. About 92% believe that salvation is a free gift. Almost all — 99% — believe that Christ is coming soon, and 87% say that they are excited or happy about the prospect of seeing Him face to face. Strangely, though, according to Norm's survey 87% of the students entering the Last Day Events class also admitted that they were afraid of passing through lastday events. Some even expressed the view (in written comments) that they would prefer to die before the time of trouble. There is something very sad about this: something is gravely wrong with religious thinking when it leads people to want to die. But sadly, it appears to me that much of popular eschatology in Seventh-day Adventist circles has been afflicted with a pathological morbidity.

Standing at the marches of the year 2000 (which has been — improperly, I believe — burdened with eschatological significance in the minds of many conservative Christians), I look back at the last 100 years or so of Adventist eschatology with mixed feelings. Surely a great deal of good has been done, but I am still disquieted. I have seen all too many little pamphlets and big books warning us of fearful things to come. These books have told us (depending on the decade in which they were written) that the Ottoman Empire (or perhaps the papacy, or maybe even atheistic Communists from the Soviet Union) would set up a center of government in Jerusalem. This will be followed by the persecution of God's true people. National and international Sunday laws will be imposed, initiating a time of trouble, a great time of trouble, a time of trouble such as never was, a time of Jacob's trouble. Probation will close, a death decree will be imposed against the few remaining people of God, and then things will start to get bad.

I cannot blame this on present company. I have heard too much of what you have said over the last couple of days, and read too much of what you have written over the last couple of decades to believe that Adventist scholars are causing this problem. I cannot blame my colleagues in academia and I cannot blame most of my colleagues in the ministry either. Again, I have heard too much from too many of them to believe that they are leading young people to fear eschatological events. And yet, I have sensed for many years a tendency in much popular Adventist thinking about the end of the present age, to present the final events of history as fearful. If we have sinned, if we in the academy and the pulpit have done wrong in this matter, it is a sin of omission. We have not taught people to fear the end of the world. But perhaps we have done too little to teach them that they should not fear, because it is manifest that many of them are afraid.

On what is this fear based? It is not — if the poll results among our students are indicative — it is not a fear of something that God might do. Students indicate by a large majority that they believe that God loves them and that Jesus has provided the complete atonement for their sins. They believe that He has promised them eternal life and that He will make good on this promise. It is not God that they fear frightful or terrifying. God is a friend, Jesus is a deliverer, Heaven is a blessed hope.

Despite hostile claims to the contrary, this fear does not appear to be based on Adventist doctrine, particularly the doctrine of the sanctuary and the idea that we will someday have to "stand before God without a mediator." In most cases, the survey reveals that God is, in the minds of these young people, associated with the very antithesis of whatever is feared.

So what then is so fearful?

It seems to me that most of this fear is based on the perception of minority status. There is a feeling
that we are so small, so few, and so endangered by a hostile world that we have little hope of success or even survival in this world. And seeing ourselves as Jerusalem besieged by Babylon, or as the Hebrew slaves groaning under the Egyptian taskmaster's burdens, we fear for our well-being, and even our lives. We recognize that we, by ourselves, cannot resist these foes and rescue ourselves from their power. This fear is inferred from those passages of the Bible which present the people of God as small group, surrounded by a host of menacing forces, and above all, I believe, it is inferred from the Apocalypse of John.

This fear cannot be attributed entirely to the book of Revelation. There are other sources for these fearful views: our concern with the book of Daniel has also fueled this anxiety. There we encounter the three Hebrews cast into the fiery furnace, the faithful prophet in the lion's den and the little horn which makes war against the saints of the Most High. Even Jesus' Olivet discourse, with its warning that "...they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death; and you will be hated by all nations..." contributes to this fear.

But surely the primary document for this view is the book of Revelation. We are the faithful few, the final (and minute) remnant of the true seed of the woman, the "few names" in Sardis who have not soiled their garments. There aren't very many of us to face the great red dragon, the dreadful seven-headed beast from the sea, and the equally dreadful two-horned beast from the land, not to mention Babylon, Sodom and Egypt, the false apostles, the synagoge of Satan, Balaam, Jezebel and the Nicolaitans and the great harlot who sits on seven hills. And when you throw in seven terrible plagues, some earthquakes, fire, and hail and a great blazing star which fouls a third of the waters of the world, our prospects seem greatly threatened. We believe ourselves too small, too weak and too few to bear up under such cataclysmic events.

We have perhaps absorbed too much of mediaeval eschatology, with its emphasis on hell and the torment of the damned, and too much of our modern popular culture, in which "apocalypse" and "apocalyptic" refer to catastrophe, not to deliverance, and certainly not to the revelation of Jesus Christ, and so we read and fear.

This is exceedingly strange in view of the fact that the Revelation was certainly written to a small, socially disenfranchised, politically powerless, persecuted group with the specific intention of giving them hope. I know of no one, from biblical scholars with advanced degrees and worldwide reputations to elderly retirees with grade-school educations, who would dispute this fact: everybody knows that Revelation was supposed to give hope to those who were persecuted. Why then does examination of it so often rob hope from those whose experience of persecution is often very slight? And why, if Revelation is supposed to bring hope, does it speak so much of catastrophe? If it is supposed to be good news, why does it contain so much bad news?

There can be no doubt that there is bad news in Revelation. One of my friends (in fact, the pastor of the church which I usually attend) made a little study of this one time and told me that he had been shocked in his review of the book to notice how often something terrible is foretold or threatened. In addition to the threatening admonitions in the messages to the seven churches, the disasters and portents which accompany the opening of the seven seals, the even more graphic disasters of the seven trumpets, the persecution of the two witnesses by the beast from the Abyss, and of the woman clothed with the sun by the great red dragon, the Apocalypse also contains the descriptions of the dreadful beasts from the sea and the land, the seven last plagues which complete the wrath of God, the blasphemous harlot who is drunk with the blood of the saints, the disastrous fall of Babylon, the "great supper of God," in which the carrion birds glut themselves on the flesh of kings and generals and mighty men, and the lake of burning sulfur in which the wicked are tormented day and night with the devil, the beast and the false prophet. It's not an advertisement for Club Med. Why shouldn't people be afraid?

Well, it is true that the Apocalypse contains a lot of negatives. There is a lot of "bad news." But we should notice that the real bad news in the book of Revelation is always for the enemies of God's people, never for those who want to follow the Lamb wherever He goes. Back in the 1960s Malcolm X used to defend some of the more threatening aspects of his ideology by saying "Good news for the sheep is bad news for the wolf." I do not think that we do his dictum any injustice if we reverse it and say, "Bad news for the wolf is good news for the sheep."

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Revelation contains a lot of bad news—for the wolf. The trumpets sound their message against those who curse God. The plagues are poured out on those who bear the mark of the beast and worship his image. The fall of Babylon afflicts the kings of the earth who committed adultery with her and the merchants of the earth who have grown rich from her excessive luxuries. The sword of the Rider on the white horse is unsheathed against those who have deceived the peoples of the earth. The lake of fire is prepared for the devil. This is all bad news. But it is bad news for God’s enemies. And bad news for the enemies of God and His people is good news for those who love Jesus. For those whom the wicked have oppressed, God promises eschatological and eternal deliverance. For those who love the Lord, God has prepared the marriage supper of the Lamb. For His own, God creates new heavens and a new earth. For His people, God has built a Holy City, New Jerusalem, with its twelve foundations and its twelve gates, a city where there is no sun or moon, for the glory of God is its light; a Jerusalem without a temple, for the Lamb of God, who walks within it, is in Himself the true sanctuary of God, the Holy of Holies in a human body, the only temple that anyone really needs.

For God’s people, the Apocalypse is good news not only eschatologically and eternally, but temporally as well. Our perception that we are a beleaguered minority outnumbered and surrounded by the legions of the wicked and the hosts of hell is a mistake. Revelation may present us as the remnant of the woman’s seed and the few at Sardis who have not soiled their garments. But we are also the one hundred forty-four thousand and the great multitude which no one can number. The theophanic vision of chapters four and five makes it clear that we are not alone. John tells us,

> Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands of thousands and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. In a loud voice they sang:
> Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!
> Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing:
> To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!

We are not alone. We are not in the minority. When we sing the praises of God, we join with the greatest majority in the universe. Everyone in heaven and earth and the sea is singing with us, singing to God and to the Lamb. We are not besieged. It is the devil and his dupes who are besieged, a temporary and ultimately insignificant outpost of error and failure on a tiny planet circling a small star on the edges of a galaxy of modest dimensions and mediocre characteristics, destined for doom and eternal oblivion. They, not we, are the minority. We have the promise of authority over the nations. We will stand in the temple of God. We will sit with Jesus on His throne, just as He sits with the Father. We aren’t alone.

Our task as pastors and scholars is to communicate to our fellow believers in the pew (and our fellow-believers in the side-arm desk) that the book of Revelation is good news, to teach them that they should not fear what they read, but should be comforted and encouraged by the revelation of Jesus Christ.

And as we teach them not to fear, perhaps we should not be surprised that many of our people are, at least initially, afraid of what they read in the Apocalypse. After all, even John’s first reaction to the revelation of Jesus Christ was terror: “When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead.”

> “Then he placed his right hand upon me, and said, ‘Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.’”

Don’t be afraid. It is the first message of the risen Christ to His beloved servant, and it is His message to us. Don’t be afraid.

Don’t be afraid when you see me in heavenly glory. Don’t be afraid of my eyes that blaze with fire,
my feet that glow like molten bronze, the sword that proceeds from my mouth, my face that shines like the sun in all its brilliance. Don't be afraid, for I have only shown myself so that you may know me, and know what I am soon to do. Don't be afraid.

Don't be afraid of my presence. I am always walking among you, though I may not be seen, and I hold your brilliant lights in the palm of my right hand. Don't be afraid.

Don't be afraid of the portents and terrors, of the dreadful beasts and enemies of God which you are about to see. Do not be afraid of what they will attempt, or even of what they will accomplish. Do not be afraid, for I am the First and the Last. I was here before they were imagined, and I will still be here when the last spark of their memory is extinguished from the remotest galaxy of the universe. And you will still be here with me. Don't be afraid.

Don't be afraid because you are few and weak and dispossessed. Don't be afraid because you know little and can do less, and have nothing. Don't be afraid, because I have everything; I made all things and by my will they were created and have their being. Don't be afraid, because you are not alone. Heaven and earth and the sea and the nether regions are filled with those who know me and love me and sing my praise. Don't be afraid.

Don't be afraid because you are a sinner. Don't be afraid because you are unworthy. I am worthy because I was slain and with my blood I purchased a people for God from every tribe and tongue and clan and nation and I have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve God and they will reign on the earth. Don't be afraid.

Don't be afraid of what the wicked may do. Don't be afraid of what they may do to you. Don't be afraid of their threats and their attacks and their persecutions. Don't even be afraid if they put you to death. I was dead, and now I live for ever and ever, and I have the keys of death and the grave. Don't be afraid.

Don't be afraid if I leave my Father's visible presence, if I set aside my priestly censer and take up my kingly sword. Don't be afraid that no intercessor will stand for you before God. I live forever. And if someday soon I leave my Father's courts, it will only be for the only reason I ever left before: I want to be with you. Don't be afraid.

Don't be afraid when the lightening strikes and the earth quakes, when hailstones the size of wheelbarrows shatter the works of humanity. Do not be afraid if the mountains tremble and every island moves from its place. Don't be afraid if the nations are consumed with sulphurous flames. If I destroy these things, it only because I have determined that I will never again allow anything to separate you from me. Don't be afraid.

