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THE CONCEPT OF THE MILLENNIUM IN REVELATION 20:1-10:
ITS ORIGIN AND MEANING

James T. H. Adamson



James T. H. Adamson, Ottawa, Canada, 1990



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INTRODUCTION

According to the narrative in Rev 20:1-10 the seer has a vision of an angel descending from heaven, with a key and chain in his hand. He proceeds to bind Satan and to throw him into the Abyss where he is securely bound for the space of a thousand years. Thrones are set up for judgment, and beside them are seen the souls of the martyrs who had been beheaded for their loyalty to Christ. They come to life in the first resurrection, and reign with Christ for a thousand years as priests of God and Christ.

At the end of this period Satan is released from his prison and sets out to seduce the nations, described as Gog and Magog, and to assemble them for the assault he will make on the holy city. But, when they surround the city, they are destroyed by fire from heaven, and the devil is cast into the lake of fire.

It seems that all these events are the postlude to the Parousia of Christ, of which we read in ch. 19, and the prelude to the Last Judgment and the descent of the New Jerusalem, which are described in 20:11 to 22:5.

This period of a thousand years is called the millennium and the subject of the millennium raises many questions. Where did the idea come from? Where did the author get his ideas about the divine being who comes like a warrior, about angels and Satan and

martyrs, about the vast army around the holy city? Would there have been any loss if he had omitted this section of his account of last things? Why did he not proceed from the account of the coming of the Messiah to that of the Last Judgment? If there were other options, why did he choose this one? "The millennium is one of the most perplexing problems in apocalyptic." [1]

We are not concerned in this essay with the history of the idea of the millennium after the book of Revelation was written. That is another story and it would lead us into accounts of millenary movements. We shall be interested in these only so far as they shed light on the meaning of the idea.

We shall be concerned rather with the antecedents of this concept, and shall make an effort to penetrate the author's own thinking on the question. If, as he indeed seems to be, he was the only New Testament writer who propounds this view, can a reason be given for the exception?

The book of Revelation is what it is because it was written by a man having a certain tradition and living in a certain situation. The situation was one of stress and persecution and fear of further suffering (1:9; 2:9). It was a situation that was fraught with danger for the churches, and the author wrote to

1. J. Gray, The Biblical Doctrine of the Reign of God (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1979), p. 267.

hearten, to encourage loyalty to the faith and to keep hope alive (2:10). He believed he had been given a message from God, the Father of Christ (1:1,6). He informed his readers that, however distressing their present circumstances, they had to remember that God reigned (19:6), not the anti-God forces, and that deliverance from heaven would come soon (22:7). There are letters to individual churches, but the whole book is really a letter in which are contained the visions which John had received. Jesus the crucified and risen, who is at the right hand of God, will come and assert himself and show that he is also ruler of the kings of the earth.

As the drama of the book unfolds we become increasingly aware of two planes, the earthly one on which the church experiences its conflicts and the nations their divine judgments, and the heavenly one in which God is praised by angels and saints and where the contests of earth are first enacted.[2]

The seriousness of the times and of life on earth is revealed in the cry of the martyrs: "How long, O Lord, before thou wilt judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" (6:9-11) and by the description of the heavenly

2. M. Gourgues, "The Thousand-Year Reign (Rev 20:1-6): Terrestrial or Celestial?" CBQ 47 (1985), pp. 680f. Also H. Kraft, Die Offenbarung des Johannes (Tübingen: Mohr, 1974), p. 253.

multitude: "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation" (7:14).

There is a great antagonism between the good and evil in the spiritual world, between God and the devil, between the hosts of heaven and the minions of the dragon (ch. 12). But reassurance is given to the church on earth that their victory is certain. The dragon is driven out of heaven and gives its power to the two beasts (ch. 13), but the day of their judgment will soon dawn. The beast and the false prophet and the dragon itself will all be destroyed (chs. 19, 20).

The church on earth then should be strong and full of hope because the Lord God omnipotent reigns and he will soon act to ensure that justice is done. After the final reckoning the heavenly city will descend to earth (chs. 21, 22)

The verses of the passage, 20:1-10, fit into this greater whole. It too contains a message of hope and reassurance, seemingly for the martyrs and confessors, or, shall we say, for all Christians, by showing them the blessings that would follow martyrdom. Tables will be turned; they will be judges instead of being judged. They will share the rule of Christ, cui servire est regnare. They will experience a special blessedness and will participate in the very holiness of God. They will be priests as well as kings. Death will have no power over them.

So our verses seem to contain a promise for the faithful. The question for us to answer is - What was the nature of that reward? What was the seer's own understanding of this vision of a kingdom?

The question is so easy to answer as it might seem. We cannot say - Let us go to the text and we shall find the answer. The truth is that the faithful have been doing that for centuries and have found different teaching.

Much of the problem is connected with the nature of the literature. Apocalyptic is a distinct genre. It is almost like theology conveyed through poetry. It is full of imagery. There are living creatures with eyes in front and behind. There are dragons and beasts and angelic hosts. There are trumpets sounding and stars falling from heaven. There are locusts and olive-trees, and plagues and earthquakes. There is much symbolism. The heavenly city is cube-shaped, like the Holy of Holies. Its walls are of jasper and its gates are pearl. Numbers too have a significance. Seven stands for perfection and there may be something of that meaning in a thousand also for it is the cube of ten. Obviously such pictures cannot be taken literally, and we have constantly to ask what John is trying to convey by his symbols. The book is also concerned with the next world, or with the mysterious frontiers between this world and

the next.[3]

Nor can we be guided overmuch by John's antecedents. We have to recognize that he was a creative artist, and he brought the freshness and originality of the spirit to his work. The imagery he may have taken from the past but he infused new meaning into old forms.

Our purpose is to find out how this idea arose in the mind of the author. Our plan is to look first at the principal interpretations of the passage that have been given in the course of the history of the church; while the doctrine has never been espoused by the main churches, varied views have been held by many sects and individual Christian thinkers and Biblical students. We shall then suggest the approach of our thesis before making an extended exegesis of the passage.[4]

3. For Apocalyptic see: S.B. Frost, Old Testament Apocalyptic (London: Epworth, 1952); D.S. Russell, The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1964); J.J. Collins, ed. Apocalypse: The Morphology of a Genre (Semeia 14. Chico, California: Scholars Press, 1979); C. Rowland, The Open Heaven (London: SPCK, 1982).

4. In the footnotes, references to journals and standard works are normally in the abbreviations used in the four volumes of the Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962) and in the Supplementary volume (1976).

CHAPTER ONE

TYPES OF INTERPRETATION

I - The Literal Historical

It is not our intention to describe all of the interpretations that have been given of the millennium passage. They are manifold. Nor is our primary concern the history of millenary ideas and movements. We have isolated what seem to be the three principal approaches to the understanding of the text. These we shall describe, giving only sufficient illustration to elucidate the meaning.

The literal interpretation of the passage was one of the earliest and has proved to be one of the most persistent. It accepts those closing chapters as providing a programme of events for the last times. At the parousia of Christ the forces of evil will be shackled and the kingdom of the Messiah will be established on earth. It will last for a thousand years, at the end of which the devil and his legions will be destroyed. The Last Judgment will take place, and this will be followed by the kingdom of God.

This view was popular in the early church, that is, during

the first four centuries. It is to be found in authors who were considered heretical as well as the orthodox, and it appears in both east and west. Some of the principal representatives are Papias, Cerinthus, Justin, Tertullian, Irenaeus, Nepos, Commodian, Lactantius and Victorinus. We may note that there is no trace of it in Clement of Rome, Ignatius, Polycarp, Tatian, Athenagoras, Theophilus and Clement of Alexandria. It may be true that we are not justified in arguing from their silence that they did not hold it,[1] yet the failure to mention such an important doctrine is surprising, if indeed it was held.

According to H. Bietenhard,[2] the faith in the millennium was not based solely on Rev 20. The relatively bald statement of Revelation had to be filled out and made more concrete. The other sources were:

1. Old Testament Prophecies of the coming kingdom, like Is 30:26; 11:6; Gen 13:14f.
2. Extra-biblical passages like Syr Bar 29:5; Sib Or 5.
3. The Rabbinical schema of the cosmic week, from Gen 1 and Ps 90:4 (cf. Ep Barn 15:3-9).

1. J.F. Bethune-Baker, An Introduction to the Early History of Church Doctrine (London: Methuen, 1951, orig.: 1903), p. 69.

2. H. Bietenhard, "The Millennial Hope in the Early Church", SJT(1953) 12-30.

4. Jesus' sayings such as Mt 5:5; 8:11; 19:28; 26:29; Lk 14:12-14; 19:19.

Millenarianism has been described as "the form in which Jewish Christianity expressed the doctrine of the Parousia".[3] Daniélou finds two strands in early millenarianism:

1. The first was developed in Asia Minor and Syria. This tradition rests on the story in Gen 2 & 3, and the kingdom was painted in the paradisaical colours used by the Old Testament and Apocalypses to describe the messianic age: the reconciliation of the animals, the fecundity of the earth and a human life-span of a thousand years. This is the millenarianism of Papias, Cerinthus, Montanus and Tertullian. One of the features of this type is that it applies to the earthly reign of the Messiah certain prophecies of the Old Testament which properly relate to the world to come, though it is of course true that in the prophets themselves these two kinds of prophecy are not distinguished.

2. The second strand was developed in Syria and Egypt, and according to it the messianic reign was related to the calculations on the cosmic week consisting of seven millennia.

3. J. Daniélou, The Theology of Jewish Christianity (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1964), p. 378. We are indebted to the whole of ch. 14, "Millenarianism", pp. 377-404.

This constituted a speculation on Gen 1-2:2, and the seventh millennium corresponded to the seventh day of creation, on which God rested and which was associated with the Messianic reign. In this view God's creative action ceased, whereas in the first it was intensified. This view is found in Hippolytus and Methodius. It became known to Irenaeus, who fused it with the Asiatic conception.[4]

Of Papias, the bishop of Hierapolis at the middle of the second century, Eusebius writes: "He says that after the resurrection of the dead there will be a period of a thousand years, when Christ's kingdom will be set up on this earth in material form." He supposes that Papias is misinterpreting the account in Revelation and fails to grasp the meaning of the mystic and symbolic language.[5]

The teaching of Papias is confirmed by Irenaeus in an oft-quoted passage: "The days shall come when the vines shall grow, each having ten thousand branches, and on each branch ten

4. Daniélou, The Theology 399.

5. Euseb. III: 39.11. in Eusebius: The History of the Church tr. by G.A. Williamson (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1983), p. 152. Eusebius considers Papias a man of very small intelligence and that it is partly due to him that the great majority of churchmen after him took the same view, of which Williamson writes in a footnote "We shall need more evidence before accepting this contemptuous dismissal of Papias and so many others as unintelligent. Did they misinterpret the apostolic accounts, or did Eusebius misinterpret theirs?"

thousand twigs, and on each twig ten thousand shoots, and on every one of the shoots ten thousand clusters, and on each cluster ten thousand grapes, and each grape when pressed will give five and twenty measures of wine....that is what is attested in writing by Papias." In the same passage he speaks of the great harvests of wheat and of fruit. Animals also will live in peace with one another and will be fully subject to men.[6]

A modern scholar considers that the above Fecundity Logion had its roots in Roman, Hebrew and Mesopotamian speculation concerning supernatural fecundity in the end time. He writes that Papias was aware of Amos 9, Ezek 47 and Joel 3, and was also influenced by Enoch, Baruch and the oral pre-history of the Talmud.[7]

Millenarianism was found also among some of the Gnostics, e.g. Cerinthus, and according to his opponents his concept of the messianic kingdom was even more materialistic than that of Papias. We are indebted again to Eusebius, in a passage quoting Dionysius: "This, they say, was the doctrine he[Cerinthus] taught

6. Irenaeus, Against All Heresies V 33,3-4. in The Ante-Nicene Fathers ed. A. Roberts and J. Donaldson (Buffalo: Christian Literature Publishing Company, 1885), vol. 2, p. 563.