Don't be afraid.
BABYLON IS FALLEN
RASTAFARIAN ESCHATOLOGY
IN THE MUSIC OF BOB MARLEY AND OTHER REGGAE ARTISTS

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Introduction
The birth of Rastafarianism took place in the 1930s when Jamaicans were struggling to fashion an identity that marked their independence from their colonizing oppressors. During the early 1900s, Jamaicans were making significant contributions to the liberation struggle of Blacks in the western world. Claude McKay was a major contributor to the resistance literature of the Harlem Renaissance. James K. Humphrey protested against racial injustice in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Unarguably, the most influential Jamaican figure of this time was Marcus Garvey, whose Universal Negro Improvement Association promoted the ideals that would become a part of Rastafarian theology. Establishing their faith on the prophecies of Marcus Garvey, Rastafarians believe that we are living at the end of time when the Black man will be rewarded for his patient suffering. After surveying the sources for Rastafarian theology, and systematizing a core set of doctrines, this paper will briefly evaluate four facets of Rastafarian eschatology.

Methodology
In this study, I examine Rastafarian eschatology via the dominant themes in the music of selected reggae artists. The sources utilized are by no means exhaustive. I have chosen to concentrate on some of the major works of the legendary Bob (Robert Nesta) Marley, and some related compositions by Burning Spear (Winston Rodney), Dennis Brown, Gregory Isaacs, Buju Banton, and Ziggy Marley. There are many other lesser-known reggae artists who could have contributed to the discussion, but I will leave their inclusion for a later study.

Limitations
While I attempt to examine Rastafarian eschatology, I must acknowledge that Rastafarians do not hold to an orthodox creed.1 I have chosen to examine the eschatology primarily via the music of Bob Marley because he is probably the most influential "evangelist." However, he was not the spokesperson for all Rastafarians. While definitely a religion, Rastafarianism encompasses a way of life. There is much room for heterodoxy.2

Sources of Rastafarian Theology
1. The King James Version of the Bible. The Bible is foundational to Rastafarian theology. Many devout Rastafarians have memorized large sections of the Bible which they quote at whim, and apply to a variety of contexts. Rastafarian theology is often derived from the Wisdom Literature, the Prophets, and the Daniel and Revelation Apocalypses. There is no general agreement about the limits of canon, and the individual is free to pronounce or denounce the inspiration of certain passages.3

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1Leonard E. Barret, The Rastafarians: The Dreadlocks of Jamaica (London: Sangster's and Heinemann, 1977), lists the following as the six basic tenets of Rastafarianism: 1) Haile Selassie is the living God. 2) The Black person is the reincarnation of ancient Israel, and is exiled in Jamaica through white oppression. 3) The White man is inferior to the Black man. 4) Jamaica is hell, Ethiopia is heaven. 5) The emperor of Ethiopia is arranging for expatriates to return. 6) Blacks shall rule the world in the near future. However, only extreme Rastas—the minority—would agree that these six tenets are core.

2E.g. the Nyabinghi totally reject Jesus Christ while the Twelve Tribes reason that if Haile Selassie believed in him, they must follow his example.

3For instance, while most Rastafarians will denounce the writings of Paul, Bob Marley freely quotes Romans 6:23 in his song "Who the Cap Fit," Rastaman Vibration (New York: Tuff Gong, 1976).
2. **Extra-Biblical Literature.** Some Rastafarians also accept the authority of other bodies of religious writings. The Apocrypha is termed the "Maccabee Version," which many believe is a special revelation that God intended for Black people.⁴ Rastas also believe in the inspiration of the *Kebra Nagast*, an apocryphal account of the unbroken lineage of the Solomonic Ethiopian dynasty through Menelek I.

3. **Speeches of Haile Selassie.** A third source of authoritative writings is comprised of certain speeches of His Imperial Majesty, Haile Selassie I. His wisdom is accepted as prophecy. When Bob Marley puts to music Selassie’s monumental address to the United Nations, he is careful not to add or take away.⁵

4. **Speeches of Marcus Mosiah Garvey.**⁶ Marcus Garvey is probably the Ellen G. White or Joseph Smith of Rastafarianism. In fact, the basis of the Rastafarian elevation of Haile Selassie is Garvey’s prophecy that a deliverer will soon rise in Africa.

**Major Themes in Rastafarian Theology**

1. **Haile Selassie is the Living God.** The elevation of Haile Selassie to the status of deity is probably the cardinal belief of all Rastafarians. In fact, the name of the cult is derived from his title, Ras (Prince) Tafari. Further, the meaning of Haile Selassie is "Power of the Trinity." While many Rastafarians view him as the exclusive god, the Twelve Tribes believe him to be the incarnation of the Holy Spirit. Rastafarians await the manifestation of Haile Selassie, at which time all faithful people will return to Africa. Buju Banton expresses the sincerity of many Rastafarians:
   
   Strange this feeling I’m feeling
   But Jah love we will always believe in
   I know you may think my faith is in vain
   Til Shiloh we’ll chant Rastafari’s name.⁷

2. **Health.** Rastafarians believe that the body is God’s temple. Consequently, they abstain from certain meats prohibited by scripture. Many are complete vegetarians, and eat only I-tal food (food without salt). They are also expected to refrain from alcoholic beverages.

3. **Ganga.** A part of the Rastafarian health message involves the smoking of ganga (marijuana) which they equate to the burning of incense in the body temple. Ganga is seen as a panacea created by God for the healing of the nations. When smoked, it is believed to open up spiritual awareness. It is also taken as a tea and eaten as a vegetable.

4. **Nazarite Vow.** The dreadlocks that many Rastafarians wear indicate their allegiance to a perpetual Nazarite vow.⁸ Not all Rastafarians wear dreadlocks.

5. **Ethiopia.** Ethiopia is the land of promise. Ethiopia is used as a generic term for all of Africa. It is believed that Africa marks the beginning of creation and recreation.

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⁴One song demands, “Bring back Maccabee Version, that God give to Black man.... Black man stand up on your foot, and give Black God the glory....”


⁸A song from the seventies contained the words, “Na go a no funeral, na go a no burial....” This reflects the part of the Nazarite vow that prohibits contact with dead bodies.

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Rastafarian Eschatology

1. **The West is Evil.** Rastafarian theology is antagonistic towards the West. The West represents everything evil. It's the place where, in Dennis Brown's words, "Wolf and leopard are trying to kill the sheep and the shepherd." Bob Marley and the Wailers observe that there is "So much trouble in the world." Buju Banton laments,

   Till I'm laid to rest  
   Always be depressed  
   There's no life in the West  
   I know the East is the best  
   All the propaganda they spread  
   Tongues will have to confess.⁹

   For Rastas, the term "west" even includes Jamaica and all other sections of the African diaspora. The West is referred to with the biblical pejorative "Babylon," and much of "conscious" reggae music is dedicated to "chanting down Babylon."¹⁰ Even as the Rastafarian "chants down Babylon," he believes it is already a fallen system. Ziggy Marley prophesies with the words of the second angel of Revelation 14:

   Fallen is Babylon right now, right now  
   Babylon system is a system that exists for centuries, centuries.  
   Still run by the same mentality that runs it, still here to do the same things they've done  
   Conquer the poor and oppress the underprivileged, we got to stop that.  
   Babylon oh Babylon.¹¹

2. **Yearning for Zion.** While trapped in the West, the Rastafarian yearns for deliverance. The struggle will not be over until the chosen people return to Ethiopia. Babylon is not the final resting place for God's people. The clarion call of Marcus Garvey's movement was "Africa for the Africans." His Black Star company encouraged the repatriation of Blacks to the motherland. However, the Rastafarian feels that the time for repatriation will be indicated by a higher power. One singer chants, "I am a Rastaman, a true born African, I am a Rastaman and I'm awaiting repatriation." Gregory Isaac languishes:

   If I could reach the border, then I would step across  
   So please take me to the border, no matter what the cost,  
   Because I'm leaving, I'm leaving out of Babylon  
   I'm leaving out of Rome, I'm leaving out of this land  
   This place could never be my home.  
   Say me want me want go home...¹²

   While some Rastafarians have settled in the Shashamane province of Ethiopia, the majority refuse to return until Zion is free from all oppressive forces and war. The vision of peace is found in the words of a song from the seventies:

   As it was when Jah first made our land,  
   So shall it be in the end,  
   With a peaceful village and children running around.

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⁹Mark Myrie and Bobby Dixon, "Til I'm Laid to Rest," performed by Buju Banton, *Til Shiloh*.  
¹²Gregory Isaacs.
3. **Struggle Against Evil.** While waiting for Zion, the Rastafarian is engaged in a struggle against the evil systems of western oppression. The one who accepts Rastafari should expect to be ridiculed and persecuted.

   Men and people will fight ya down when ya see JAH light.
   Let me tell you if you’re not wrong everything is alright.
   Walk, through the roads of creation,
   We’re the generation who trod through great tribulation.\(^{13}\)

   Much of the warfare takes place on an ideological level. The struggle is primarily against the evil West, and the Rastafarian protests by his refusal to be used by the establishment:
   I and I build the cabin, I and I plant the corn
   Didn’t my people before me Slave for this country
   Now you look me with a scorn
   Then you eat up all my corn
   We gonna chase those crazy baldhead
   Chase them crazy
   Chase those crazy baldheads out of town.\(^{14}\)

   The Rastaman also recognizes the fallacy behind the notion that the European culture is superior to others. In a dialogue with the West, Marley talks about how the Black people “Build your penitentiary, we build your schools,” and in return we received “Brainwash education, to make us the fools....”\(^{15}\) But Blacks are not expected to passively accept the “brainwash education.” In the second verse of the last song on his final album, Marley appeals: “Emancipate yourselves from mental slavery, None but ourselves can free our minds.”\(^{16}\) The Rastafarian does not fall victim to the false doctrines of the West.

   Particularly under fire is the European ecclesiastical establishment with its escapist doctrine that discourages the Black man from striving for economic and political empowerment. Marley taunts, “Hate is your reward for love, telling us of your God above.”\(^{17}\) And several have adapted the words of the following:

   Get up stand up, stand up for your rights.
   Get up stand up, Don’t give up the fight.
   Some people say great god going to come from the sky
   Take away everything and make everybody feel high
   Its not all that glitters is gold, and half the story has never been told
   So now you see the light, stand up for your rights.
   Preacher man don’t tell me that heaven is under the earth,
   If you knew what life was worth, you will look for your’s on earth
   And now you see the light, you gotta stand up for your rights.

   The struggle against evil involves both an open assault on the Babylonian system and serious introspection on the part of the believer. Marley challenges his listeners to move beyond complacency:

   Open your eyes and look within
   Are you satisfied with the life you’re living
   We know where we’re going
   We know where we’re from

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\(^{15}\)Marley & Ford, “Crazy Baldhead.”


\(^{17}\)Marley & Ford, “Crazy Baldhead.”

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We're leaving Babylon into our father's land.\(^{18}\)

The struggle is defined as an Aexodus\(^{17}\)—a “movement of Jah people.” The Rastafarian believes that the best weapon against evil is love. Rastafarians often greet each other with the phrase “peace and love,” emphasizing both the belief that love conquers all, and the hope for an eternal era of peace. While Rastafarianism is primarily Afrocentric, it believes that all people can achieve the love that is necessary for acceptance before Jah. Marley makes a passionate plea in his song "One Love":

One love, one heart
Let's get together and feel alright
(Hear the children crying) One love, (Hear the children crying) one heart
Give thanks and praise to the Lord and I will feel alright.\(^{19}\)

The positive vibration transmitted through love will help to transform society. Negative behavior only glorifies the devil.

If you get down and quarrel every day
You're saying prayers to the Devil, I say
Why not help one another on the way
Make it much easier
Say you just can't live that negative way
You know what I mean
Make way for the positive day
Cause it's a new day
New time, new feeling yeah!
Say it's a new sign
Oh what a new day.\(^{20}\)

Ultimately, Marley sees love in action as the key to victory over evil forces, and warns that those who refuse to participate will fall victim to the coming wrath.