7. J.C. Gregory, The Chiliastic Hermeneutic of Papias of Hierapolis and Justin Martyr compared with later Patristic Chiliasts (Doctoral Thesis: Baylor, 1983), pp. 83-126. For Papias see also G. Maier, Die Johannesoffenbarung und die Kirche (Tübingen: Mohr, 1981), p. 50.

- that Christ's kingdom would be on earth; and the things he lusted after himself, being the slave of his body and sensual through and through, filled the heaven of his dreams - unlimited indulgence in gluttony and lechery at banquets, drinking-bouts and wedding-feasts, or (to call these things by what he called more respectable names) festivals, sacrifices and immolation of victims." [8]

A similar materialism is to be found in Nepos, a third century Egyptian bishop. He taught that the promises made to the saints in holy scripture would be fulfilled more in accordance with Jewish ideas and that there would be a millennium of bodily indulgence on the earth. He believed he could draw on the Revelation of John to prove his notion. He was rebuked by Dionysius. [9]

There are others who teach this doctrine but avoid the extravagances. In the Epistle of Barnabas, to be dated probably about 135 A.D., we read that those who crucified Jesus will see him descend from heaven to punish the wicked and to receive into his kingdom all who have suffered affliction because of loyalty to him. Christians have already become a new type, a re-created humanity. The full consummation of this process is presently to

8. Euseb. VII 25.6. in Williamson, Eusebius 309.

9. Euseb. VII 24.4. in Williamson, Eusebius 307.

be realized. The end is to be attained six thousand years after creation, each day of creation week representing one thousand years in the duration of the world. Then God will send his son to introduce a rest day of one thousand years answering to the sabbath, following the work of creation. At the close of this millennium a still greater transformation will be accomplished.[10]

Justin Martyr is quite instructive about the subject. The Lord Jesus Christ will return to Jerusalem which is to be rebuilt, and the Christian people are to be gathered together there and live in happiness with him and with the patriarchs and prophets. For a thousand years the kingdom at Jerusalem will last for all believers in Christ and then there will take place the universal and eternal resurrection and the judgment. In support of his belief he cites Is 65:17-25, whose literal fulfilment he evidently looks for, and justifies his expectation of a thousand-year reign of Christ in the new Jerusalem from the book of Revelation, which he considers to be a work of the apostle John.[11]

10. Barn 15:1-9 tr. by J.A. Kleist in Ancient Christian Writers, J. Quasten and J.C. Plumpe, eds. (Westminster, Maryland: Newman Press, 1948), vol. 6, p. 58.

11. Justin Martyr, Dialogue with Tryphon 80, 81, 109. in The Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1, pp. 239f.

In the doctoral thesis mentioned above J.C. Gregory notes that there is some tension in his view of the end.[12] In the Dialogue and in the Apology the general resurrection is normally followed by the eternal order with God. But in the Dialogue 80,81 there is a chiliastic theme; there is a resurrection of Christians, followed by the millennial reign of Christ in a rebuilt Jerusalem and then by a final resurrection of the remainder of mankind. His chiliasm is buttressed from Is 65:17,22; Ps 90:4; 2 Pet 3:8; Lk 20:35f, which latter he quotes against crude materialism.

This view is confirmed by E.R. Goodenough, who writes that, while Justin laid an overwhelming emphasis on the second coming (he is the first to speak specifically of the deutera parousia) and the last judgment, he did not have a definite and consistent conception of what is to happen at the end.[13]

It is interesting to note that to Justin the belief in the millennium was not an essential part of the Christian faith and he acknowledges that many genuine Christians do not hold it, but he suggests that many who reject it also reject the resurrection

12. Gregory, The Chiliastic Hermeneutic 184.

13. E.R. Goodenough, The Theology of Justin Martyr (Amsterdam: Philo Press, 1968), pp. 279-291.

of the body, which is an essential doctrine.[14]

When talking about the kingdom Irenaeus never specifically refers to a thousand-year period, although he repeatedly refers to Rev 20:2-7. He joins together the Revelation passage with 1 Cor 15:24-28. Opposed to the Gnostics and their anti-materialism, his chiliasm is a natural extension of his idea of the word become flesh. Further, Satan must be bound by the same chains with which he bound men.[15]

Irenaeus has the thought that in the millennium the righteous will become accustomed to the glory of the Father and will also have access to the communion of the saints and angels. The Jerusalem of the kingdom is where "the righteous are disciplined beforehand for incorruption and prepared for salvation".[16]

There is a comparable thought in Tertullian who says that the millennial city is an image of the final city that is to come. "We do confess that a kingdom is promised to us upon the earth, although before heaven, only in another state of

14. Justin Martyr, Dialogue 80 in The Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1, p. 239.

15. Gregory, The Chiliastic Hermeneutic 267ff.

16. Irenaeus, Against All Heresies V 35.2. in The Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1, p. 566

existence; in-as-much as it will be after the resurrection for a thousand years in the divinely built city of Jerusalem, let down from heaven". He also writes of the appropriateness of an earthly kingdom "since it is both just and Godworthy that His servants should have their joy in the place where they have also suffered affliction for His name's sake." [17]

In the above reference to the Epistle of Barnabas we noted the description of the period as a rest day of a thousand years. This is the second stream of thought which appears in these early centuries and is based on Ps 90:4 (A thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday..) and Gen 2:2. It is found for the first time in the epistle of Barnabas and reappears later in Hippolytus of Rome, and, in the east, in Methodius of Olympus.

In his commentary on Daniel, Hippolytus tells us that at the end of six thousand years there comes the Holy Day on which God will rest from his works. This sabbath is the figure of the future kingdom of the saints, when they will reign with Christ after his advent from heaven, "as John describes it in his Apocalypse". The six thousand years are not yet fulfilled because John tells us in ch.17:10 "Five have fallen, one remains,

17. Tertullian, Ag. Marcion 3:24. in The Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 3, p. 343.

but the other is not yet come".[18]

Methodius writes in his Symposium that in the seventh millennium, when time will end and the Lord cease his work of creation, there will be a cessation of human procreation and also of the fruitfulness of the earth.[19]

It is not our purpose to describe the extension of the teaching on the millennium during the first four centuries, but we may note that this early form has been the position of many commentators in the course of the history of the church, and it represents the interpretation of the Adventist churches and sects, for example, Plymouth Brethren, Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Seventh-Day Adventists.

The interpretation of C. Rowland may be taken as expressing the view of some modern scholars, and generally of Adventist churches.[20]

He comments that John teaches a messianic kingdom, a temporary one before the final kingdom of God. What is described

18. Hippolytus, Commentary on Daniel, 4:23 (Paris: Ed. du Cerf, 1947), p. 307.

19. Methodius, Symposium, or concerning Chastity in French translation "Banquet" 9:1 (Paris: Librairie Lecoffre, 1932), pp. 156-161.

20. Rowland, The Open Heaven 435-436.

in Rev 20:4-6 is more than a prelude to the new age. It is a vindication of the faithful in the eyes of the world. The apparent futility of the life of the martyrs is vindicated. Further, those who are obedient to God in the testing situations of this present life have shown themselves best equipped to exercise rule in the life to come (cf. Lk 22:29f).

According to Rowland, the inclusion of the messianic reign on earth in the eschatology of Revelation should warn us not to assume that apocalyptic had lost faith in history as the sphere of redemption. Creation is not so corrupt that it is beyond hope. There will be one big change, however. The temptation to evil will have been restrained by the binding of Satan. Throughout history God is in complete control, in creation, in redemption by the cross of Christ, and in the final destruction of the forces of chaos.

Prigent calls the position of the early Fathers an apocalyptic or literalistic millenarianism and would distinguish it from the prophetic millenarianism of many later exegetes, especially Protestant, e.g. Brutsch, Behm, Bietenhard, Cullmann and Rissi.[21] Prigent quotes Brutsch to the effect that Rev 20:4-6 announces "sous le signe du Christ triomphant de la

21. P. Prigent, "Le Millénium dans l'Apocalypse johannique" in F. Raphael, ed. L'Apocalyptique (Paris: Geuthner, 1977), pp. 140-156.

parousie et avec le correspondant arrêt de toute activité satanique, une période à venir de l'histoire, épanouie dans la justice de Dieu, où les victimes des persécutions hériteront la terre pour y glorifier Dieu, où l'Eglise, bafouée dans la mesure de sa fidélité, régnera dans l'esprit de service du Christ et en communion continue avec lui."[22]

Schnackenburg points out that Cullmann and his pupil Rissi suggest that the Regnum Christi that began with the Resurrection continues into the initial stage of the future aeon and the millennium will be the church of this final period. He adds that Bietenhard arrives at a similar conclusion except that it is in reverse and he allows the future aeon to penetrate into the present era.[23]

The early Christians who believed in the millennium were called Chiliasts. As it is put by Boettner,[24] "It is commonly understood that today those who bear the name Premillennialists are logically the same as those who formerly were known as

22. Prigent, "Le Millénium" 140.

23. R. Schnackenburg, God's Rule and Kingdom (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), p. 341.

24. L. Boettner, The Millennium (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1966), p. 5. On pp. 144 and 145 Boettner mentions some of the topics that are treated in modern Premillenarianism, namely, the Rapture, Tribulation, and Dispensationalism in which a prominent place is given to the Jews.

Chiliasts, although their systems differ in several important respects."

II - The Spiritual Historical

The millenarianism of the early church was gradually changed. The Parousia did not take place. Persecutions ceased and at the beginning of the fourth century Christianity became the state religion. Jewish ways of thinking were supplanted by Graeco-Roman notions. There was a new emphasis on the church. "The allegorical interpretation of Scripture, introduced by the Alexandrian school, and sponsored especially by Origen, also had a chilling effect on all millennial hopes." [25]

In the second century the Gnostics rejected the conception, contending that the only resurrection possible was spiritual, partial here in this world and in perfection hereafter. [26] A doctrine of the resurrection of the body or even of personal immortality was precluded by their fundamental conception of matter as evil. The soul, freed from its limitations, is simply

25. L. Berkhof, The History of Christian Doctrines (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1937), p. 262.

26. See p. 11.

to be reunited with the Pleroma, the fullness of divine being.

[27]

Contemporary with the Gnostics was Origen (185-254) who condemned chiliastic views as absurd.[28] He argued that those who hold them are attached to the surface meaning of the letter only, and are given to the pleasures of the body which they think shall be theirs after the resurrection. They understand the scriptures in a Jewish manner, and believe that there will be family life and the procreation of children, and that an earthly Jerusalem shall be built on the foundation of precious stones.

The most formidable assault on chiliastic teaching was made by Dionysius of Alexandria, who rejected the apostolic origin of the book of Revelation, the strongest support of all millenarian ideas.[29] Nepos had written against the allegorical interpretation of Revelation, saying it must be taken literally.

27. Irenaeus illustrates Gnostic teaching in "Against All Heresies" I 24:1-2 and 24:5 (vol. 1 of above translation, pp. 349 & 350) from two Gnostics of the second century. Saturninus writes: After death the spark of life returns to what is of the same nature as itself and the other elements of man's composition are dissolved into what they were made from. A similar idea appears in Basilides: Salvation belongs to the soul alone, for the body is by nature subject to corruption. See also K. Rudolph, Gnosis (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987; orig.: 1977), pp. 189-194.

28. Origen, De Principiis 2.11.2. Tr. in Roberts and Donaldson, The Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 4, p. 294.

29. Euseb. VII 25.6 in Williamson, Eusebius p. 309.

The opposition of Dionysius was widely effective in banishing all materialistic expectations from the faith of the church. No thorough examination of the passage however was taken by the Alexandrian school.

A new millennial theory was propounded by Augustine, but he tells us that the source of much of his teaching was to be found in Tychonius, a writer of the fourth century.[30] Tychonius wrote a commentary on Revelation, interpreted almost entirely in a spiritual sense, in the manner of Origen. Augustine does not mention this work but it has been shown that he is deeply indebted to it.[31]

According to Augustine among the "Seven Rules" of Tychonius was "De recapitulatione" which states that the narrative is not continuous but repeats itself and goes over the same ground under different symbols. He makes the first resurrection spiritual, one of the soul, and the second corporeal, one of the body. The first is of those awakened by baptism from the deadness of sin to eternal life, and the second is the general, literal resurrection of all flesh. The millennium thus begins at the first advent of

30. Augustine, On Christian Doctrine 3, chs. 30-37. tr. by D.W. Robertson (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1958).

31. J.H.S. Burleigh, The City of God (London: Nisbet, 1949), p. 105. Burleigh tells us that the chief book of Tychonius was "Rules for the interpretation of Old Testament Prophecy" which is quoted and commended by Augustine in "On Christian Doctrine".

Christ. Another of his rules was "De temporibus", according to which a part of time may stand for the whole.

The above position is substantially that of Augustine.[32] He tells us that he had once been a chiliast but had turned against the doctrine because of the "carnal" position of some of its adherents.[33] Like Tychonius he regarded the thousand years as a figurative numerical, expressive of the whole period intervening between Christ's earthly ministry and the end of the world, in other words from his first advent to his second coming.

Starting from Jo 5:22-29 Augustine sees two resurrections, a resurrection to life and a resurrection to judgment. "The hour is coming and now is when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live". This is the soul's resurrection, according to Augustine. "The hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come forth, those who have done good to the resurrection of life and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment". This is the body's resurrection and is prior to the general judgment. The millennium is to be found in the first of these, the spiritual

32. Augustine, The City of God, tr. by J. Healey (London: Dent, 1945), xx:6-13.

33. Augustine, The City xx:7.

resurrection, the resurrection of the soul.[34]

Augustine develops his position also with the consideration of Mt 12:24 (No man can enter a strong man's house unless he first bind the strong man).[35] Satan is bound by the power of Christ during this whole period, and this means an inhibition of his full power of temptation. If he were allowed to practise fully his violence and fraudulence, he would pervert and destroy the faith of many. In the end he shall be loosed that the city of God may see what a potent adversary she has conquered by the grace of her Saviour and Redeemer.[36] The loosing means that the enemies of the church will be especially active in their opposition for three and a half years before the inauguration of the final judgment.[37]

He quotes Col 3:1,2, "If you then be risen with Christ, seek the things which are above where Christ sits at the right hand of God." The Church reigns even during the time of persecution because "the victorious souls of the glorious martyrs, subduing all earthly toils and tortures, have reigned and do reign with Christ until the expiration of the thousand years, and then shall

- 34. Augustine, The City xx:6.
- 35. Augustine, The City xx:7.
- 36. Augustine, The City xx:8.
- 37. Augustine, The City xx:11.

take their bodies again, and so reign body and soul with him forever." [38] While John mentions the martyrs only, " this is but taking a part for the whole, for we take the passage to mean all the dead that belong to Christ's kingdom, which is the Church." [39]

The thousand years are all the years of this age, "noting the plenitude of the time by a number most perfect. For a thousand is the cube of ten: ten times ten is a hundred and this is a square, but it is but a plane one; but to produce the cube multiply ten by a hundred, and there arises one thousand." [40]

The church now on earth is both the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of heaven. [41] It reigns with Christ even when it contains unworthy members because it reigns in the persons of those who are so in his kingdom that they are his kingdom. The camp of the saints is the church. [42] Even the new Jerusalem has to be understood in terms of the church. It is a kingdom of warfare where there are daily conflicts with the enemy, sometimes with victory, sometimes with loss, until the coming of the most

38. Augustine, The City xx:13.

39. Augustine, The City xx:9.

40. Augustine, The City xx:9.

41. Augustine, The City xx:9.

42. Augustine, The City xx:11.

peaceful kingdom.[43]

The thrones are the rulers' places of the church and the persons by whom it is governed.[44] But Augustine does not limit those who reign to church leaders. "Now this is not meant only of those whom the church specifically calls bishops and priests, but as we are all called Christians because of our mystical chrism, our unction, so we are all priests in being the members of one priest." [45]

It is therefore possible to say that for Augustine "the millennium was no longer a desideratum; it was already a realization." [46] In other words, Augustine's view is a kind of "realized eschatology", although we have to note that he does not wholly dissolve Christian eschatology in allegory. "Elijah shall come, the Jews shall believe, Antichrist shall persecute, Christ shall judge, the dead shall arise, the good and the bad shall sever, the world shall burn and be renewed. All this we must believe shall be, but in what order, our full experience then

43. Augustine, The City xx:9.

44. Augustine, The City xx:9.

45. Augustine, The City xx:10.

46. L.E. Froom, The Prophetic Faith of our Fathers (Washington: Review and Herald, 1950), vol. I, p. 482.

shall exceed our imperfect intelligence as yet."[47]

There is another interpretation very similar to this but it does not consider the millennial period the whole time of the church but only a part, the part being that period after the persecutions. Just as there was a renewal in Israel after the return from exile, described in Ez 37 in the allegory of the dry bones, so there will be a period of quiet in the church after the first resurrection and before the invasion of the land by Gog and Magog (Rev 20:7-10).

This seems to be the understanding of H.B. Swete. He writes that the age of the martyrs, however long its duration although that is symbolized by three and a half years, would be followed by a far longer period of Christian supremacy during which the faith for which the martyrs died would live and reign. This he thought to be the essential meaning of the thousand year reign.[48] As he tells us in the same passage that on the whole he thought Augustine was on the right lines, we may conclude that this position was a development of Augustine's.

This is also the view of M.-É. Boismard. "La résurrection des martyrs symbolise le renouveau de l'Église après la

47. Augustine, The City xx:30.

48. H.B. Swete, Commentary on Revelation (Grand Rapids: Fregel, 1977, orig.: 1906), p. 266.

persécution de Rome; le règne de mille ans correspond donc à la phase terrestre du Royaume du Christ, depuis l'arrêt des persécutions (chute de Rome) jusqu'au Jugement dernier."[49]

Support is given to this position by A. Gelin who writes: "L'exégèse de S. Augustin suivi par le P. Allo est de voir dans le millénium toute la vie de l'Église.....; mais cette exégèse est trop liée à la théorie de la "récapitulation"; alors que dans la perspective de Jean le millénium s'insère à une certaine place de la suite des événements et pourrait être un moyen de marquer le long retardement de la parousie."[50]

A. Feuillet thinks that to make the millennium coincide with the entire time of the church is incompatible with a really objective exegesis of the Apocalypse in which the millennium has a definitely circumscribed place within the framework of the entire eschatological drama. "We are more inclined to favour the thought of Swete, Boismard and Gelin."[51]

Post-millenarian views have to be grouped under this type. According to these the kingdom of God is now being extended in the world through the preaching of the Gospel and the saving work

49. M.-É. Boismard, L'Apocalypse (Paris: Desclee, 1953), p. 81.

50. A. Gelin, "Millénarisme" in SDB, 1292.

51. A. Feuillet, The Apocalypse (Staten Island, N.Y.: Alba House, tr. 1964), p. 121.

of the Holy Spirit, the world will be eventually Christianized and the return of Christ will occur at the close of a long period of righteousness and peace, commonly called the Millennium.

"Among Post-millenarians should be mentioned first of all the great Augustine." [52] We may note that Augustine is also claimed by the A-millenarians. [53] The truth is that both elements are to be found in Augustine. His teaching is amillennial because he denies that after the present dispensation there is to be a reign of Christ on earth before the last judgment. It is postmillennial because he identifies the whole of the gospel age with the millennium, after which Christ will come.

Post-millenarians believe that the binding of Satan is a long, slow process. [54] They do not consider that Rev 19:11-21 describes the Parousia. Rather it is a vision setting forth the age-long struggle between the forces of good and the forces of

52. Boettner, Millennium 10. It is more usual to limit the designation to modern figures. "Adherents to this postmillennial position are largely nineteenth century scholars such as Charles Hodge, A.H. Strong, C.A. Briggs, and David Brown. Most of them trace their view to Daniel Whitby, seventeenth century controversialist". See J.F. Walvoord in The Revelation of Jesus Christ (Chicago: Moody, 1966), p. 289.

53. Boettner, Millennium 110.

54. Boettner, Millennium 45.

evil in the world.[55]

Before we leave this section we might consider the views of the Reformers for they show the influence of Augustine and the prevailing mediaeval church position.

We have a good expression of Luther's attitude in his commentary on Ps 110:1. "The Anabaptists and similar erring spirits dream that before the Last Day all the enemies of the church will be physically exterminated and a church assembled which shall consist of pious Christians only; they will govern in peace without any opposition or attack".[56] As he comments on the phrase "Until I make thy enemies thy footstool" he goes on to write that this verse says that there are to be enemies continuously as long as Christ reigns on earth. Death will not be abolished until the Last Day when all his enemies will be exterminated with one blow.

The mediaeval church also spoke of the Last Day but its emphasis was completely on its significance for the individual as the day of judgment. With Luther there is the eager expectation of the coming of Jesus with its significance for the world as well as for the individual. It would mean the coming of the

55. Boettner, Millennium 30.

56. Luther's Works vol. 13 - Selected Psalms, tr. H.R. Klann (St. Louis, Miss: Concordia Publishing House, 1956), p. 263.

kingdom. History would come to an end and be completed in the ultimate kingdom of God, and there would come about the renewal of the entire world and its perfection as God's creation.[57]

The question is - how did Luther understand Rev 20? According to Althaus he interpreted it as the mediaeval church did, in terms not of the end of history but as a description of the church. "The millennium lies in the past and was brought to an end through the coming of the Turks or with the papacy becoming the antichrist".[58]

Calvin was as scornful of the position of the chiliasts as Luther was. "Their fiction is too childish either to need or to be worth a refutation".[59] He thinks their position is not supported by the Apocalypse. He argues that Christ's kingdom is not a transient but an eternal one. The grace of God and the power of Christ are fulfilled only when sin is blotted out, when death is swallowed up, and when everlasting life is fully restored. The hope of the elect would be undermined by a temporal limitation of the kingdom.

57. P. Althaus, The Theology of Martin Luther (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), tr. R.C. Schultz, p. 424.

58. Althaus, The Theology 419.

59. J. Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion (ed. J.T. McNeill, tr. F.L. Battles, London: S.C.M., 1961), p. 997.