Let's get together to fight this Holy Armageddon
When the man comes there will be no due
Have pity on those whose chances grow thinner
There ain't no hiding place from the Father of creation.\(^{21}\)

4. **Deliverance.** The Rastafarian believes in the eventual triumph of good over evil. This triumph involves the total eradication of evil:

Check out the real situation
Nation war against nation
Where did it all begin, when will it end
Well it seems like total destruction
The only solution.\(^{22}\)

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\(^{18}\)Marley, "Exodus."


\(^{20}\)Marley, "One Love."


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The Rastafarian does not believe that humans will evoke the final global catastrophe. Marley exhorts, “Have no fear for atomic energy, cause none a them can stop the time.” The end is ushered in by Jah, and Jah alone: “JAH come to breakdown downpression, rule equality, wipe away transgressions, and set the captives free.”

As with some of the Negro spirituals, the metaphor of a train is used to describe the mode of deliverance. Marley refers to it as the “Zion Train.” This train has a definite destination and only those at the right station can board.

Zion train is coming our way
Zion train is coming our way
Oh people get on board
You better get on board
Thank the Lord, Praise Fari
I gotta catch this train
Cause there is no other station
Then you going in the same direction
Zion train is coming our way
Zion train is coming our way.

For the Rastafarian, deliverance is coming—it’s even at the door. When the train arrives, the individual boards without any material possessions. Faith is the only requirement for entrance.

People get ready there’s a train a coming
You don’t need no baggage you just get on board.
All you need is faith to hear the diesel humming
Don’t need no ticket you just thank the Lord.
People get ready for the train to Jordan
Picking up passengers from coast to coast
Faith is the key Open the doors and board then
There is hope for all among the loved the most.

Conclusion

Rastafarianism started as a nationalistic movement that sought to create an identity for the Jamaican oppressed. Through the music of Bob Marley and other reggae musicians, the message of Rastafari has spread “to the world.” An analysis of Rastafarian eschatology demonstrates a strong reliance on biblical apocalyptic thought. Rastafarians understand the ramifications of the controversy between good and evil. The oppressive social system is correctly identified with Babylon. Like the Christian, the Rastafarian cannot feel at home in a world of injustice, and so he yearns for Zion. Although living in Babylon, the Rastafarian is called to a high ethical standard as his positive behavior penetrates the evil environment. The Rastafarian cannot conform to the ideology of a fallen society. As a reward for his patient suffering, the Rastafarian is delivered from his environment and taken to another sphere of existence. He exits Babylon and enters the promised land—Ethiopia.

23Marley, “Redemption Song.”
24Marley, “Exodus.”
26Curtis Mayfield, “People Get Ready,” performed by Ziggy Marley, Fallen is Babylon.
MY JOURNEY OF DISCOVERIES
IN APOCALYPTIC ESCHATOLOGY

Hans K. LaRondelle
Sarasota, Florida

Being raised a Roman Catholic till my eighth year in the Netherlands, I learned young to believe in God and in the authority of the Catholic Church to forgive sins. When my mother later married a Protestant man, I was sent to a Protestant school and learned that the Bible is God's Word and should be our authority to believe. At the age of nineteen, I chose to attend the law school at the Leyden University and began to read the Bible. The law professors taught me to think for myself in a disciplined way, the academic way.

I could not make sense out of the Old Testament laws and rituals, and began to read the classic book "The Imitation of Christ" by Thomas à Kempis. This was all about trying to establish a union with God through pious devotions and practices, a frustrating effort. At that time a new friend gave me on my birthday a book about the Bible, written by a Dutch Adventist pastor. This book explained the meaning of the Bible in a simple way, and showed how Christ was the center of the entire plan of salvation. By faith in Jesus, I experienced in my little attic at home a rebirth of heart and a true love for God. Now I decided that my life belonged to Him and that I would switch from law study to theology. Although my stepfather resented my decision, my mother encouraged me to follow Christ wherever He lead me.

Soon after my baptism in 1949, at the age of twenty, I decided to attend the newly established Adventist Seminary near Utrecht. There were no academically trained professors of theology there as I had expected. In frustration, I started reading the book "Bible Readings for the Home," as well as some Ellen White books. This gave some satisfaction, but such literature did not help me with my thirst for professional knowledge in theology. I trusted that a fuller understanding of Scripture would come later, when I had a chance to read each Bible book more in context, instead of just using isolated texts to prove our church doctrines and its unique message.

Influence of the hermeneutic of the Australian Louis F. Were

My first breakthrough came from an unsuspected source. A layperson who worked at the Dutch office of the Voice of Hope gave me one day a book that she had received from a friend in Australia. It was the book The Certainty of the Third Angel's Message, privately published in 1945 by Louis F. Were, who had been a successful Adventist evangelist in Australia. His book presented a thought-provoking list of biblical principles of Scripture interpretation that made Christ the moral purpose of all types and prophecies. This showed me the continuous inspiration of the Bible and the spiritual unity of both the Old and New Testaments. Through his revival of biblical typology, Were demonstrated the Christocentric nature as well as end-time orientation of God's covenant promises to Israel. This presented the coherence of the entire Bible that was spiritually and intellectually appealing. This was for me the missing link in Adventism, an illumination that gave me a new commitment to the Adventist message by exalting Christ as the Center of all prophecies and church doctrines.

Were had discovered what few other Adventists had seen before: the reasons why the applications of the drying up of the Euphrates waters to modern Turkey and of Armageddon to WWI and again to WWII by our evangelists, all had proved to be false. He found the cause in a faulty hermeneutic of geographic literalism! He showed convincingly that Uriah Smith and Ellen White operated each with different principles of interpreting the territorial expressions in Bible prophecies. Were concluded that all applications of Armageddon to an end-time battle over the holy sepulchers in Palestine or over the "liquid gold of the Euphrates Valley"1 were a fundamental violation of the gospel hermeneutic of the New Testament. He argued that our end-time applications of the geographic terms of Bible prophecy to the Middle East were nothing but a partial adoption of dispensational futurism.2

I was compelled to establish Were's hermeneutical discovery more clearly from the Bible alone, without using Ellen White as the final interpreter, so that our prophetic interpretations could find a more universal appeal. I chose this task as my theological contribution to Adventist eschatology and developed this systematically during my 25 years of teaching at Andrews University Seminary. This Christ-centered hermeneutic is set forth in my book The Israel of God in Prophecy. Principles of Prophetic Interpretation (Andrews University Press, 9th ed. 1998; a Portuguese translation is being prepared by our Seminary in Sao Paulo, Brazil). I applied the gospel hermeneutic to the

A number of graduates from Dallas Theological Seminary have thanked me for showing them persuasively that the OT is primarily Messiah-centered and not Israel-centered. Eleven of them gave up their dispensational hermeneutic, with the consequence that some of them actually lost their job as a pastor in their churches.

I was gratified that one of my keenest students, Jon Paulien, was chosen to write the article "Armageddon" in the Anchor Bible Dictionary (Doubleday, 1992). I am also grateful for the statement of Donald E. Mansell, in his recent book Adventists and Armageddon. Have we misinterpreted prophecy? (Pacific Press, 1999) that my Seminary teaching has helped our young ministers to "base their understanding of Armageddon on sound hermeneutical principles" (p. 109). The "Daniel & Revelation Committee" of the Biblical Research Institute has published four essays of mine on the Seven Last Plagues and Armageddon in Symposium on Revelation. Book II (F. B. Holbrook, ed., BRI; Review and Herald Publishing Assn., 1992).

Influence of the Dutch Professor of Theology: G. C. Berkouwer

My journey of discovery did not end with finding a consistent Christocentric hermeneutic for Adventist eschatology. As a young pastor in the Netherlands, I felt the lack of a more professional training in the science of exegesis, in biblical languages, and in historical theology. In 1957 I went to the Protestant State University in Utrecht and two years later to the Reformed Free University in Amsterdam. I found those theologians to be skilled in their theological disciplines and often humble, spiritual men. A new world of knowledge and insight opened up that excited and satisfied me. It deepened my commitment to Scripture and gave me a more intelligent faith and more courage to preach the Adventist message.

The one professor who exerted the most decisive influence on me by his life and teachings was Dr. Gerrit C. Berkouwer. Here was not just a pious and eloquent teacher, but also an independent and creative thinker, an original Christian theologian. In his epoch-making book Divine Election he challenged his own Presbyterian Church to correct its Calvinistic doctrine of a "double predestination."

His style of letting the Bible speak for itself fascinated me. This was even a step beyond Louis Were, in that Berkouwer did not need an extrabiblical prophet to explain or illuminate the Bible. Berkouwer actually practiced the Sola Scriptura principle of faith as a Protestant Bible scholar. He explained that this axiom of faith originated with Luther and Calvin and was their battle cry to liberate the Christian conscience from the dictates of a self-exalting church. "Sola Scriptura" was the polemical expression of the Reformation that symbolized its rejection of any church authority as the final interpreter of Holy Scripture. Sola Scriptura intended to exalt Scripture as the final arbiter of all papal claims, church creeds and traditions.

Berkouwer emphasized the statements of Paul to the Corinthian church that also had the gift of prophecy (1 Cor. 1:7): "Do not go beyond what is written" (1 Cor. 4:6), and to Timothy: "God's Word is not chained" (2 Tim. 2:9). He stressed that the authority of any church creed is subjected to the voice of God in His word. Only then can the church be a true witness of Christ. Berkouwer showed an unusual reverence for the words of Scripture, which he saw as parts of a progressive revelation of God in Christ. To him the biblical nature of "faith" was the humble acceptance of and obedience to the Word of God. Only the Bible has the authority to bind the conscience before God. No institution or extrabiblical authority figure can ever claim to be the ultimate touchstone or criterion.

From Berkouwer I learned that Sola Scriptura was the foundation of historic Protestantism, intended to safeguard the principle that Scripture is its own expositor, because God is His own best interpreter (see Isa. 54:13). This meant for me that even Ellen White's gift of prophecy was to be subordinated to and judged by Holy Scripture. I simply assumed there could be no real difference or conflict between the Bible and Ellen White's writings, because she wrote everything inspired by the Spirit of prophecy. I had become a Seventh-day Adventist by reading her book The Great Controversy. As a good Roman Catholic will dismiss any suggestion that the Pope's declarations ex cathedra might deviate from the Word of God, so I dismissed a priori all possibility that Ellen White could have written anything that went beyond Holy Scripture or biblical exegesis. I believed Ellen White's writings were as normative as the Bible before the final judgment of God. As is customary among us, I simply adopted her words as the absolute norm for my conscience. Her writings were after all God's inspired Bible commentary!

No Adventist had taught me the fundamental difference between biblical exegesis and our historical applications of prophecy or those of the historicist school. Later I discovered that ignorance of the essential difference between exegesis and our applications of prophecy, between God's Word and our word, prevents a critical consideration of our tradition and of our past mistakes and hinders the search for a better understanding of Bible prophecies.
Solving the Adventist dilemma of two authorities of Inspiration

As my knowledge of Scripture increased, I gradually awakened to my responsibility and duty to test Ellen White's interpretations and applications of Scripture by the norm of "Sola Scriptura." Over time this caused some reevaluations of my unlimited confidence in her as the final interpreter of Scripture. I was forced to redefine the God-appointed function of her gift of prophecy. As Adventists, we do not stress any limitation to her prophetic gift. The result is that all her writings are easily taken as an infallible, verbal inspiration by God for the remnant church, on equal level of authority as the Bible itself. We teach our young people therefore that God has given us "two main sources of divine wisdom." For all practical purposes, Ellen White has become nothing but the "Testimony of Jesus" of Revelation 12:17 and is on that basis accepted as the infallible interpreter and applier of Scripture.

Remarkably, Mrs. White herself only referred to Joel 2:28 as the biblical forecast of her divine inspiration "to witness 'for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ'" (GC ix, xii). Never once did she suggest that her mission was part of the canonical "testimony of Jesus" mentioned six times in the book of Revelation (1:2, 9; 6:9; 12:17; 19:10; 20:4).

The unqualified equation of "the testimony of Jesus" and the writings of Ellen White, an essential part of traditional Adventism, became questionable to me only when I discovered an apparent inaccuracy in her historical description of the French Revolution and further saw her problematic designation of the meteor shower of 1833 as the specific sign that determined the final generation of Matthew 24:34. With regard to 1833, she concluded: "Now we know of a surety that the Lord's coming is at hand" (DA 632; cf. GC 334). Time has revealed, however, that we cannot base our "surety" on meteor showers or on any time-fixation of the final generation.

Later I learned from Ron Graybill's research that Ellen White on occasion "simply took over the historical references used in [U.] Smith's exposition" (Spectrum. Summer 1972, 49-53). Smith, in his turn, however, had uncritically taken over some erroneous historical applications from his source, the Millerite George Storrs in 1843 (Smith, Revelation 538). Warren H. Johns clarified the issue for me: "The discovery of Ellen White's extensive and varied use of prior sources should extinguish any lingering trace of the verbal dictation theory... To admit minor discrepancies in Ellen White's writings is not to deny their inspiration. Inspiration is not to be equated with absolute perfection." I gave up the popular Adventist view that Ellen White was verbally inspired.

The transubstantiation of the biblical "testimony of Jesus" into Ellen White's writings became a new challenge, when I discovered that her application of the cosmic signs regarding the second coming in Matthew 24 and in Revelation 6 to past centuries lacked the theological perspective of the biblical prophets and that of Christ Himself! This showed me another limitation to Ellen White's exegetical function. I published my new findings in two articles in Ministry (Sept. '98 and Sept. '99), and gave account of my duty to a responsible biblical exegesis of the cosmic signs in my book How to Understand the End-Time Prophecies. The Biblical-Contextual Approach.

Freedom for a responsible exegesis is fortunately in harmony with Ellen White's call to "return to the great Protestant principle,---the Bible, and the Bible only, as the rule of faith and duty" (GC 204-205), and is at the heart of her insistence that God's people are called to "maintain the Bible, and the Bible only, as the standard of all doctrines" (see GC 595). The science of biblical exegesis should be clearly distinguished from our historical applications. Mrs. White calls us to be Bible Adventists! The SDA Biblical Research Institute declared to this effect: "We do not believe that Scripture can be understood only through the writings of Ellen White... We do not believe that the writings of Ellen White exhaust the meaning of Scripture."

Influence of Kenneth Strand's apocalyptic studies

The meticulous studies of Kenneth A. Strand on the book of Revelation stimulated my search for a better understanding of the last Bible book. His method of a strictly contextual exegesis of the Apocalypse honored the Sola Scriptura principle. Here was an original thinker who was blazing a new trail in Adventism! Especially significant was his ground-breaking article "The Two Witnesses of Rev 11:3-12" in AUSS 19:2 (1981). It opened a new theological perspective within the book of Revelation. His finding that the "two-witnesses theology of Revelation 11 dominates the entire Apocalypse was an illuminating discovery that threw new light on the twofold mark of the faithful church of Christ. Strand demonstrated its "prominent emphasis" in the book of Revelation and that also Christ had taught a "two-witnesses" theology in the Gospels: He and His Father being the two Witnesses (Ibid. 133).

How can it be that this "prominent emphasis" on a twofold witness had escaped earlier Adventists and is still being ignored? Did Strand uncover a denominational blind spot regarding such an important issue as the abiding hallmark of the church in the book of Revelation? Consider this challenging conclusion of Strand:

The foregoing makes clear that "the word of God" and "testimony of Jesus" provide a concept or theme that
permeates, undergirds, and underlies the book of Revelation, the Revelation itself being said to proclaim this twofold divine message (1:2) (Ibid. 132).

In the book of Revelation, faithfulness to the "word of God" and to the "testimony of Jesus Christ" separates the faithful from the faithless, and it brings about persecution that includes John's own exile and the martyrdom of other believers (see again Rev 1:9; 6:9; 12:17; 20:4; etc.) (Ibid. 133).

Strand identified the substance of the two witnesses as "the OT prophetic message and the NT apostolic witness" (Ibid. 134). This all-permeating truth in Revelation, evident for an enlightened Bible scholar, became obscured in Adventism when some began to bolster the spiritual appeal of the Spirit of prophecy in Ellen White by an innovative appeal to Revelation 12:17. One might defend this novel exegesis perhaps by arguing that "the testimony" of Jesus in Rev. 12:17 was given an "extended" application beyond the NT apostolic witness. But what happens when an extended application begins to replace the intentional meaning of John's Apocalypse? How can such a dogmatic exegesis of Rev. 12:17 stand the test of objective scrutiny and rigid criticism? Can the exclusive application of the "testimony of Jesus" in Rev. 12:17 to an end-time prophet be defended by a contextual exegesis?

The unit of chapters 12-14 constitutes one great interlocking entity, in which each succeeding chapter enlarges the previous one with an increasing clarification of the end-time test of faith. In this progressive parallel structure, the brief description of the remnant church in 12:17 as "those who keep the commandments of God and hold the testimony of Jesus" is repeated and clarified in 14:12 as the saints "who keep the commandments of God and hold fast the faith of Jesus" (NRSV). Are we suddenly confronted with a total of three characteristics of the true church in Revelation? Or does the infrastructure of chapters 12-14 compel us to understand the "testimony of Jesus" in 12:17 as being explained by its inspired equivalent of the "faith of Jesus," that is, as "the faith once for all entrusted to the saints" (Jude 3)? Just as the "commandments of God" are not new commandments but the biblical commandments, so is the "testimony of Jesus" not an extrabiblical Spirit of prophecy but the historic, biblical testimony of Jesus as recorded in the New Testament. John's revelation in Rev. 12-14 intends to assure us that the true Israel of God at the end of the church age will stand again in faithful succession to the apostolic church (cf. 1:2, 9) and to the church of the martyrs of the ages (cf. 6:9). Especially the martyrs of the remnant church will be rewarded in heaven for their faithfulness to the "testimony of Jesus" and to "the word of God" (20:4).

The angel's words of reproof to John to "worship God!" in Rev. 19:10, do not change the clarifying interpretation of 12:17 in 14:12 for the remnant church. The angel informed John, who was wrongly worshiping him, that he was only a "fellow servant" of the prophets, transmitting "the testimony of Jesus" for "all who keep the words of this book" (Rev. 22:9). This testimony of Jesus in the Apocalypse is from the Spirit of prophecy or Holy Spirit (see Rev. 22:16) and should lead to worship God only. The remnant church of Rev. 12-14 is called to keep the "faith of Jesus," which our Bible scholars understand to mean "the body of teachings that center in Jesus."9

References
4. The rallying cry of Voltaire was: "Écrasez l'infâme!" by which he did not mean "Crush Christ!" as Mrs. White adopted from Uriah Smith (GC 273; see Smith, Revelation, 538), but rather "Crush the Roman Catholic superstition and tyranny," as the professional historians report. Mrs. White never wished to be considered as an authority on "points of history and chronology" (so W.C. White, in Selected Messages, 3:446).
6. First Impressions, Sarasota, FL, 1997. See pp. 51-56; 135-141; and Appendix A, "Relationship of the End-Time Gift of Prophecy to the Bible."
8. I give account of my understanding of the "Testimony of Jesus" in How to Understand the End-Time Prophecies of the Bible, pp. 281-290.
HOW WE ARE ADVENT-IST AS WE ENTER THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY
(OR WHAT I WOULD SAY TO URIAH SMITH ON THE WAY TO THE AIRPORT)

Fritz Guy
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One hundred fifty-five years after the "great disappointment" of 1844, an essential task of Adventist theologians—and of all Adventists who think theologically—is to face as honestly and creatively as we can the question of whether an Advent-ist vision of the future can be sustained in and for the twenty-first century.

My own response to this question is already signaled in the title of this brief presentation. It is not the formulation of a question but the announcement of an explanation: not "Are we (still) Advent-ist?" but "How we are Advent-ist." Whether or not I am guilty of false advertising you will judge when I have finished. And, I suggest, your primary criteria of judgment should be plausibility and authenticity: does the explanation make sense? and is it truly Advent-ist? (My quirky hyphenation of "Advent-ist" is intended as a reminder that the subject under discussion is, quite specifically, our Advent hope, "the doctrine that the second coming of Christ and the end of the world are near at hand," rather than the more general "principles and practices of Seventh-day Adventists.")

Implicit in my decision to address this subject is the conviction that we are not, and cannot be, Advent-ist in exactly the same way as were our spiritual and theological great-great-grandparents a century and a half ago. That is, the Advent hope does not and cannot mean for us exactly what it meant for them. Our world is different—technologically, culturally, religiously—and so are its inhabitants (including us). Not only has it become a global village in a way that was unimaginable in the mid-nineteenth century, but it has also become increasingly obsessed with nonstop, seven-days-a-week consumerism. Furthermore, since the Second Vatican Council (1963-65) everything previously written about the character of Roman Catholicism has to be reexamined.

Yet it is surely appropriate to ask, without assuming the answer in advance, in what ways our present Advent hope is consonant with our spiritual and theological heritage. The point here is illustrated by the imaginary entrepreneur who claimed to have on display the ax with which the young George Washington chopped down the famous cherry tree. "Of course," the man said, "it's had four new heads and three new handles, but it's the same ax." Is it the same ax? Yes and no. Are you the same person you were twenty years ago? Most of your body is different; and you have learned many new things and formed significant new relationships. But there is an evident continuity that makes you still you. How much change can a theological tradition sustain and still make a credible claim to historical continuity?

If I were riding to Logan International Airport with Uriah Smith on Sunday morning, I would say first of all that for our generation of Adventists, as for his, the Advent hope envisions an actual, objective coming of God again to our world—a real event. And then I would say further that as we enter the twenty-first century, our hope is historically realistic, scripturally responsible, spiritually positive, theologically modest, and existentially valuable.

Our Advent hope is historically realistic. It recognizes, for example, not only that the expectations and predictions of Millerite Adventists before the "disappointment" were not fulfilled; but also that neither were the expectations and predictions of Sabbatarian Adventists after the "disappointment."

For decades Seventh-day Adventists believed that "the signs mentioned in [Matt. 24:29] . . . would take place so near the day of His coming that Christ declared that the 'generation' that sees the last of the signs [the "falling of the

1Both of these meanings are given in Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 10th ed. (Springfield, Mass: Merriam-Webster, 1993), s.v. "Adventism."

2Compare Marshall McLuhan, Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man (New York: New American Library, 1966), 298: "With instant electric technology, the globe itself can never again be more than a village."
stars" in 1833], shall not pass before . . . Christ's coming and the end of the world" occur. This nineteenth-century Advent-ist expectation was expressed in a notable prediction Ellen White attributed to a heavenly messenger: "I was shown the company present at the Conference [that is, during a conference of Adventist believers convened at Battle Creek; the date was May 27, 1856]. Said the angel: 'Some food for worms, some subjects of the seven last plagues, some will be alive and remain upon the earth to be translated at the coming of Jesus.' Solemn words were these, spoken by the angel."4

The nonoccurrence of the hoped-for (and expected) coming of Christ was not, of course, peculiar to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It was the experience of Christians already in the first century. Paul and his contemporaries expected Jesus to come in their lifetime (1 Thess. 4:17); and the earliest Christian communities remembered Jesus himself as saying to his disciples that at least some of them would see his return "with his angels in the glory of his Father" (Matt. 16:27-28). The Book of Revelation begins with the announcement that it was written "to show [Christ's] servants what must soon take place" (1:1), and it ends with the promise, "Surely I am coming soon" (Rev. 22:20).