While Calvin is critical of chiliasm what does he make of the thousand years?

In the same passage of the Institutes he has the sentence "For the number 'one thousand' (Rev 20:4) does not apply to the eternal blessedness of the church but only to the various disturbances that awaited the church while still toiling on earth".

H. Quistorp is critical of Calvin here, and seems to be right in saying that "the thousand years does not mean the eternal blessedness of the church but it is equally contrary to the text to suggest as he does that it is merely a question of various revolutions which the church militant on earth must expect".[60] In other words, in the view of this writer, it is a similar error to that of Augustine; he interprets the testimony of Revelation more in terms of church history than of eschatology.

60. H. Quistorp, Calvin's Doctrine of the Last Things, tr. H. Knight (London: Lutterworth, 1955), p. 160.

III - The Symbolic Transcendental

The above two types see the millennium as realized terrestrially. It finds expression on the plane of history, in the first case after the Parousia, but still on the earth, within historical time, in the second, in the story of the church between the first advent of Christ and the end of time.

The symbolic type of interpretation recognizes that the symbols are taken from this world, as they must be, but they signify something that belongs to the Beyond. It is not always clear what this something is but at any rate the symbols must be recognized for what they are, figures pointing away from themselves.

The view of I.T. Beckwith should be so understood.[61] He is opposed to taking John literally. John is not forecasting an actual period in history when the martyrs will reign. Rather he is indicating what the martyrs will gain by their steadfastness. They illustrate what Jesus says in Mt 10:39: He that loses his life for my sake will find it. Commenting on Beckwith's view R.H. Mounce writes: John's "essential meaning may be realized in

61. I.T. Beckwith, The Apocalypse of John (New York: Macmillan, 1922), pp. 736-8.

something other than a temporal fulfilment".[62]

Another such viewpoint is held by R. Schnackenburg. The word symbolic he thinks well describes Revelation as a whole.

He{the seer} has to describe as a human being for human beings the whole eschatological process in spatial and temporal categories, and this he does unaffectedly using many images and colours in temporal sequence with a dramatic climax. If we consider the course of events as they are described, the plagues and the last things proper, we have to recognize in it a language of symbolism, enriched with many Old Testament and Jewish apocalyptic images and symbols (colours and numbers) and also that the time-sequences are an artificial construction.[63]

With regard to the millennium he does not think that the seer was thinking of an actual inter-regnum.[64] He makes several points.

Earlier in Revelation there is no indication of a kingdom of Christ prior to the real kingdom of God. Indeed in 11:15 (the kingdom of this world has become our Lord's and his Christ's) God's rule is the same as Christ's (cf. 12:10). In 11:17f the attack of the nations (19:15, 19-21) is associated with God's assumption of kingship. Rev 5:10 means no more than that the redeemed will share in the reign of the Lamb when this embraces

62. R.H. Mounce, The Book of Revelation (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), p. 359.

63. Schnackenburg, God's Rule 342.

64. Schnackenburg, God's Rule 339-347.

the earth (cf. 22:5). The events which the seer views as a sequence are really one and the same event but they are given a successive description to create a strong impression. Christ does not come twice at the end. All the yearning of the church for Christ is assuaged at the Parousia (19:11ff) and no room is left for an interval of rule between this and the marriage of the Lamb (19:7; 21:2). God's future kingdom represented under the image of the celestial Jerusalem descending from heaven denotes no new phase in contrast to a kingdom of Christ. The throne of God and of the Lamb is to be found in the final city of God and there God's servants will fulfil their service as priests and kings (22:4f).

Schnackenburg would therefore be critical of the above two interpretations, of the first because it holds that there are two future kingdoms, of the second because it is based on a faulty exegesis. The verses from 19:11 are a description of the Parousia and consequently what is described thereafter concerns eschatological events only.

His conclusion is that the vision of the millennium is a symbolical description of the martyrs' victory and their special reward.

G. Rochais does not agree with Schnackenburg's argumentation. There is no call to argue against mythological

images as if they were historical realities. The seer does not have coherence and logic in his description of the real. However Rochais agrees with the general position of Schnackenburg. John has borrowed the image of a thousand-year reign from Jewish apocalyptic and used it to describe the reward of the martyrs. By the use of signs and symbols the author has given expression to the faith that those who freely surrendered their lives will be in the Beyond with Christ. God is the God who raises the dead and calls into being that which does not exist (Rom 4:17). Faith in the Parousia is stronger than the anguish of persecution for Christ has already conquered all evil.[65]

G.C. Berkouwer gives expression to this point of view and seems to favour it himself over against the view that John is making a proclamation of the future, indicating a historical interim rule. It is "a visionary illumination of the life of the martyrs".[66] It is not a narrative account of a future earthly reign of peace but "an apocalyptic unveiling of the reality of salvation in Christ as a backdrop to the reality of the suffering and martyrdom that still continue as long as the dominion of

65. G. Rochais, "Le règne des mille ans et la seconde mort; origines et sens. Ap 19:11-20:6." NRT 103 (1981) 831-56, esp. 851.

66. G.C. Berkouwer, The Return of Christ (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), p. 304.

Christ remains hidden".[67] The vision shows forth the victory of Christ, and by contrast the ultimate impotence of the power of Satan. It is apocalyptic comfort rather than a strictly chronological narrative account or a description as from the pen of a reporter.

In the course of his study of the subject Schnackenburg writes that the other Catholic interpretation is that the vision reflects a spiritual reality, which may be another way of saying the same thing. At any rate this seems to be a good description of E.S. Fiorenza's position, and to this we now turn.[68]

Fiorenza's main study of the subject is to be found in Die Tausendjährige Herrschaft der Auferstandenen, and she begins this monograph by acknowledging that the difficulties connected with the passage are almost beyond solution. She recognizes the reality of the two above-noted positions, which she calls the eschatological and the historical. She proceeds to ask some pertinent questions. Why is the rule of Christ and his faithful limited to a thousand years? Is a limitation of time meant by

67. Berkouwer, The Return p. 307.

68. E.S. Fiorenza, "Die tausendjährige Herrschaft der Auferstandenen (Apk 20, 4-6)" BiLe (1972) 107-124. Also Priester für Gott (Münster: Aschendorff, 1972), pp. 325-344. Also Invitation to the Book of Revelation (New York: Doubleday, 1966). Also The Book of Revelation - Justice and Judgment (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985).

this phrase or does it have a theological meaning? Why does the text speak of a thousand-year rule when 22:5 promises an eternal reign of the eschatologically saved? How can there be a limited reign after the Parousia and before the world judgment, and how can it be limited by Satan? Do vv. 20:4-6 not interrupt the course of the vision of 20:1-10?

She next makes a neat tabulation of the text and contends that the main thought of the section 20:4-6 is not so much the "thousand year reign" as the "first resurrection". She proceeds to place 20:4-6 in the context of the closing chapters of the book of Revelation. After the destruction of Babylon, the political power in the service of Antichrist, and following a short connecting piece (19:1-10), comes the Parousia, and the whole cosmos is snatched away from the anti-godly powers and placed under the rule of Christ. There is the announcement of the destruction of all men, and the portrayal of the punishment of the false prophet and the beast, who both owe their power to the dragon, and finally the destruction of the dragon itself. Then there is the final verdict about the fate of all men in the world court, and the portrayal of the new heaven and the new earth.

It is difficult to understand the sequence and relationship of 20:1-3 and 20:7-10 to 20:4-6. The first two passages deal with the punishment of the dragon and his demonic hordes. The third

passage seems at first glance to be an alien element in this context, though it has reference to the beast and a three-time mention of the thousand years. But in that setting the verses point up the liberation of the faithful from the power of the dragon and their taking over with Christ the lordship that had been usurped by the dragon and his followers, a rule which will last forever (22:5).

When Fiorenza considers the religious along with the historical-traditional background she notes that there are difficulties because the course of the end of history events is not uniformly depicted. There are different traditions and these traditions are intertwined. Non-Jewish influences, e.g. Persian, cannot be ruled out.

At any rate the influence of some of the Old Testament prophets is clear. The schema of Rev 20-22 seems to be taken from Ez 37-40ff. In both there is a time of testing for God's people and a judgment of world powers and a coming of the holy city. Revelation also enriches Ezekiel with features from Daniel 7 and Trito-Isaiah. The seer does not slavishly follow one model. The order of events may be changed and new elements introduced.

In later Jewish thought three views are to be taken into account.

1. According to the Two-Ages teaching, which was developed after 70 AD, there follows on this evil period in the world the coming age, which represents something new. At its beginning there is a judgment over all men (for enquiries began to be made about what happened to individuals, for example, those who had died as righteous believers or as martyrs), their resurrection, the destruction of this world and the advent of a new world.

2. The old Jewish national eschatology lived on. It was concerned with the future of the people of Israel, not with the fate of the individual. In this there is no universal world judgment over the peoples who are the enemies of Israel.

3. The universal and national expectations combined in a messianic inter-regnum; so that we have now time, Messiah time and eternal salvation. Messiah time is an interim period of earthly transitory salvation. The days of the Messiah are the last period of time of the present world time, in which there is still the occurrence of death. This view we find in apocalyptic writing like 2 Esd 7:26-35 and rabbinical literature (Eliezer ben Hyrkanos).[69]

Fiorenza thinks that the author of Revelation has clearly

69. According to Fiorenza other passages often quoted, like En 93:1ff; 91:12-17; 3 Sib 652ff; Syr Bar 29f; Slav En 33, do not have an inter-regnum.

been influenced by 1 and 2 above; indeed he binds those views together. In 20:4-6 he stresses that only those members of the new people of God who have not submitted to the anti-God powers will share in the first resurrection. In 20:11-15 he depicts a world judgment in which all the dead are judged according to their deeds.

Although it might appear that the third view influenced John, he uses it rather as a symbol than as a definite period of time. The author has taken over the idea of a thousand only on the grounds of tradition. 20:4-6 deals not with a messianic inter-regnum but rather with a definite aspect of eschatological salvation.

To establish this position she compares 2 Esd 7:26-35 with Rev 20:1-15 and notes that while in 2 Esdras after a messiah time of four hundred years on earth the messiah and his followers die, and the world is changed to the silence of primaeval times, before the dead rise and the Lord appears on his throne, in Revelation there follows at the beginning of messiah time the partial resurrection of the dead, but no mention is made of the death of the Messiah, and it is not said that Christ and his co-rulers will give up the Lordship after a thousand years. This limitation seems to apply only to the devil.

With regard to the number 1000 the earliest attestation of

the number is to be found in Slav En 33:1ff, where it marks the world's pause between death and new life, between this and the coming world. The origin of this may be in a combination of Gen 1:32, 2:1-3 and Ps 90:4. This age is of six thousand years and comes to an end with the seventh day, which represents the thousand-year Sabbath rest. The author of Revelation might have taken up the picture of a seventh millennium, in which the world returns to silence, since during this time all men had died. Into the place of world silence, and not into the place to which Jewish apocalyptic assigned the messianic kingdom, which has its place before the world silence, the author placed the statement about the thousand-year lordship of the Messiah. If this theory is true, the messianic lordship is not a period which belongs to this age but already belongs to the new world, to the eschatological time of salvation.

Fiorenza argues that the author seems to want to prevent a temporal understanding of the vision of 20:4-6 and thinks the 1000 has a qualitative characteristic. It is not a question of definite duration but rather a question of incorporating the eschatological hopes of the Old Testament and Judaism in order to emphasize the special position of Christ and his followers in the eschatological time of salvation.

The subject is treated also in her book "Priester für Gott". The main theme of Revelation is the achievement of the

reign of God and of Christ over the cosmos and the whole earth. The devil has temporary power given to him by God and exercises it over the earth through the beast, the false prophet and the great city of Babel. At the Parousia the earth is freed and the devil is cast down to the underworld just as previously he had been cast down from heaven to earth. While the earth is given over to the devil, there is a kingdom of God on the earth in the Christian community, though it is subject to temptation, suffering, death and judgment.

There are some significant sentences in the book. "There is a qualitative difference between the messianic reign of the followers of Christ and the Jewish hope of an earthly kingdom in Palestine before the end of the age, since the reigning ones according to Rev 20:4ff are by the resurrection completely removed from this age and belong to the future world." [70] Later she writes "Resurrection is resurrection for the earth which nevertheless is qualitatively different from the present earth by this, that it is removed from the power of Satan and the demon authorities and placed under the rule of God." [71]

The total fullness of salvation begins with the second coming of Christ. The authority is not given to the church as a

70. Fiorenza, Priester 327.

71. Fiorenza, Priester 331.

whole; it is for the faithful ones, those who have accepted the rule of God with their whole being. They have not only received the priesthood through faith in the sacrifice of Christ; they have proved worthy members by their life and witness. The author of Revelation does not mention the territory of the rule of the resurrected ones.

We have described Fiorenza's position in some detail not only because it illustrates the third type of interpretation but because it casts some light on the whole problem of the millennium.

The third type of interpretation then stresses the transcendental nature of the reward of the martyrs. The passage is not speaking about an earthly reign of Christ. Rather it is describing the reigning with Christ in heaven of those who have died in his name.

IV - Towards a Thesis Position

Scholars have not yet written the last word on the subject. As Schnackenburg writes: "We are a long way from any uniform and satisfactory interpretation. This must always depend on the

basic explanation of the Apocalypse and the theological background of the individual."[72]

In this section we are taking an initial look at the above three general positions and indicating our preference for the third. Some of the arguments made will be expanded later.

With regard to the first type of interpretation, the passage seems to limit the experience of the millennium to a certain group of Christians. Those in the early church who believed in the doctrine and the majority of pre-millenarians apply it to all the saints. But the passage speaks very clearly of those who had been beheaded for their testimony and had not worshipped the beast and its image. In no age of the church would such a description cover all believers.

The passage in Revelation is very short and scant. If we wanted a description of the millennium and its features, we could not find it there. Those who participate are raised to reign with Christ. They are blessed and holy. They are exempt from the last judgment. They are priests of God and Christ.

Those who have believed in a literal millennium have been forced to go to the utopian dreams of the prophets. They hold that the Old Testament prophecies of the Messianic kingdom,

72. Schnackenburg, God's Rule 339.

especially those concerning Israel, are fulfilled in the period of the millennium. Consequently we have the pictures of fruitfulness and longevity and in some cases sensuality.

There is a problem here, and it is recognized by H. Bietenhard, himself a pre-millenarian, in his major study on the subject.[73] He states that it is impossible to indicate exactly which Old Testament passages can be claimed for the millennium and which for the final kingdom of God.

We have a good illustration of the point in Is 65:17, "I create new heavens and a new earth". A modern pre-millenarian, H. Lindsey, says that this is a passage which describes the millennium.[74] Yet when we turn to Revelation we find the quotation at 21:1, where it appears after the Last Judgment and at the beginning of the description of the heavenly city and the final kingdom.

There was a similar confusion in the thought of the early Fathers. According to H. Bietenhard, as against Rev 20 Tertullian was expecting the heavenly Jerusalem as part of the millennium; to fill out his picture of the millennium Commodianus

73. H. Bietenhard, Das tausendjährige Reich (Zürich: Zwingli, 1955), p. 143.

74. H. Lindsey, The 1980's: Countdown to Armageddon (Bantam Books: Toronto, 1981), p. 173.

borrow features of the new creation in Rev 21; Victorinus of Pettau also believed that the heavenly Jerusalem would come down to earth during the millennium.[75]

Further, nowhere in Rev 20:4-6 does it say that the resurrected ones return to earth to reign. Certainly in 20:1 the angel is seen coming down from heaven, and afterwards (20:9) the hosts march over the broad earth. But vv. 4-6 look like an insertion into this passage, and there is no mention of the earth in them. Resurrection itself does not mean the assumption of a material earthly body (cf. 1 Cor 15:35-50, and also the body of the risen Christ). We are told that they reigned with Christ, but Christ now reigns at the right hand of God in heavenly places, that is, in the spiritual world.[76]

Father Gourgues makes the following points as he argues for a celestial reign in the millennium:

The alternation earth-heaven regularly occurs in the

75. H. Bietenhard, "The Millennial Hope" 17, 24, 25. The above argument is based on the understanding that pre-millennialists have gone outside of 20:4-6 to fill in their picture of the millennium and that in ch. 21 we have a description of the final kingdom of God. The argument loses its point of course if Rev 21:1-22:5 does not describe the final kingdom. Some scholars do indeed consider that this is the case, and find in it a description of the millennial kingdom, either in part or in whole, as we shall see later.

76. Gourgues, "The Thousand-Year Reign" 679-80.

descriptions in Revelation. See chs. 7, 11, 12, 14, 18 & 19.

There is no indication that the new existence inaugurated by the resurrected martyrs will be terrestrial.

The Christ is already reigning in heaven. See 3:21; 5:12; 11:15; 14:14; 17:14; 19:16.

Wherever the word throne is used in Revelation (47 times) it refers to celestial thrones, except three times when it is used of Satan's throne and the beast's throne.

Those who reign with Christ are the same as those in 15:2, where those who had conquered the beast are in heaven praising God.

The picture of the literalists is difficult to conceive. It portrays life continuing on the earth under the conditions that we know now. There is justice and peace but there is still death, and the government is administered by those who have been resurrected. We are to think of these rulers moving amongst the populace. It seems a strange mixing of the earthly and the unearthly. It is a kind of hybrid, an intermediate stage between the two ages, half on this side of death and half on the other.

When we turn to the second interpretation, we find that it says in effect that the millennium has been a reality since the resurrection of Christ. It is the age of the Gospel and the

Church, even although that age has been marked by much persecution and tribulation.

We may argue that in the period between the first and second coming of Christ there is little evidence that the devil is bound. Indeed a better description of the human situation would be in the words of 1 Pet 5:8, "The devil goes about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour". However, Augustine is alive to the reality of evil in the world.[77] What he is saying is that the devil's power is restricted so that the work of the kingdom may be carried on. There is a kingdom of Christ now and believers may enter it.

There is indeed such a kingdom. Christ has ascended to heavenly places and those who believe in him are united with him spiritually and reign with him. But that truth is based on other passages of Scripture. As far as Rev 20 is concerned, Augustine seems to have done violence to its exposition.

The text seems rather to be concerned with the Beyond, with the Last Things, with the End and what lies after the end. Augustine seems to treat Rev 20 as a "recapitulation" of the

77. Augustine, The City xx:7. The devil "is not only cast out from God's servants, but pursues them also with a causeless hate...who knows not the devil's daily seducing and drawing of others unto eternal torment?...Nor is it a wonder if the devil subvert some of those who are even regenerate in Christ."

preceding chapters instead of as describing a new age following chronologically on the events set forth in ch. 19. When the whole book is taken into account we are aware of the fact that John is looking forward to something that is about to happen, even although he recognizes the accomplishment of Christ in his cross and resurrection. The events that he looks forward to rise to a climax in the last chapters - the fall of Babylon, the destruction of the two beasts, the binding, loosing and destruction of the devil, the utter end of death and Hades, and the coming of the heavenly city. The thousand years of the martyrs' reign are clearly set in this closing period.[78]

It is possible to criticize the Augustinian position in other ways. Although Swete believes that Augustine is on the right lines, he writes "there are points at which the Augustinian

78. "Perhaps those who hold with the school of "realised eschatology" will hail St. Augustine as one of themselves". So writes Burleigh in The City 145. It appears to the present writer that this is the position of G. Caird in his commentary (G.B. Caird, A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine (New York: Harper and Row, 1966). In this otherwise admirable commentary we have difficulty in accepting two points that Caird makes: 1. The event that John expected to happen soon was not the End, but the persecution, which was an event so important that it could only be described in eschatological terms. 2. Like other Biblical writers John believed in a real End, but most of what has been interpreted as eschatological expectation was primarily a way of expressing the confidence that God was working out his purpose in the events of contemporary history(p. 236). We can only conclude from sentences like these that realized eschatology has no place for the End of the world, nor for the Parousia of Christ.

interpretation forsakes the guidance of St. John's words; it overlooks, e.g., the limitation of the first Resurrection to the martyrs and confessors." [79] This is a very big limitation.

The third position seems when first stated to depart considerably from the narrative. "They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years". There seems to be a period of time between the first resurrection and the general resurrection of the dead.

In answer to this we have to note that not only does the third type of interpretation recognize that it is the martyrs who are being talked about, but that the description is being made in the style of the whole book, namely symbolic. Where there is symbolism, we are not constrained to take a passage literally. There is great scope for interpretation, although it must take into account other passages where similar symbolism appears.

Apocalyptic writers exercised much freedom in developing what they read. In Dan 9:2 the author tells us that according to Jeremiah seventy years would pass before the end of the desolations of Jerusalem. When he is puzzled about the non-fulfilment of this prophecy it was revealed to him that the seventy years stood for seventy weeks of years. It would seem

79. Swete, Commentary 266.

that in this type of writing, when numbers are used, we are not bound to take them literally. As we shall see, John was influenced by paradisaical imagery and so we find some further justification for a symbolic interpretation of the thousand-year reign.

The reign has a transcendental nature. It takes place not only after the death of the faithful but after their resurrection. Its location is not the world as we know it, with its evil and suffering and death. The kingdom belongs to the age to come. It is brought into being by the Parousia of Christ.

If we argue that the victory of God must be won in the setting which he created and for which he has a purpose, in the sphere moreover where his servants have witnessed and suffered, we have to reply that the purpose of God is not fulfilled where there is evil and death. It is only after they have been destroyed that the great goal is reached. This is brought about by the Parousia. The purpose of God is not defeated, but it is attained in the new heaven and new earth. If the Parousia is a symbol, it is a symbol of more than the fact that God's purpose is being worked out; it indicates that the purpose reaches a fulfilment in a new reality, a new level of existence.

The theological background of the present writer leads him to favour the third type of interpretation, and the aim of this

essay is to suggest that the author is describing the reward of the martyrs; that he uses the idea of the thousand years symbolically and not as a measure of time; and that the bestowal of the blessedness on the martyrs is related to the End and to the Final Coming of Christ.

We propose now to present an exegesis of the verses, Rev 20:1-10. We shall divide the passage into three sections, and append to each an extended note on some leading ideas in the section. We shall then examine the context of the passage in the book of Revelation and its relation to the rest of the New Testament.

CHAPTER TWO

EXEGESIS OF THE PASSAGE

I - EXEGESIS OF 20:1-3

This section tells us of the binding of Satan, also called the dragon, the ancient serpent, the devil. He is immobilized for a thousand years so that he will be unable to deceive the nations. It is into this account that the story of the resurrection of the martyrs is set.