But although the unexpected passage of time, stretching into centuries, is not a specifically modern Advent-ist problem, it remains a fact, an aspect of reality that we cannot properly deny or ignore. There is something paradoxical about celebrating for more than 150 years the successive anniversaries of the beginning of a movement that proclaims, "Jesus is coming soon."5 Our Advent hope has learned from our own history that we don't know when Jesus will return—not the day or the hour, as Jesus said (Matt. 24:36), and not the decade or the generation. Yet hope remains alert to the surprises of grace, the possibilities of the unexpected.6

Our Advent hope is scripturally responsible. It would rather read the Bible—really read it, not just raid it7—and let it speak God's Word to us, than brandish it as a weapon against our theological opponents. To read the Bible carefully means, among other things, to read it in the languages in which it was written, and to understand its various parts as the kinds of writing they individually are. And we remember a familiar admonition:

There is no excuse for anyone in taking the position that there is no more truth to be revealed, and that all our expositions of Scripture are without an error. The fact that certain doctrines have been held as truth for many years by our people is not a proof that our ideas are infallible. Age will not make error into truth, and truth can afford to be fair. No true doctrine will lose anything by close investigation.8

Our hope recognizes, for example, that the Greek words τὸν λοιπῆν (Rev. 12:17), translated "the remnant" in

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3Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, vol. 5 (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1956, 1980), 503. The "falling of the stars" on the night of Nov. 12-13, 1833, was a spectacular Leonid meteor shower that occurred as Earth passed through dust and debris shed from the tail of Comet Tempel-Tuttle. This shower is an annual event but is often more dramatic every thirty-three years, after the comet has made its closest approach to the sun. Another especially impressive display occurred in 1966.


5The irony here was noted several decades ago, as I recall, by Francis D. Nichol, editor of the Review and Herald (now Adventist Review), 1945-66.

6See Matt. 24:44 NIV: "The Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him."

7I am indebted to John Jones for this wordplay.

the King James Version, mean simply "the others"—or, collectively, "the rest"—of the offspring of the woman symbolizing the Christian community of faith. The words carry no necessary implication of chronological posteriority or even numerical minority.\(^9\)

More broadly, our hope sees with increasing clarity that the Book of Revelation is largely a right-brain, holistic composition to which many people have insisted on giving a left-brain, reductionistic interpretation. When you hear a piece of music you particularly enjoy, you don't play your favorite measure or two over and over; you want to hear the whole thing. The Book of Revelation is not a piece of encryption to be decoded, but a song of hope by which to be captivated, an epic poem by which to be inspired and energized. As one evangelical commentator says, "If the Revelation is not read as a poem, it is simply incomprehensible... We do not have more information after we read a poem, we have more experience."\(^11\)

With this insight into the nature of biblical apocalyptic, our hope can sit more lightly on interpretations and applications of specific periods of time, whether half an hour (Rev. 8:1) or forty-two months (11:2; 13:5) or a thousand years (20:2-3).

**Our Advent hope is spiritually positive.** It finds its security and energy in Jesus' witness to God's love, and can thus avoid the maladies characteristic of many apocalyptic communities of faith.

Reading the Book of Revelation, our hope sees beyond the pictures of war in heaven and on earth (Rev. 12), the mark of the beast (Rev. 13-14), the seven last plagues (Rev. 16-17), and the lake of fire (Rev. 20). All that is there, to be sure, and needs to be taken seriously; but above, beyond, and more important than that we see a new kind of heaven, a new kind of earth,\(^12\) a holy city, and a God who is at home with\(^13\) human beings (Rev. 21-22). This vision was not only the grand climax but also, I believe, the central thesis and fundamental meaning of the Book of Revelation: the fulfillment of the divine intention in creation, the realization of human destiny, the ultimate triumph of love.

This is the quintessential Advent-ist hope, vision, and message: humanity "at home" with God and God "at home" with humanity in intimate spiritual relationship. "God himself will be with them" (Rev. 21:3). The Fourth Gospel (another of the latest New Testament writings) expressed its Advent hope in Jesus' assurance to his disciples that he would come again, "so that where I am there you may be also" (John 14:3). In a letter to the Christians in Thessalonica (perhaps the earliest of the New Testament writings) Paul spoke similarly of the result of Jesus' return: "and so we will be with the Lord for ever" (1 Thess. 4:17).

A community of Advent hope does not think of itself as a spiritual elite on whom the proclamation of the gospel (and thus the historical realization of the plan of salvation) hinges; for it sees that history and salvation are God's responsibility. It understands that its mission is to bear, as widely and convincingly as it can, a message of God's universal and self-emptying love, a message that makes it possible to look forward to an eternal future with confidence and openness. The Advent hope sees divine justice and final judgment as implementations of God's love as it was expressed in Jesus the Messiah.

The Advent hope is an expansive hope. It is hope not only for ourselves and our community, but for as large a part of humanity as possible—even for creation itself, which in its own way "waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God" (Rom. 8:25).

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\(^9\)As in the New International Version, the New Revised Standard Version, the Revised English Bible, the New American Standard Version, etc.

\(^{10}\)See, for example, Rev. 11:13 NRSV: "Seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven."


\(^{12}\)The Gk. καινόν—here emphasizes qualitative newness in contrast to the chronological recency of νέον—.

\(^{13}\)Gk. σκένος, literally "tent with."
Our Advent hope is theologically modest. It knows that what it doesn’t know is much more than what it does know: it has no precise and detailed knowledge about our future with God, any more than Christian faith has such knowledge about the inner being of God or about the exact nature of God’s action in the world. In 1844 disappointment came, not because the Advent-ists were too sure, but because they were sure about too much.

If the Book of Revelation in particular is a composition for right-brain interpretation, the Advent hope in general is a subject for right-brain reflection. In the Gospels, the Pauline letters, and the Apocalypse we have a kaleidoscope of pictures, but the proper focus of our attention is not on the pictures themselves but on what is pictured in them. The pictures are pointers to a transcendent reality. It precisely the function of a pointer to direct attention away from itself to something else. If I point toward something and say, "Oh, look!" and you stare at my finger instead of the object to which I am pointing, it is obvious that you have not understood what I said.

From the biblical pictures of our ultimate destiny the Advent hope gains some important insights into the general nature of the future. On the one hand it will be significantly continuous with our present reality insofar as it will be an embodied, self-conscious, and interpersonal existence with God in the person of Jesus. But on the other hand it will also be radically discontinuous, insofar as it will entail the paradox of a "spiritual body"; thus it is clear that "we will all be changed" (1 Cor. 15:44, 52). "Then," the apostle said, "I will know fully, even as I have been fully known" (1 Cor. 13:12); that is, we will know God in a way analogous to the way in which we are now known by God. So, as indicated also by the resurrection of Jesus to a new kind of existence, the final resurrection will involve far more than resuscitation with improved genes, cells, and organs. The transition from the present human existence to the future human existence will be a major ontological transformation.

Recognizing this radical (although not absolute) discontinuity between the present and the ultimate future enables the Advent hope to avoid the mistake of the Sadducees, who, Jesus said, knew "neither the scriptures nor the power of God" (Matt. 22:29). Because it does not extrapolate directly from the present to the ultimate future, and because it does not regard poetic imagery as literal description, our hope need not worry (as some do) about such things as the prospect of sex in heaven.

Nor does our hope try to map the future, formulating detailed scenarios of "last-day events." Here too we are content not to know, recognizing that "the promises and threatenings of God are alike conditional." Prophetic vision is more a matter of insight into the dynamics of spiritual and historical reality than it is foresight into the particularities of the future; it offers a picture of the possibilities of grace (and the potential of evil) rather than a preview of inevitabilities. Knowing something about the dynamics of human history may indeed provide clues to the general shape of the future; but the Advent hope is not gnostic, claiming secret, inside knowledge about the future. Prophecy is not "history written in advance" (a misperception of that goes back more than three centuries). People of hope know that the future belongs to God; but about exactly what is going to happen tomorrow, next week, next year, or next century, they know no more than anyone else.

It might seem as if our ignorance of the future—both the specific course of the historical future and the ontology of the ultimate future—is a disadvantage; for we humans are notoriously curious, motivated in part by our desire to be in control, to shape our own destiny (or at least to suppose we shape our own future, which is harder to do the less we know about it). But on further reflection it becomes apparent that a future we could precisely delineate would in the long run be no more satisfying than a God we could completely comprehend (or, for that matter, a spouse, lover, or friend we could perfectly predict).

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14The Sadducees were, however, correct in identifying a difficulty in the assumption, as common now as it was then, that the eschatological resurrection was essentially a resuscitation.


16Compare Johannes Cocceius (1603-1669): Propheta est quasi rerum futurum historia ("Prophecy is, as it were, the history of future things"), quoted by Jürgen Moltmann, The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 7.
Our Advent hope is existentially valuable. It is valuable because, first and foremost and finally, it looks to the future in the light of God’s active presence. The primary content of authentic Advent hope, vision, and message is not, as in much popular Christian eschatology, "the end of the world," but "the coming God," the God who comes, and comes, and comes again. This is why it is a "blessed hope" (Tit. 2:13). What it hopes for is not the world's ending but its transformation: the fulfillment of God's own vision for the world, the ultimate, eternal, decisive triumph of love.

On the other hand, our Advent hope is by no means a simple optimism. It knows that human history has been, is, and will continue to be messy; that individual lives are messy; that life in a community of faith is sometimes messy. It knows about the possibilities of nuclear and biological warfare, and of ecological collapse, and about human sin and brokenness. But it knows also about the possibilities of grace, about resurrection, about eternal life. So far from being a Pollyanna optimism, this is a truly radical realism, because it takes account of a dimension of reality that skeptics refuse to acknowledge. The words Annie Smith taught our great-great-grandparents to sing in 1852 now seem quaint, somewhat exaggerated, and too dark for our current taste; but we know what they mean:

While pilgrims here we journey on in this dark vale of sin and gloom,
Through tribulation, hate, and scorn, or through the portals of the tomb,
Till our returning King shall come to take His exile captives home,
O! what can buoy the spirits up? 'Tis this alone—the blessed hope.

So the glow of Advent hope lights up our lives here and now.

This, then, is how we are Advent-ist as we enter the twenty-first century—not in exactly the same way that our Adventist foreparents were, but authentically, passionately, and (in our best moments) radiantly Advent-ist nevertheless—living in joy and not in fear, in love and not in competition, in generosity and not in acquisitiveness. Our Advent hope does not predict the future, but looks forward to it eagerly (which is spiritually more important); for it knows that the future is, in the most profound sense, God's future, that what is coming is the activity and presence of God, and that in everything God will be working for good (Rom. 8:28).

"Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses," our Advent hope calls us to "lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely," and "run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith" (Heb. 12:1-2 NRSV). In other words, we Adventists should be truly hopeful, truly Advent-ist.

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18 Moltmann, 22-29.


STORIES OF CONTEMPORARY BEASTS AND REMNANTS

Introduction of topic & speakers

Sabbath Worship - ASRS Meetings, 1999

Kendra Haloviak
Columbia Union College

Not too far from where we are meeting today... my Great-great-great grandmother, Belinda Loveland, her husband Reuben, and close friend Ellen Harmon, eagerly anticipated the soon return of Jesus. They loved the “blessed hope.”

But somewhere along the family tree, the “blessed hope” became the “dreaded fear.” Somehow, as the stories of early pioneers were told to the children and the children’s children, the powers of the beast took center stage. Would they be ready for Jesus’ return? Would they be able to resist the temptations of the beast powers?