"1 Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain. 2 And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, 3 and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years were ended. After that he must be loosed for a little while".

v. 1 "Then I saw" (kai eidon)

This is a phrase of frequent occurrence in Revelation (over 30 times) and in the closing section it appears at 19:11, 17, 19; 20:1, 4, 11, 12; 21:1. Swete says of v. 1, "It must not be assumed that the events now to be described chronologically follow the destruction of the Beast and the False Prophet and

their army."[1] kai eidon is to be distinguished from meta tauta eidon which does mean "after this I saw". Swete points out that it does not, like the second phrase, determine the order of time in which the vision was seen in relation to the visions which precede it, but merely connects it with other visions.

"an angel coming down from heaven" (aggelon katabainonta ek tou ouranou)

It is strange that it is not God or Christ who effects the binding of Satan although it was Christ who brought about the judgment of the two beasts. At any rate, the angel is a heavenly power, an agent of God. "Like Michael at 12:7-9 the angel puts into effect the victory of others."[2]

"holding ...the key of the bottomless pit" (echonta tēn klein tēs abussou)

The angel comes with the power to consign the devil to the Abyss. John's universe is structured on three levels - the heavens, the earth and the underworld. Abussos (lit. bottomless) is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew Tehom. It was used to describe the waters beneath the earth (cf. Gen 1:2 & Ps 104:6-9). The earth was at first covered by it and then rested on it. It

1. Swete, Commentary 259.
2. J. Sweet, Revelation (London: SCM, 1979), p. 287.

came to have a secondary meaning, the place of the dead (e.g. Ps 71:20; Rom 10:7). It developed from the idea of the place of the dead, Sheol or the pit-dungeon, through the apocalyptic works (e.g. 1 En 10:13, the abyss of fire) to its New Testament meaning of the abode of the powers of evil. The word appears in Rev 9:1, 2, 11; 11:7; 17:8 and Lk 8:31.

v. 2 "And he seized the dragon" (kai ekratēsen ton drakonta)

We have in this verse the four names that Revelation uses for the devil. They all appear at 12:9. As drakōn it is the terrible monster that lies in wait for the offspring of the woman. When it is called ophis (serpent) we have an allusion to the story in Gen 3. The name diabolos means slanderer and this appears in the New Testament from Mt 4:1 on. Satanas transliterates a Hebrew word which means adversary, and is used to describe human adversaries and angels (1 K 11:14, 23; 1 Sam 29:21; Nu 22:22). The term came to be used of the adversary of mankind, the spirit that accuses men before God (Job 1:6; Zech 3:1).

"bound " (edēsen)

For the idea of the binding of Satan, as we shall see,[3] John had precedents both in the Old Testament and in

3. cf. p. 63.

extra-Biblical literature. We find references to the overpowering of the evil powers in Mt 12:28f; Lk 10:18f; and also in 2 Pet 2:4 and Jud 6, where the sinning angels are committed to pits of nether gloom and kept in great chains until the judgment.

"a thousand years" (chilia etē)

Swete takes this phrase to represent a long period of time, a great epoch in human history.[4] From this he goes on to relate the account to the story of the two witnesses in ch. 11 and to say that "if the 1260 days symbolize the duration of the triumph of heathenism, the 1000 years as clearly symbolize the duration of the triumph of Christianity." [5] In other words, John is making the point that the age of persecution is very short compared with the duration of the bliss of the martyrs.

Or it is possible to understand the phrase as representing something other than time, perfection or completeness, not unlike the number seven. There were more than seven churches in Asia Minor yet our author chose seven to represent them all. We may compare the use of seven in Ezek 39:9 and 39:12, where the weapons of the enemies of Israel make fires for seven years, and

4. Swete, Commentary 260.

5. Swete, Commentary 266.

where it takes seven months to bury their bodies. So a thousand, which is the cube of ten, is the number of completeness. It is used in our book more than once to stand for completeness of some sort, although it is only in this chapter that it stands alone.[6] In 21:16 we learn that the holy city is a perfect cube. Each side is 12,000 stadia (1,500 miles). The number 12,000 is the number 12, the number of Israel, multiplied by the cube of 10, a perfect number. The dimensions of the city cannot be taken literally; they stand for the perfect total of God's people.

Milligan stresses that these numbers have a symbolical, not a numerical, value. The thousand years express no period of time. They do not denote a space of time at the close of the present dispensation to be either preceded or followed by the Parousia.

"They embody an idea; and that idea, whether applied to the subjugation of Satan or to the triumph of the saints, is the idea of completeness or perfection. Satan is bound for a thousand years, that is, he is completely bound. The saints reign for a thousand years, that is, they are introduced into a state of perfect and glorious liberty."[7]

6. 7,000 in Rev 11:13; 12,000 in 7:5-8; 21:16; 144,000 in 7:4; 14:1-3; and with another number in 11:3; 12:16; 14:20.

7. W. Milligan, The Book of Revelation (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1900), p. 339.

v. 3 "and threw him into the pit" (kai ebalen auton eis tēn abusson)

Already the dragon has been cast out of heaven (12:9). Now he is cast out of earth and imprisoned in his own place.

Beasley-Murray notes that the Prayer of Manasseh has the closest verbal agreement of all literature with our passage. The Lord is addressed as one "who has shut up the abyss and sealed it with thy fearful name", an invocation "which appears to echo the ancient myth of the conquest of the sea-monster."^[8] But, as Charles points out, "Whereas it is a literal Satan overcome by an angel that is presupposed in our text, it is a mythological monster that is overcome by God in the Prayer of Manasseh". The mythological idea of the rising of the chaos monster against the creator at the beginning of the world had been before the seer's time changed into an eschatological expectation, i.e. the rebellion of Satan against God at the end of the world. It is the mythological idea that is set forth in the Prayer of Manasseh.^[9]

"that he should deceive the nations no more" (hina mē)

8. G.R. Beasley-Murray, The Revelation of John (London: Oliphants, 1974), p. 286.

9. R.H. Charles, The Revelation of St. John (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920), vol. I, p. 143.

planēsē eti ta ethnē)

To mislead is the devil's principal function. See 12:9 and 13:14. In Jo 8:44 he is the father of lies.

"After that he must be loosed" (meta tauta dei luthēnai)

The dei expresses some divine necessity founded on the necessity of the divine will; cf. 1:1; 4:1; 11:5; 13:10; 17:11. We have a similar idea in Dan 2:28 and 2:45. Commenting on the Greek phrase ha dei genesthai in Rev 22:6, T. Collins speaks of the "emphasis in the whole book upon the central fact that history is unfolding according to God's plan".[10]

Angels

In ch. 20 an angel comes down from heaven to bind the devil and this is one of many angels who appear in the book of Revelation. In fact there is not another book in the Bible with such a profusion of angelic beings.

The background to its view of angels, indeed to the whole New Testament view, is to be found in the Old Testament and later Jewish writings. They are spiritual beings who surround the throne of God and exist to do his bidding.

10. T. Collins, Apocalypse 22:6-21 as the Focal Point of Moral Teaching and Exhortation in the Apocalypse (Rome: Doctoral Dissertation, 1986), p. 116.

In Revelation the role of angels is paramount. "The Revelation of John is exuberant in its use of the angelic stage machinery of the Jewish apocalypses."^[11] The teaching of Revelation on angels is indeed similar to that of the apocalypses though it is a little more restrained. They are spiritual beings who stand in the presence of God and are ready to carry out his commands. One of their activities is the worship of God. "They stood around the throne and fell on their faces" (7:11). They are very numerous and are often described as armies or hosts. In 5:11 are mentioned angels numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands. When the Lord comes at the last "the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, followed him on white horses" (19:14).

They have high status and in the great judgment they are in the presence of the Father and before them the risen Christ will confess the names of those who conquer (3:5). Yet they are not to be worshipped (19:10). They are intermediaries between God and men. They are messengers carrying a message from God, and they are agents doing the will of God. They intercede with God for men. Commenting on 8:3 I.T. Beckwith says "A mediatorial service is attributed to angels in the Apocrypha and pseudepigraphical writings (cf. Tob 12:12, 15; En 9:3; Test Lev

11. G.F. Moore, Judaism (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950), vol. I, p. 404.

3:5)." [12] At the same time it has to be noted that many are angels of judgment.

Angels vary in authority and some are described as strong angels (10:1; 5:2; 18:1, 21). This suggests a hierarchy, as does 12:7 where Michael and his angels fight against the dragon. Swete notes the restraint and comments "Only one angel receives a name and it is borrowed from the book of Daniel (12:7, cf. Dan 10:21), and there is but a passing allusion to the seven angels of the Presence, of whom Enoch has so much to say (8:2, cf. En 20)." [13]

In 12:7 we learn also that there are wicked angels, whose master is the dragon. We may note also that in Revelation everything has an angel, the winds (7:1), the abyss (9:11), water (10:4), the churches (chs. 2 & 3). These angels seem to be the controlling spirits or forces of the various realities.

We may say then that in Revelation, as in the whole Bible, angel is no more than another word for the divine operation, and this is what the author seeks to convey when he speaks of the angel coming down from heaven (20:1).

We cannot say whether the angel has a self-consciousness and

12. I.T. Beckwith, The Apocalypse 553.

13. Swete, Commentary clxx.

a personal identity. We can say that, if it is a symbol, it is a symbol that represents a reality similar to the Spirit of God, a reality of divine omnipresence and activity and power.

Satan and his Binding

The concept of Satan is post-exilic in Hebrew thought. The word appears in three passages in later literature. In none of them can Satan be described as a personality who is destructively evil. In Zech 3:1, 2 the Satan (= adversary) is a heavenly being who challenges the fitness of Joshua to serve as high priest after the return from exile. In Job 1 & 2 the Satan is a member of the heavenly court who questions the integrity of Job and is permitted by God to put him to the test. There he is the accuser and the tempter. In 1 Ch 21:1 Satan (the definite article does not appear here) tempts David to the sin of taking a census. In the earlier version of the story in 2 Sam 24 it is God himself who submits David to the test.

It is in the inter-testamental period that the conception is fully developed. Here he is an evil personality. There is an "ever-growing tendency to dualism which, however, always stops short of being absolute through the all-controlling limitations imposed by Hebrew monotheism." [14]

14. O.C. Whitehouse, "Satan" in HDB IV (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1902) 408.

In the Book of Wisdom (2:24) Satan and the serpent of Gen 3 are more or less identified. Death entered the world through the envy of the devil. In 2 Enoch the devil became Satan after he left the heavens. 29:4 portrays how he was hurled from the heights with his angels on the third day of creation. But the fullest demonology is to be found in 1 Enoch. The demons proceeded from the giants who were the offspring of the fallen angels and the daughters of men. These demons work man's moral ruin (16:1). Satan is the ruler of the kingdom of evil, which is nevertheless subject to the "Lord of spirits" (65:6). In the Book of Similitudes there are satans who existed as evil spirits before the watchers fell by corrupting themselves with women. The four chief angels will cast them into a burning furnace on the great day "that the Lord of spirits may take vengeance on them for their unrighteousness in becoming subject to Satan and leading astray those who dwell on the earth" (54:6).

It is Gaster's view that this development took place when national fortunes were low.[15] It was felt that the sufferings of Israel were due not so much to divine displeasure as to demonic malevolence, experienced in the great conflict with the evil one.

15. T.H. Gaster, "Satan" in IDB 4 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962) 225.

Alternative names for the evil one were Beliar (Test Jud 25:3) and Mastemah (Jub 10:8) and Semjaza and Azazel (En 9:6, 7). He was the planter of corruption and the source of all deception. He was the enemy of God as well as of man. He came to be identified with the serpent in the garden of Eden and with an angelic rebel who had been cast out of heaven. He and his hosts would eventually be worsted in a decisive combat (En 67:6; 103:8; Test Dan 5:10-11; Test Jud 25:3; Sib Or 3:71).

The same ideas are found in the New Testament. Satan is the adversary of man and God. He tempts to sin, he incites to evil and he seeks to obstruct the kingdom of God. Although he may masquerade as the angel of light he is the power of darkness. He is a cunning liar, the inflictor of physical malady and a murderer. He is the prince of demons, the ruler of this world, the prince of the power of the air.

He figures prominently in the book of Revelation. From the phrase "synagogue of Satan" (2:9) we learn that he can infiltrate the hearts of men. He can cast the faithful into prison (2:10), i.e. he is the evil spirit that prompts the action of those who persecute. He has a throne in Pergamum, a reference to the fact that this provincial capital was the chief centre of imperial worship (2:13). He is well named Abaddon or Apollyon, for he is the king of the creatures who emerge from the abyss on a mission of destruction (9:11).

It is ch. 12 that has the fullest description of his nature and activity. He is the great dragon. Behind the figure of the dragon lies the ancient Babylonian myth of the combat between the creator and a great sea monster. The monster symbolizes the chaotic ocean, full of mystery and evil, and is variously described in the Old Testament as Dragon, Rahab, Leviathan and Serpent. (See Is 51:9; Ps 74:13, 14; Job 26:13.) It appears also in several apocalyptic writings (e.g. Test Ash 7:3).

He is described as a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his head seven diadems. (Ps 74:13, 14 tells us that the Leviathan was a sea-monster with several heads, and in Dan 7:7 the fourth beast has ten horns.) "The red colour of the dragon suggests at once the ravages of fire and the shedding of blood, the diadems on seven heads, that it is through kings that he exercises his power." [16]

There was war in heaven between Michael and his angels and the devil and his angels. The devil was worsted and cast down to earth (cf. Is 14:12; Lk 10:18; Jo 12:31). There he continued his nefarious work of accusing, for he knew his time was short. He also attempted to destroy the community of God's people on earth. They were able to conquer because of the sacrifice of the Lamb, though some had to suffer death.

16. C.A. Scott, Revelation (Edinburgh: Jack, n. d.), p. 228.

The dragon has powerful worshippers in the two beasts, the Roman empire and its priesthood. Despite his help they are destined for destruction. After their destruction Satan himself is bound.

The binding of Satan is another topic which our author found in the Old Testament and apocalyptic works, and there is a similar myth in Greek and Persian literature.

In Is 24:21 we read: "On that day the Lord will punish the host of heaven, in heaven, and the hosts of earth, on the earth. They will be gathered together as prisoners in a pit; they will be shut up in a prison, and after many days they will be punished." The same theme appears in apocalyptic works, e.g. 1 En 10:4-10: "The Lord said to Raphael - Bind Azazel hand and foot and throw him into the darkness. And he made a hole in the desert which was in Dudael and cast him there. He threw on top of him rugged and sharp rocks and he covered his face in order that he may not see the light and be sent into the fire on the great day of judgment."

There is an interesting verse at the end of a similar passage in 1 En 21:1-6: "These are among the stars which have transgressed the commandments of the Lord and are bound in this place until the completion of ten million years according to the number of their sins." Test Lev 18:10-12 has the words : "And he

shall open the gates of Paradise....The spirit of holiness shall be upon them and Beliar shall be bound by him."[17]

A.Y. Collins notes that all over the ancient Near East there was a mythic pattern of combat, depicting a struggle between two divine beings and their allies, and that one of the combatants is usually a monster, very often a dragon.[18] Not only is this broadly true but there is a remarkable likeness in some of the specific aspects of the combat.

An Iranian myth tells of Azi-Dahaka, the noxious serpent, beaten in primaeval time by the hero Thraetona and fettered in the mountain Damavand for nine thousand years. He was released by Ahriman and reigned for a thousand years but was finally discomfited by Keresispa.[19] We have to note here of course that Iranian myths belong to various periods before and after the Christian era.

Glasson draws attention to a similar myth among the Greeks. He quotes these words from Beer: "The Titans provide another

17. H.C. Kee, "Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs" in OTP (New York: Doubleday, 1983) 795. Kee has the footnote here: "The binding of Beliar, as in Is 24:22-3, where the wicked angels are rendered powerless; cf. Mk 3:27; Lk 11:14-22".

18. A.Y. Collins, The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation (Missola, Montana: Scholars Press, 1976), p. 57.

19. R.H. Charles, The Revelation II:142.

parallel, for they were cast down by Zeus into Tartarus to be liberated later from their confinement and completely destroyed after a final struggle." [20]

There is no ground for tracing any direct connection between John's passage and any Greek or Iranian myth, but he undoubtedly used the tradition that was to be found in Isaiah and Enoch. [21] The doom of the great power of evil before the word of God is being sounded. The dragon has been cast out of heaven; now he is cast out of earth and sent to his own place. While we may wonder why John does not have him destroyed immediately, we may believe that he used the Jewish myth as the framework and dramatic setting for what he is about to relate in vv. 4-6.

The devil was responsible for the persecution of the martyrs (2:10). Therefore he must be punished. Into the story of his end is placed the account of the resurrection of the martyrs, and their vindication is a contrast to his humiliation.

20. T.F. Glasson, Greek Influence in Jewish Eschatology (London: SPCK, 1961), p. 64.

21. "The intrinsically impressive view that Revelation is simply borrowing a definite myth breaks down not merely on differences in the conception of the role of Michael but more particularly on the fact that the image of the drakon does not occur only in the vision of Rev 12 but is the key image for Satan in the whole book". W. Foerster, "drakon" in TDNT II:282.

II - EXEGESIS OF 20:4-6

"4 Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom judgment was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their testimony to Jesus and for the word of God, and who had not worshipped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. 5 The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. 6 Blessed and holy is he who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and they shall reign with him a thousand years".

The most difficult section of our passage is to be found here. It seems to be wedged between the binding of Satan and the annihilation of Satan. From v. 7 it follows that this vision is considered simultaneous with Satan's captivity.

The influence of Dan 7:9, 10 is clear: "As I looked, thrones were placed and one that was ancient of days took his seat ... the court sat in judgment." We may note also v. 22: "Judgment was given for the saints of the most high and the time came when the saints received the kingdom", and v. 27: "and the kingdom shall be given to the people of the saints of the most high". We recall similar ideas in Lk 22:30, Mt 19:28, and 1 Cor 6:2.

v. 4 "Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom judgment was committed" (kai eidon thronous kai ekathisan ep'autous kai krīma edothē autois)

The word for thrones occurs 47 times in Revelation and normally refers to thrones in heaven, with the exception of 2:13 (Satan's throne) and 13:2 and 16:10 (the beast's throne).

Are the occupants of the thrones those who are mentioned in the second part of the verse, those who had been beheaded, those who had suffered in some way and shown themselves worthy to rule? (cf. 2:26f; 3:21)

Or is the reference to a heavenly court "which includes Christ and his assessors, the apostles (Mt 19:28) and Saints (1 Cor 6:3)?"[22] To this large and authoritative group is given the right of pronouncing sentence, and they do pronounce judgment on the martyrs, who have been crying out for vengeance (6:9) and who are now admitted to the share of heavenly rule.

It is not absolutely certain which is meant. M.-É. Boismard finds the verse scarcely intelligible as it stands and would put part of the verse (And I saw thrones on which all those who took their seats who would not worship the beast and his image to be sealed on their foreheads or their hands) between vv. 11 and 12 in the Last Judgment scene.[23]

Charles thinks that from 3:21 we should expect the martyrs

22. Swete, Commentary 261.

23. Jerusalem Bible, 449.

to be referred to here and it is they who sit on the thrones as Christ's assessors.[24] The structure of the sentence is ungrammatical and he suggests that the first part of the verse should be transposed to the end. The order now is that he sees the souls first and then the thrones. "This signifies that authority is now vested in the hands of the righteous, and not in those of the oppressors of the church as beforetime." [25]

The present writer prefers the view of Swete for two reasons: (a) The vision seems to be inspired by Dan 7 where there is a clear distinction between those on the throne (7:9 "one that was ancient of days" and 7:10 "the court sat in judgment") and those on whom judgment was passed and to whom dominion was afterwards given (7:13 "one like a son of man...and to him dominion was given" and 7:27 "and the kingdom shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High"). (b) There seems to be a distinction in the text between those on the throne to whom judgment was given, and the souls of those who had suffered and came to life. It was after they came to life that they reigned with Christ. In other words a favourable judgment was passed on them by those on the throne and they came to life. They did not reign with Christ until they were raised.

24. Charles, Revelation II 182.

25. Charles, Revelation II 183.

"the souls...who had not worshipped" (tas psuchas..hoitines
ou prosekunēsan)

The souls were in the intermediate state after death and were awaiting the day of resurrection (cf. 6:9).

Again we have to ask if there are two groups here or only one. If one, the second phrase (Who had not worshipped...received..) is epexegetical of the first (Who had been beheaded..). If two groups are envisaged, they are those who had been killed and those who had not been killed but had suffered.

Unfortunately, the Greek is bad and we have a nominative coordinated to an accusative (psuchas and hoitines).

Swete understands the phrase as describing martyrs and confessors. The triumph of Christ was shared by those who "suffered reproach, boycotting, imprisonment, loss of goods, or other inconveniences, though they did not win the martyr's crown." [26] Undoubtedly there were those who could be so described, but it is not clear that John had such in mind.

We prefer the position of Charles, who thinks that only

26. Swete, Commentary 262.

martyrs are in view.[27] His reasons are: 1. According to 13:15 all who refused to worship the image were to be slain. 2. If the second clause is taken to describe the surviving faithful, we would have to attach two conflicting meanings to ezēsan, i.e. "lived again" and "continued to live" according as we connect it with the first class, the actual martyrs, or the second class, the confessors. 3. The opening words of v. 5 hoi loipoi tōn nekrōn clearly imply that the persons referred to in v. 4 were among the dead.

The relative hoitines does not settle the issue. It can function with the indefinite meaning "whoever" and would then here indicate two different groups. On the other hand hostis is often used as a simple relative "who". In addition, it is sometimes used qualitatively, of a definite person or thing, indicating "which, as other like things" or "which by its very nature". The relative sentence may also express a reason or consequence. These latter uses would justify translating 20:4 as "the martyrs, who, to be sure, had not worshipped the beast".[28]

This verse then limits the experience of the millennium to those who had suffered death for their faith. The saints in

27. Charles, Revelation II 183.

28. G. Abbott-Smith, A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1937), p. 325.

general will play their part in the final kingdom (22:5) but this first reigning with Christ is for the martyrs.

"of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and the word of God" (tōn pepelekismenōn dia tēn marturian Iesou kai ton logon tou Theou)

The verb means "slain" or "beheaded". The pelekus had been the instrument of punishment in republican Rome. The testimony of Jesus (1:9; 12:17; 19:10) is the testimony that Jesus gave to them or the testimony they bore to him. For the word of God see 1:9 and 6:9. John himself was confined to Patmos for both.

"the beast...the image...the mark" (to therion...tēn eikona....to charagma)

The beast (11:7 and 13-20 passim) is closely linked with Satan and is a kind of incarnation of him. He is normally identified with the Roman Empire and with the cult of emperor-worship. Of his final destruction we read in 19:20.