When my mother started dating a New Yorker with a Russian name, her New England relatives had some concerns. Quickly, though, they discovered that one of my dad’s hobbies was learning about Adventist history. In his own studies on Ellen White he discovered a recurring theme in her writings—“Christ, our Righteousness.” With the assurance of salvation, Mrs. White, and those who would follow could courageously challenge the beast powers. People of faith go on the offensive against the beast!

Our seven speakers today will discuss contemporary beasts and the people of faith—the remnants-- who challenge them:

Keith Burton, is an Associate Professor of New Testament at Oakwood. He will share with us some insights into the life of Sojourner Truth

Zdravko (Zack) Plantak, Croatian by birth, Adventist by conviction, and currently a Professor of Theology at Columbia Union College will share actions by remnant in Yugoslavia during the past year.

Roy Branson, also a Professor at CUC, and Director of the Adventist Center for Law & Public Policy speaks about those committed to the power, might, and means of the tobacco industry

Marta Teel first identifies herself as a public servant. She teaches at the Bloomington High School in Colton, California. Her family engaged the beast powers in Spain, and continue to do so today.

John Webster is a professor of Theology and the History of Christianity at La Sierra University. A pastor for seven years, John shares the struggles with beast powers in South Africa.

Jill Lamberton is a graduate of Walla Walla College and Western Washington University. She currently teaches at Portland Adventist Academy and her scholarly interests are at the intersection of Religion and literature. Jill will focus on Jonathan Kozol’s work with inner city children.

Herald Weiss is Professor of Religious Studies at St. Mary’s College. He will be making a presentation this afternoon for the SBL meetings (“First Century Jews, Christians and the Sabbath.”) Dr. Weiss shares the stories of the eight people killed by death squads in El Salvador.

Revelation 12:11 – “But they have conquered him by the blood of the lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they did not cling to life even in the face of death” (NRSV).
VOICES OF REMNANT RESISTANCE TO THE POWER OF THE BEAST
John W. Webster
La Sierra University

I would like to share with you this morning the story of three lives—Beyers Naudé, Thula Nkosi and Ginn Fourie—lives with little in common, except for the coincidence of shared South African nationality, the consistency and coherence of their prophetic witness against the power of the beast to silence, stunt and kill, and the serendipitous privilege I have had to become acquainted with each of them. I would like to call their stories, "voices of remnant resistance to beastly pretense." But first a word about the use of the apocalyptic image "the beast" in the context of Apartheid South Africa. I think the term denotes (and not merely connotes)—"that civil-religious concoction of blasphemy, coercion, human arrogance and injustice that seems to find root all too easily in our midst." And here I am quoting from the SAUC's recent official "Statement of Confession" presented to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission last year. For the Beast of Revelation has reared its ugly head not only in the medieval papacy but also in the modern civil-religions of fascism, nazism, totalitarian communism and apartheid, to mention only its most notorious incarnations.


An Afrikaner's Resistance and Hope in the Face of the Silencing Power of the Beast

I met Beyers Naudé for the first time in a ram-shackled hall at the University of the Western Cape. Though by now justly famous for his almost single-handed resistance to the heresy of apartheid from within the Dutch Reformed Church itself, I was deeply impressed by his humility and passionate theological seriousness. Here was a "white Afrikaner of white Afrikaners. If any have reason to boast in the flesh, important as this is for die eie Afrikaneridentiteit ["proper" Afrikaner identity], it is he: born the son of a NGK [Dutch Reformed Church] minister; of conservative Voortrekkers and Dutch stock; his father a Boer chaplain during the Anglo-Boer War, and founding member of the Afrikaner Broederbond. Beyers was a graduate of the patriotic Stellenbosch University, a member of the elitist Afrikaner Broederbond and moderator of the NGK in the Transvaal. Yet he was finally ostracized, demonized, defrocked and banned for seven years by the leaders of the same Afrikaner nationalism that gave him birth." [Charles Villa-Vicencio, Resistance and Hope]

In response to the Sharpeville massacre of March 1960 (when the police shot and killed 69 black people who had been peacefully protesting the pass laws), the World Council of Churches (WCC) sent a delegation in December to meet with the South African member churches at Cottesloe in Johannesburg. "With this meeting the South African church entered into a new phase of its history. And the name of Beyers Naudé was poised to become a household word throughout South Africa, and soon it would be known in Christian circles around the world." What happened?

In a slow and measured way Beyers had been moving away from the Apartheid ideology of his upbringing and its theological justification throughout the decade of the 1950's. But the Cottesloe consultation was to mark a breaking point. The overwhelming majority of the church delegates at Cottesloe (including those of the NGK) worked in harmony with the WCC representatives to produce a document of far-reaching symbolic value condemning racism as unbiblical. The recommendations of the consultation were certainly not of a radical kind, even by the standards of the day. They would have been accepted as self-evident by most Christians around the world at the time. But South Africa is a strange society, and a storm was unleashed. The recommendations were seen to be a signal that the church, and more significantly the NGK delegates to the consultation, were ready to reject the biblical and theological justification of apartheid. Prime Minister Verwoerd perceived danger and magisterially called the NGK delegates to order. He told them that they had allowed themselves to be unduly influenced by the liberal views of the WCC, and reminded them that theologians too had to have a single mind in affirming the high purposes of apartheid. He told them they needed to recant, and recant they did. It was Beyers Naudé alone who refused to deviate. He stood alone and experienced the icy winds of alienation which he would feel again and again in later years. The night before the Transvaal synod made
its final decision on the Cottesloe Statement, he wrestled with his conscience:

"I had to decide. Would I because of pressure, political pressure and other pressures which were being exercised, give in and accept, or would I stand by my convictions, which over a period of years had become rooted in me as firm and holy Christian convictions? I decided on the latter course, and put it clearly to the synod that with all the respect which I have for the highest assembly of my church, in obedience to God and my conscience, I could not see my way clear to giving way on a single one of those resolutions, because I was convinced that those resolutions were in accordance with the truth of the gospel."

What followed is history. The NGK withdrew from the WCC, Beyers Naudé was forced to resign as Moderator of the Synod, and the NGK eventually produced the notorious study *Ras, Volk en Nasie en Volkeverhoudinge in die Lig van die Skrif* [Race, Ethnicity and Nation: Race Relations in the Light of Scripture] which would contribute so largely to the Ottawa decision to declare apartheid a heresy, and the suspension of the membership of that church from the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. Beyers Naudé started an ecumenical journal *Pro Veritate* to work for change within the Afrikaans speaking churches. He founded the Christian Institute in 1962 with at first a similar goal, which then later broadened to focus on Black experience and theology in South Africa—something almost unheard of at the time.

But the State did not sit idly by. Using the arm of the church, it stripped Beyers Naudé of his ministerial credentials, and began a process of harassment, intimidation and threat that became the stuff of his life. I still remember growing up and hearing the news reports of the security police raiding the Christian Institutes office or Naudé’s own home in the wee hours of the morning looking for incriminating evidence for what they took for granted—that despite his persistent witness to Christ and his Gospel—he must be a crypto-communist. Eventually, on 19 October 1977 the State lost its nerve and served banning orders on Beyers Naudé and the Christian Institute. Banning meant being restricted to one’s local magisterial district. Never being able to meet with more than one other person at a time. And above all, total silencing. It was illegal to quote anything a banned person said or wrote. It was the State’s instrument of choice in silencing its most vocal foes—such as Steve Biko and Winnie Mandela. And now it attempted to silence one of its own. For seven years Beyers Naudé disappeared off the face of the earth. By the time the banning order was lifted (quite unexpectedly on 26 September 1984) processes were already underway that would eventually culminate in the end of Apartheid and the liberation of at least the political aspirations of the majority of South Africa’s peoples. Eventually, it would be the Beast itself, not Beyers Naudé, that would be silenced. He speaks still. Now urging us all to realize that while official apartheid is gone, economic apartheid has not, and the struggle continues. Stooped, greying and frail—he cannot keep quiet while we still wait for the coming Kingdom of God. Listen to what he wrote in a final issue of *Pro Veritate* in 1977 after the Soweto uprising involving school children:

"Gloom and despondency dominated many white Christians. The future looms before them in dreadful greyness, unrelieved by any sparkle of hope or delight, so they seek means of sensual or spiritual escapism, and let the government be their god. Sixty-seven years of white power have failed to produce a peaceful and hopeful society, and government promises to secure the future of whites by the use of massive armed force are no comfort. The economy is breaking down under the cost of forcefully segregating and subjugating 80% of the population. Is there no shame when whites must shoot hundreds of school children to maintain their superiority? Superior to what? But Christians who prophecy only doom must realize they are not speaking with a Jesus voice. There is an alternative programme in which the positive contribution of whites is fully demanded, arising from the faith that God is busy with his programme. The strategy of God is at work in our history and it is our task to find and follow his purposes. That is what the Christian faith is about, and the task for which we are sent to make disciples."

Resistance and Hope. This is the dialect the Remnant talk.

An African Adventist’s *Loyal Critique* in Face of the Stunting Power of the Beast

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When I returned to Helderberg College in 1991 from Princeton I kept hearing the name of Thula Nkosi from my Black students. He and Pule Magethi had just published the little booklet God or Apartheid: A Challenge to South African Apartheid, probably the most pointed and incisive critique of Adventism’s fatal flirtation with apartheid published to that date. I quickly discovered that here was a Black Adventist intellectual with profound insight. His grasp of the problems of colonialism and the all-too-common failure of missionaries to contextualize the gospel, and affirm indigenous cultures in any way, to say nothing of the dehumanizing effect of apartheid, was impressive. We invited him to the College as a guest lecturer, and his ability to communicate with Black and White alike was astonishing. Here was a man of insight, learning, wisdom and grace. He helped us understand experiences we had never had, and could never have. Yet he didn’t even have a BA degree. He was not a minister, nor was he employed by the Adventist church. He was a sometime teacher at Bethel, and even helped out in the ministry, but he never had a permanent position—never a chance to finish his degree. Sadly, even the church that he loves so much has had difficulty understanding the role of its “loyal critics.” So Nkosi remains—outsider, prophet, thinker—a remnant voice that has, without bitterness, resisted the stunting power of the Beast.

A Mother’s Choice for Forgiveness and her Vision of Reconciliation in Face of the Killing Power of the Beast

It was the best of times. It was the worst of times. It was 1993. Mandela was free. South Africa had chosen negotiations over bloodbath. The die had been cast. The first free and fair election was just around the corner. But for some in the PAC (a smaller liberation party, heavily invested in the armed struggle) the end was not yet. Whites had not yet suffered as they deserved. Peace was coming too soon. Young operatives had not yet had a chance to earn their revolutionary credentials. The war could not stop—just yet. And it had now gotten ugly. A group of PAC guerillas had stormed into St James, a popular Evangelical Anglican Church killing hundreds of worshipers in a hail of AK47 bullets. Shortly thereafter another church was hit by the same group. Fear was back in the air.

But tonight New Year’s Eve was approaching. Time for celebrating. Lindy Foure, a vivacious Adventist university student was with her friends at the Heidelberg Restaurant near UCT, that night. Unexpectedly the doors burst open and a trio of PAC operatives fired round after round into the restaurant. Lindy’s body crumpled to the floor, and she died in agony in her friend’s arms a few moments later. With most of the church pastoral team away at the time, I was called to break the news to the family. How does one describe such grief? What a waste? So close to the end of hostilities? So near and yet so far. What does one say? Lindy was the very epitome of the New South Africa—bright, optimistic, non-racist, open. But now nothing.

At the funeral, I was somewhat taken aback when Ginn Foure, Lindy’s mother, asked if she could read a prayer that she had prepared, while the closest family and friends formed a huge circle around the simple pine wood casket. But I was astonished and moved to tears as I listened to a Mother’s prayer I will never forget. Though violated and broken and outraged at the evil and pain of the act, in a steady and clear voice she prayed a prayer of incredible power. A prayer of forgiveness for the perpetrators, a prayer asking for love—the love Jesus showed on the cross. “Father forgive them for they know not what they do.”

But people sometimes have superhuman strength during a crisis. Not so with Ginn Foure. A year later, after the operatives had been arrested and charged with the murders, Ginn found herself in court facing young men who denied it all. After their criminal conviction and imprisonment, Ginn went to see them in prison—to tell them that she had forgiven them, and wanted to try to understand the experiences and traumas of their lives that had led them down the road they had chosen. They remained hardened and unresponsive.

Eventually the three PAC operatives applied to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission for amnesty for their politically motivated acts. Hearings were held. Victims and perpetrators talked face to face. They admitted to the killings, but claimed they only acted on orders from higher up the organization. Ginn Foure, just out of the hospital after cancer treatment, supported their request for amnesty, and again—without in any way minimizing the devastation their acts had caused, or the evil and futility of the resort to violence—supported their request for amnesty. But going further, she sought them out after the hearings for a personal visit. There they sat in chains, and for the first time they opened up to her, moved by her powerful witness to the gospel of grace and forgiveness. The leader of the trio, looked
at Ginn and said, “I do not know how you can do it. If it were my daughter that you had killed, I know I could never have forgiven you.” Touched by her desire to understand the experience of living under apartheid, they agreed to further contacts. Eventually, they committed together to try to do something concrete and positive for both victims and perpetrators of violence from every quarter. With Ginn’s continual urging and pushing this need has now been accepted by all the political parties in South Africa and steps are underway for practical implementation.

Invited last year to present a paper at the international conference on the Psychological Effects of Torture in the Post-Apartheid South Africa—telling her story, she was the only one to receive a standing ovation.

Truth, Reconciliation, Forgiveness. Stopping the cycle of violence. Remnant Resistance to the Power of the Beast—the power of the beast to silence, the power of the beast to stunt, and the power of the beast to kill.

Let me end with the words of the official Church “Statement of Confession” to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission:

“In the face of the heresy of apartheid, we confess that we have failed by our sins of omission and commission to properly evidence the endurance of the saints, keep the commandments of God, or hold fast to the faith of Jesus, thereby misrepresenting the eternal gospel of Jesus Christ (Rev 14:6,7). This has been hurtful to our society, to the identity and mission of our corporate church, and to the lives of its individual members. Therefore, in deep repentance we seek for forgiveness from God and our fellow citizens, and commit ourselves to reformation, justice and reconciliation.”

“We commit ourselves, therefore, once again and all the more earnestly to the proclamation of the “eternal gospel” of the universality of God’s love; the denouncement of the “Babylonian captivity” of the church in which it sells its soul to the state; and the articulation of a more effective and clear warning against the worship of the “beast”—that civil-religious concoction of blasphemy, coercion, human arrogance and injustice that seems to find root all too easily in our midst (Rev. 14:6-11).”

South African Union Conference “Statement of Confession” to the TRC, 1998
STORIES OF CONTEMPORARY BEASTS AND REMNANTS: JONATHAN KOZOL

Jill Lamberton  
Portland, Oregon

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up  
like a raisin in the sun?  
Or fester like a sore—  
And then run?  
Does it stink like rotten meat?  
Or crust and sugar over—  
like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags  
like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

The day after Jonathan Kozol read this poem by Langston Hughes to his fourth-grade class, he was fired. The year was 1964 and the city was Boston. Kozol had recently graduated from Harvard University. The school in which he taught was one of Boston’s most poor and segregated; Kozol’s class didn’t have a room, but shared the school’s auditorium with another fourth-grade class, the choir, and a drama group. He was the 16th teacher these 35 fourth-graders had had since starting kindergarten. They were reading at the first-grade level and he was grasping at anything that might claim their interest in reading. Poetry seemed to work. A girl whom Kozol describes as “one of the most embittered children in the class” began to cry at the words of Langston Hughes’ poem. Perhaps she too had been wondering what happens to a dream deferred. In any case, she went home and memorized the lines. When both she and Kozol arrived at school the next day, she was fired. It seems the poems he’d been reading, those by Robert Frost and Hughes, were not on the approved fourth-grade list. It seems the poems he’d been reading were “too advanced.” It seems the poetry of Hughes, in particular, was deemed “inflammatory” (Inequalities 1-2).

Jonathan Kozol is a teacher. In the 35 years since he was fired for reading poetry, Kozol believes that in terms of poverty, quality of education, and segregation, America’s inner-city schools have gotten worse, not better. Jonathan Kozol is a recorder of stories. His nine books call by name the beasts in contemporary America: Homelessness, poverty, segregation, oppression, repression, an educational system that fails its most needy students, and the government and media cover-up of these contemporary realities. At issue for Kozol is that in the 1990s, American children suffer all of these forms of oppression in this land of opportunity, and children, as we all know, do not make these choices for themselves. There is a dragon afoot when the children of the world’s richest nation are handed a sagging heavy load of an American dream. Kozol is dedicated to telling the stories of those whose stories middle-class America doesn’t want to hear. Those Kozol struggles to educate are the comfortable, those who think they have heard before the stories of the poor and who have now stopped listening.

Kozol is certainly not alone in his political views. The description I just read would not seem to make him stand out or stand alone, but there is more to this story. Kozol’s method is different. Explaining the impetus for his 1991 book Savage Inequalities: Children in America’s Schools, Kozol writes, “It occurred to me that we had not been listening much to children in these recent years of ‘summit conferences’ on education, of severe reports and ominous prescriptions. The voices of children, frankly, had been missing from the whole discussion” (5). Kozol’s method is to talk to the people that those who share his concerns are generally content to talk about. Because his method is different, the beasts and the remnants he sees and names are consistently different, unexpected. His heroes are children, school teachers, Harvard-educated ministers who choose to return to embittered inner-city parishes to fight beasts and oppressive systems that are gaining strength.

Kozol’s most recent book, Amazing Grace: The Lives of Children and the Conscience of a Nation, was published in 1995. The book contains conversations with residents of Mott Haven, a neighborhood in the South Bronx,
whose streets, according to the NY Times, contain the “deadliest blocks” in New York City (Amazing Grace 5). Kozol is drawn to Mott Haven by a few burning questions he wants to ask of the children here. He wonders, “What is it like for children to grow up here? What do they think the world has done to them? Do they believe that they are being shunned or hidden by society? If so, do they think they deserve this? What is it that enables some of them to pray? When they pray, what do they say to God?” (5).

Teenage David, a resident of Mott Haven who is caring for his mother as she cies of AIDS, tells Kozol, “Evil exists. I believe that what the rich have done to the poor people in this city is something that a preacher could call evil. Somebody has power. Pretending that they don’t so they don’t need to use it to help people—that is my idea of evil” (23).

*Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints (Rev. 13:9; last part).*

Kozol’s work lifts up the faithful, those who endure, and for Kozol these are often tireless church workers. He writes, “Saddened by the streets, I am repeatedly attracted into churches. I search them out, and though some of the pastors speak of politics and strategies of change, it is not their politics that I am really seeking, but their company. Many in their conversations, cite the gospels. When I mention I am Jewish, they have often gone out of their way to draw upon Isaiah and Ezekiel and the other prophets. Meeting these men and women is a stirring experience for me. They are among the most unselfish people I have ever known. Many really do see Jesus in the faces of the poorest people whom they serve” (78).

As a perhaps inadvertent confirmation of this early claim in his book, Kozol ends his book on the Mott Haven streets inside a church. It’s Mother’s Day, and the Reverend Barbara Ann Groover rises to preach. She tells the story of Hagar who fled to the wilderness with her small son. After reading the scriptural account, Reverend Groover tells her audience of mostly single mothers, “You may not have an Abraham to stand beside you. But I want you to know God blesses every mother on this earth. I want you to know there is a song for you. I want you to know that Hagar went down on her knees beside the water in the wilderness and, like a tree standing by the water, she was not afraid, because God spoke to her and told her that He had engraved her child’s name upon the palm of His own hand” (227; Kozol’s emphasis).

*What happens to a dream deferred? Does it dry up like a raisin in the sun?*

The epigraph to Kozol’s Amazing Grace offers one answer. It reads: “And I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away....And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold ..., I make all things new” (xi).

But the body of Kozol’s work reminds us that this newness is hardly present, nor does it always seem imminent. The pain of these children is old, their stories are old, their dreams are old. And Kozol asks us to renew our commitment to hear. Right now it appears most have stopped listening.

Jonathan Kozol knows that there is renewal in stories. The ministers who live and work among the poorest of America’s children believe this too, and therefore continue to breathe life into very old stories. The children whom Kozol meets have stories, hope that in telling Kozol their stories they will be recognized, confirmed, alive. Kozol, in turn, in an act of good faith, tells us their stories.

*Let anyone who has an ear hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches.*

Works Cited


ON THE APOCALYPSE AS LITURGY

Today's worship service approaches the Apocalypse of John as a celestial liturgy. Believers in every age have viewed the Apocalypse not only as a work to be "analyzed" or "deciphered" but also as a psalm of praise to be "enacted" and "celebrated." The liturgical format of the book builds on hymns and prayers that are punctuated by doxologies, alleluias, and amens. Worship aids include flaming candlesticks, golden bowls, and burning censers. Participants in the service, in addition to John, are the Risen Lord and assorted heavenly creatures, with fully one hundred and forty-four thousand elect leading a vast multitude in antiphonal refrains.

John's liturgy was written for the seven churches of Asia Minor that endured the alien atmosphere of pagan Rome. These fledgling Christian congregations are implored to honor the Lord of history who conquered the ostentatious wealth and persecuting power of secular culture. As brutal persecution by the Babylonian beast threatens the body and subtle cultural and economic seduction by the imperial harlot threatens the soul, these remnant communities are exhorted to stand against false religious and political systems and indeed to "Come out of her."

The apocalyptic language of the liturgy hurls hearers through space and time as they journey into heavenly and earthly and subterranean spheres while piecing together fragments of humankind's cosmic story. Divine and demonic symbols of this great controversy flash larger than life of the screen of universal history. Beasts rampage and nations give obeisance. Harlots seduce and populations succumb. Winds blow and the earth shakes. Bowls are poured out and history screams. Woes are flung against space and the universe is hushed. And through it all the vast multitude shouts "Alleluia!"

The Babylonian beasts, imperial harlots, and demonic dragons are real. Very real. The forms of these false systems change, of course, but they stalk the faithful of every age. Yet the shout of "Alleluia!" is also real. It proclaims that ultimate reality lies rather with the New Jerusalem than with Babylon. The unlocked city, the temple-less religion, and the tree of life whose leaves heal the nations all call up a radically new reality—a reality in which persons and cities and churches and nations spring from values inspired by One who says, "Behold, I am making all things new."

In anticipation of this new reality—and in the face of false Babylonian powers which coerce, manipulate, and persecute—the slain Lamb calls believers to form remnant communities which heal, nurture, and build. This call has enabled the faithful remnant throughout history to cope. And to hope. And it is this same call that our own worshiping community celebrates and enacts today.

"Hear, you who have ears to hear, what the Spirit says to the churches!"

Hymn: For All the Saints

For all the saints
Who from their labors rest
Who Thee by faith
Before the world confessed,
Thy name, O Jesus,
Be forever blest,
Alleluia. Alleluia.

And when the strife is fierce,
The warfare long,
Steals on the ear
The distant triumph song,
And hearts are brave again,
And arms are strong.
Alleluia. Alleluia.

Thou wast their rock,
Their fortress, and their might;
Thou, Lord, their captain
In the well-fought fight;
Thou, in the darkness, drear
Their one true light.
Alleluia. Alleluia.

From earth's wide bounds
From ocean's farthest coast,
Through gates of pearl
Streams in the countless host,
Singing to Father,
Son, and Holy Ghost,
Alleluia. Alleluia.

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Reader 1: After this I heard what sounded like the roar of a vast throng in heaven; and they were shouting:
‘Alleluia! Victory and glory and power belong to our God.
For true and just are his judgments!
He has condemned the great whore
Who has corrupted the earth with her fornication,
and has avenged upon her the blood of his servants.’

Reader 2: Again I heard what sounded like a vast crowd,
like the noise of rushing water and deep roars of thunder,
and they cried:
‘Alleluia! The Lord our God, sovereign over all,
has entered on his reign!
Exalt and shout for joy and do him homage,
for the wedding of the Lamb has come!
His bride has made herself ready,
And for her dress she has been given fine linen, clean and shining.’

Reader 1: Then one of the seven angels spoke unto me and said,
‘Come, and I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.’
Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth,
for the first heaven and the first earth had vanished,
and there was no longer any sea.

Reader 2: I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming out of heaven from God,
made ready like a bride adorned for her husband.
I heard a loud voice proclaiming from the throne:
‘Now at last God has his dwelling among men!
He will dwell among them and they shall be his people,
and God himself will be with them.
He will wipe every tear from their eyes
There shall be an end to death, and to mourning and crying and pain;
For the old order has passed away!’

Reader 1: Then he who sat on the throne said,
"Behold! I am making all things new!"
I saw no temple in the city,
for its temple was the sovereign Lord God and the Lamb.
The gates of the city shall never be shut by day—
and there will be no night.
Then he showed me the river of the water of life.

Reader 2: On either side of the river stood a tree of life,
which yields twelve crops of fruit,
one for each month of the year.
The leaves of the trees serve for the healing of the nations,
and every accursed thing shall disappear.
There shall be no more night,
nor will they need the light of lamp or sun,
for the Lord God will give them light;  
and they shall reign for evermore.

Reader 1:  
Then I looked, and on Mount Zion stood the Lamb,  
and with him were a hundred and forty-four thousand  
who had his name and the name of his Father written on their foreheads.  
I heard a sound from heaven like the noise of rushing water;  
It was the sound of harpers playing on their harps.  
There before the throne they were singing a new song.  
That song no one could learn  
except the hundred and forty-four thousand,  
who along from the whole world had been ransomed.  
They were singing the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb.

Hymn: Worthy, Worthy Is the Lamb!

Worthy, worthy is the Lamb,  
Worthy, worthy is the Lamb;  
Worthy, worthy is the Lamb  
That was slain.

Savior. Let Thy kingdom come!  
Now the power of sin consume;  
Bring Thy blest millennium,  
Holy Lamb.

Glory, Alleluia!  
Praise Him, Alleluia!  
Glory, Alleluia  
To the Lamb

Reader 2:  
I, Jesus, have sent my angel to you  
with this testimony for the churches.  
Happy are those who wash their robes clean!  
They will have the right to the tree of life  
and will enter by the gates of the city.

Reader 1:  
'Come!' say the Spirit and the bride.  
'Come!' let each hearer reply.

Reader 2:  
Come forward, you who are thirsty;  
Accept the water of life, a free gift to all who desire it.

Reader 1:  
He who gives this testimony speaks, "Yes, I am coming soon."

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

Reader 2:  
The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you all.

Amen.

Benediction
Those attending the ASRS annual meeting were privileged to experience original art depicting the Seven Churches of Revelation. The excellent sculptures were.

Representation of the Churches

prepared and presented by Robert L. Preston from Atlantic Union Colleges. Photos of the exhibit and the artist’s statement are included with this publication

Artist’s Statement

Eight sculptures were created to develop a visual concept of the seven churches of Revelation for the Adventist Society for Religious Studies. This was done in conjunction with their meetings during

The Church at Ephesus

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The Church at Smyrna
Biblical Literature held in November 1999 in Boston. I understood at first that the topic was to be the Apocalypse and also the

The Church at Pergamumt

limited to the seven churches of Revelation. To be innovative and creative dealing with the seven churches, I found that I had to do

The Church at Thyatira

exhibit was to be in the famous Massachusetts Institute of Technology Chapel. Artists have always found the subject of the apocalypse interesting and the MIT Chapel is an outstanding space in which to exhibit sculpture.

I was told, "The expectation for the Saturday morning service this year is that it will be innovative and creative, utilizing the arts, including portable free-standing sculpture."..

After I had started the series on the apocalypse, I was informed that I was

The Church at Sardis
a great deal of research to develop the concept of the reality of the churches. It was impossible to use all of the symbols so I took artistic license in some cases during the creative process of working with the subject matter.

The Church at Philadelphia

The major concerns were the visual format of the work and how it would present in the chapel space. The MIT Chapel is round so I took advantage of the rounded concept and built open cylinders so the theme of each work would be seen from inside out; the perfect circle would seem to be broken with each open cylinder, as each church was imperfect. Clay seemed to be the natural medium to work with because of the natural process of forming something from the soft malleable clay to the fragile drying period of the sculpture waiting to be fired at an intense temperature in the kiln. During the firing, the clay becomes very hard and is not the same soft material that it first was. It changes just as the churches changed.

Theologically, I saw that the churches were a developing symbol of the hand (humanity's place in the work of God), of the ear (that of listening), and of clay (the human element in the church, treasurers in earthen vessels).
Robert L. Preston, is the Art Coordinator for the Art Department at Atlantic Union College in South Lancaster, Massachusetts. From July of 1991 to 1995, he was the Chairman of the Art/Interior Design Departments at the college. As Chairman of the Art/Interior Design Departments, he taught, organized and evaluated programs for the Art Department and taught for and supervised adult degree program students. He was also the curator for the exhibits for the Weidner Center, and the present time he is the director of the Bartlett Gallery and develops programs for students to intern and research in area art museums.

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C. MERVYN MAXWELL
1925 – 1999

C. Mervyn Maxwell was born January 13, 1925 in Watford, England, and moved with his parents to California in 1936. Following an extended illness, he died July 21, 1999 at Berrien Spring, Michigan. A professor emeritus at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary since his retirement in 1988, he had taught church history and later served as chairman of the department.

Mervyn earned his Bachelor’s degree at Pacific Union College in 1946, a Master’s at the Seminary in 1951, and a Doctor of Philosophy from the University of Chicago in 1966. He began his ministry in California, pastoring several churches in Northern and Southeastern California Conferences. It was while he was teaching religion at Union College in Lincoln, Nebraska in 1968, that he transferred to the Seminary.

He was a prolific writer and published many articles and books, including *Man, What a God!* and *Tell It to the World*, a history of the Adventist church. Sales of his books number more than 700,000 copies, and his two-volume commentary on Daniel and Revelation, *God Cares*, has been translated into several languages.

As a specialist in Adventist history, he was a co-founder of Adventist Heritage Ministry, an organization for the preservation and restoration of significant historic sites, and for fifteen years before his death was an active charter member. Projects have included the William Miller house in Maine, Hiram Edson’s barn in upstate New York, and the Adventist Historic Village, currently under construction in Battle Creek, Michigan.

At the time of his death, he was acting editor of *Adventist Affirm*, a popular magazine affirming the validity and contemporary relevance of historic Adventist beliefs and practices.

Dr. Maxwell was the son of the late Arthur S. (Uncle Arthur) and Rachel E. Maxwell. He is survived by his wife, the former Pauline Weitz, their son, Stanley and his wife Phemie, three brothers A. Graham, S. Lawrence, and D. Malcolm; a sister, Deirdre Smith, and a little granddaughter, Roxanne.

The funeral service was conducted in Pioneer Memorial Church on the Andrews University campus by William Fagal of the Ellen G. White Estate. In place of flowers, Dr. Maxwell had requested gifts to Adventist Heritage Ministry.
WALTER FREDERICK SPECHT
1912–1999

Walter Frederick Specht was born on the campus of Campion Academy at Loveland, Colorado on July 17, 1912. He died October 30, 1999 at Loma Linda, California.

His mother Eva, nee Sperling, was the daughter of Mennonite German immigrants from Southern Russia who were homesteading near New Home, North Dakota. Walter’s father, Frederick George Specht, immigrated from Germany to Wisconsin at the age of 15. He eventually became a teacher in North Dakota at the same school attended by Eva. A relationship developed that led to their marriage in 1902. George contracted tuberculosis while teaching and pastoring at Sheyenne River Academy and was persuaded by his physician to move with his family to Colorado in the hope of regaining his health. They settled on a small farm near Campion Academy in 1910 so that the children could attend Adventist schools. George died in 1919 when an influenza epidemic swept Colorado, leaving Eva with six children to bring up and educate and a farm to run. The children ranged in age from sixteen to four, and Walter was the next to the youngest at seven.

During his high school years, Walter felt the call to the ministry and began to preach in small churches that did not have a regular pastor. He graduated from Campion Academy in 1930 and went on to attend Union College in Lincoln, Nebraska and Walla Walla College in College place, Washington. He graduated from Walla Walla College with a Bachelor of Theology degree in 1936. During those years he gave diligent study to the Greek of the New Testament and was introduced to New Testament textual criticism. While at Walla Walla he also was introduced to Velma L. Fish, and they soon became very fond of each other. They were married in 1936, and Velma became a loving, supportive pastor’s wife.

Walter spent 10 years in pastoral-evangelistic work in the Montana, Oregon, and Oklahoma Conferences. He continued his study of Greek and Hebrew and completed a M.A. in Biblical Languages from the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary. During this time a daughter, La Rena Eloise, was born in 1938 and a son, Daryl Le Roy, was born in 1942.

In 1946, Walter joined the religion faculty of La Sierra College, Riverside, California, as an instructor in Greek and Religion. More than 20 years of teaching there were interrupted by a two-year absence to work on a Doctoral degree in New Testament and Early Christian Literature at the University of Chicago. He received his Ph.D. in 1955 and became chairman of the Religion department at La Sierra College the same year.

In 1967, Walter joined the faculty of the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary of Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, as chairman of the New Testament Department. Ten years later he returned to California to become Dean of the Division of Religion of Loma Linda University, a position he held for two years before retiring.

Walter always had an interest in languages and in the history of the Bible—its formation, its transmission in manuscript form, and its translation. He especially liked to study and compare the many English versions of the Bible. He was a diligent Bible student and had a desire to explore and learn new things. He also had a passion for teaching Theology students and a lifelong commitment to improving the ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Walter had an insatiable love for books, which he both read and collected for his extensive library. Spare moments almost always found him reading. He also enjoyed writing and was a contributor to the Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary and Bible Dictionary, Andrews University Seminary Studies, and numerous other publications. He is probably best known for the book he co-authored with Sakae Kubo, So Many Versions? First published in 1975, it appeared in a revised and enlarged edition in 1983.

Walter was fond of good music and loved to sing. He was for several years in the Loma Linda University Church choir. He also loved getting out into nature and climbing mountains. He and Velma enjoyed camping, hiking, and traveling the world together. Gardening and growing roses were other favorite pastimes.

Walter was kind, thoughtful, loving, and respected by students and colleagues alike. He was devoted to his family, to Christian education, to the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and most of all to the God he loved all his life.

Velma, his wife of 62 years, preceded him in death on March 19, 1999. Walter’s brother, Oswald Specht, and sister, Olivia Emery, also preceded him in death. Members of the immediate family who mourn their loss are brothers, Ed Specht, Carl Specht, and Henry Specht; his daughter La Rena Taylor of Morristown, Tennessee; and his son Daryl Specht of Farmington, New Mexico. In addition, he leaves seven grandchildren, thirteen great-grandchildren, and a large number of other relatives, friends, students and colleagues.

—Prepared by Daryl L. Specht

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The Churches of Revelation

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