There is more information about the mark of the beast and the worshipping of the image in 13:14f. The eikōn is probably the statue of the Roman Emperor. The charagma has been understood in various ways: the branding of slaves, the tattooing of a religious emblem of a god, seals, marks on coins. "The choice of right hand or forehead is presumably for conspicuousness. It

could not be hidden. It may also be meant as a travesty of the Jewish custom of wearing phylacteries." [29] At any rate the mark seems to have been some kind of certificate connected with emperor-worship and necessary for buying and selling (13:17). It was called the mark of the beast because it was acquired at the price of denying Christ.

"They came to life" (kai ezēsan)

Zao is found more than 140 times in the New Testament, 13 of them in Revelation. It has the same range of meanings as the English word "live". It can mean to live as opposed to being dead, or to live spiritually, or to come to life again after being dead. It is used in Revelation of the living God (4:9), of Christ who rose from the dead and is now living (1:8), and of Christians (3:1).

While ezēsan can be translated "they lived", it is probably better to translate it "they came to life". This is suggested by the phrase "This is the first resurrection" in the next verse. The souls of the martyrs are raised in the first resurrection, and the rest of the dead are raised in the general resurrection at the end of the thousand years.

Conservative commentators are concerned to prove that this

29. L. Morris, Revelation (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), p. 172.

must have been a physical resurrection so that the millennium itself might take place on earth.[30]

Swete answers:

To infer from this statement, as many expositors have done, that the ezēsan of v. 4 must be understood of bodily resuscitation, is to interpret apocalyptic prophecy by methods of exegesis which are proper to ordinary narrative. The Seer merely guards against the impression that he had referred to the General Resurrection, which will follow and not precede the Thousand years of the Martyrs' reign.[31]

The martyrs had spiritual life while they were on earth. They retained it after death, as souls under the altar; in the intermediate state they were still spiritually alive. When they came to life, as this verse describes, they entered a new order of being. "But there is no indication that the new existence, inaugurated by resurrection, will be terrestrial in the former sense." [32] They came to life as Christ did (Rev 2:8), and as Christ is after the Ascension. The Resurrection Body of Christ could have physical manifestations, as the Synoptic narratives indicate, but we cannot say that he returned to the physical mode of life that was his before the crucifixion (See Mk 16:12; Mt 28:17; Lk 24:37). This seems to be what Paul is saying in 1 Cor

30. G. Ladd, Crucial Questions about the Kingdom of God (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), pp. 141ff.

31. Swete, Commentary 263.

32. Gourgues, "The Thousand-Year Reign" 679.

15 about the spiritual body. There are celestial bodies and there are terrestrial bodies. The spiritual body, unlike the physical one, is imperishable; it is raised in glory and in power. It was to this kind of life that John saw the martyrs raised in his vision. Others may be raised to this super-earthly life at the General Resurrection in order to be judged(20:12) and take part in the bliss of the final kingdom, but only the martyrs are raised at the millennial kingdom.

There may be indeed something appealing to the imagination in the thought that they were raised to a life on the earth on which they had been martyred, but that is not in the text. The New Testament speaks of a bodily resurrection, to distinguish this fact from a purely spiritual resurrection, but bodily resurrection in the New Testament does not mean return to physical and terrestrial life as we know it.

"and they reigned with Christ" (kai ebasileusan meta tou Christou)

It is to be noted that, while "Jesus" is used in the middle of v. 4, it is "Christ" that appears at the end of the verse and in v. 6. This is Christ the Messiah and the kingdom is the messianic kingdom.

ho Christos occurs in 11:15, 12:10, and 20:4,6. "The Lord's Anointed, against Whom the kings of the earth conspired, has

triumphed over His enemies, and His victory ensures that of those who have fought on His side." [33] Christ has an exalted position in Revelation. He is "the ruler of the kings of the earth" (1:5). He has the power to judge and reward (22:12). He shares regal authority with the Father and he will grant the conqueror "to sit with me on my throne, as I myself have conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne" (2:21). He is the Lamb in the midst of the throne (7:17). It is possible to speak of the kingdom of Christ (11:15). He is the Lord of lords and King of kings (17:14; 19:16).

The kingdom is a common conception in the New Testament but normally Christians live in it as citizens. Here the idea is that of being kings and reigning. In 2:26 the conqueror is promised power over the nations and he is told that he shall rule them, cf. 5:10. The phrase "reign with Christ" is particular to Revelation. M. de Jonge draws attention to the fact that the wording basileuo meta tou Christou in 20:4 is particular to the Apocalypse, as is the ad hoc phrase hiereis tou Theou kai tou Christou in v. 6, and he goes on to make the helpful comment "Taking up the familiar notion of a future reign of the believers with Jesus Christ at his parousia, the autho: worked it out in his own way, choosing his own terminology, influenced by Old

33. Swete, Commentary 262.

Testament notions about the Davidic King appointed and anointed by God".[34]

Rissi comments that John is not here concerned with the triumph of believers over unbelievers but rather with the kingship of believers "in the sense of their absolute freedom from all human and superhuman forces. John has therefore omitted any mention of an object of their rule." [35] They reigned but no hint is given where or over whom they reigned.

While there is a sense in which this is true of the believer's kingship, for "those who receive abundance of grace reign in life through Jesus Christ" (Rom 5:17), perhaps a little more is intended here. Christ rules over others, and it is to this co-rule that the martyrs are admitted. Caird writes that just as Christ after his resurrection began a new activity, unbounded by limits of time and space, so for the martyrs resurrection means that they have been "let loose into the world". [36] They do not come back to earth in physical bodies but by their spirits they exercise influence and authority. For

34. M. de Jonge, "The Use of the expression ho Christos in the Apocalypse of John" in L'Apocalypse johannique et l'Apocalyptique dans le Nouveau Testament, ed. J. Lambrecht (Leuven: University Press, 1980), p. 281.

35. Rissi, The Future of the World (Napierville: Allenson, 1972), p. 33.

36. Caird, A Commentary 255.

they have been glorified with Christ.

"a thousand years" (chilia ete)

This phrase occurs six times in vv. 2-7. See p. 57.

The symbolism of the book of Revelation seems opposed to a literal understanding of the phrase. Some commentators take it for a long period. As we have noted, Swete aptly compares the twelve hundred and sixty days symbolizing the duration of heathenism (11:3) with the thousand years of the martyrs' reign.[37] We find a similar contrast in 1 Pet 1:3-6.

Many commentators write that the numbers do not stand for a long period of time but something else. Thus we have statements like the following: "The number 1000 has lost its temporal significance, as have all numbers in Revelation that denote a specific time, and has become an expression for the peculiar character of the time that is intended by the concept. Here it is the time of the revealed Messiah".[38]

"Le chiffre a donc une signification symbolique et son interprétation doit être avant tout théologique."[39]

37. Swete, Commentary 266.

38. Rissi, The Future 34.

39. Prigent, "Le Millénium" 154.

Fiorenza points out that the author of Revelation seems to have understood this number, as also other details of number in his book, more in the sense of a qualitative characterizing. The period of the messianic reign seems "to belong essentially to the new time of salvation and no longer to the old-world time in which one is subject to death." [40]

The comments of these scholars are important for our interpretation, and to them we shall return.

v. 5 "The rest of the dead" (hoi loipoi ton nekrōn)

The rest of the dead did not come to life again until the thousand years were ended. If the previous verse refers exclusively to martyrs, as we believe it does, this verse refers to the rest of Christians and mankind. Commentators who think of all Christians rising in the first resurrection would understand "the rest of the dead" as referring to the rest of mankind. [41]

"This is the first resurrection" (hautē hē anastasis hē prōtē)

Grammatically this phrase could refer to the general resurrection at the end of the thousand years, just mentioned,

40. Fiorenza, "Die tausend-jährige Herrschaft" 123.

41. e.g. G. Ladd, A Commentary on the Revelation of John (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), p. 268.

but the sense seems to require that it be taken to describe the rising of the martyrs in v. 4. "The first resurrection restores the martyrs to life for their millennial reign, the second brings all the dead before the great white throne".[42]

v. 6 "Blessed and holy" (makarios kai hagios)

This is one of the seven beatitudes of Revelation. The others are to be found at 1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 22:7, 14. This one is different from the others because hagios has been added to makarios. Fiorenza points out that the author wants to emphasize not only the bliss of the eschatological rulers but the holiness of the priests. They have been removed entirely from the profanity of the world and by their likeness to God are qualified for his service.[43]

"priests of God and of Christ" (hiereis tou Theou kai tou Christou)

In the initial vision the risen Christ is a priestly figure (1:13). The martyrs will also be priests. The word also appears in 1:6 and 5:10. (cf. Is 61:6 as well as Ex 19:6).

As priests they have access to the immediate presence of

42. Caird, A Commentary 254.

43. Fiorenza, Priester für Gott 339.

God. In fact they are called priests of God and Christ, a reference to the joint worship of God and the Lamb.

As we are not told whom they rule, so it is not said to whom they are priests. But the phrase suggests that they do not simply have access to God but are also intermediaries between Him and the world.

"the second death" (ho deuterios thanatos)

The first death is the death of the body. The second death is the death after judgment. In 2:11 it appears in the letter to the church at Smyrna, as a place powerless to hurt the conqueror. In 21:8 it is the lot of the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted, murderers, fornicators, sorcerers, idolaters and liars. In 20:14 it is identified with the lake of fire, which is the final end of the beast and false prophet, of the devil and death and Hades.

M. McNamara points out that the phrase "the second death" appears in the Targums at Jer 51:39, 57; Dt 33:6; Is 22:14; Is 65:6, 15. There it seems to mean (a) exclusion from the resurrection, i.e. remaining in the grave, or (b) passing to eternal damnation.[44]

44. M. McNamara, The New Testament and the Palestinian Targum of the Pentateuch (Rome: Pontifical Bible Institute, 1966), p. 256.

To sum up this discussion, the following points may be made.

The seer has a vision of a divine tribunal by which judgment is passed on the martyrs, those who had lost their lives in making a faithful witness to the gospel.

They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. This is the first resurrection. At the end of the period the rest of the dead come to life for the judgment.

The martyrs have a double blessedness. They are saved from the judgment that could lead to the second death, the final annihilation of the wicked. They shall be priests of God and of Christ and reign with Christ for a thousand years.

There is a continuing debate about the nature of their resurrection and about the meaning of the thousand years.

In the light of his examination of the text the present writer thinks it possible to understand the resurrection as a victory over death similar to that of Christ, and the thousand years as a symbol of the perfection of the experience of glorification.

At this stage in the exegesis we will look more closely at the main ideas in this crucial passage in our effort to understand the background to John's thinking. The central thought can be expressed in one sentence: the martyrs came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. There are four principal items in this sentence: The Martyrs; Resurrection; The Christ; and The Messianic Kingdom.

The Martyrs

There are several references to martyrs throughout the book. "A constant preoccupation of the Apocalypse is the fate of the martyrs." [45]

In the Old Testament the martyr was the witness (eth). He was one who had first hand knowledge of a fact or an event. He had been there when the fact was made known or the event took place. He had seen it all and he could testify to the truth. This meaning appears in the New Testament (Mt 18:15-17; 1 Tim 5:19), but it is developed further. Witnesses are those who testify to the truth about God (Jo 3 :11, 32; 8:18; Rev 1:5; 11:3), as are those who testify to what they have seen or heard

45. W.J. Harrington, Understanding the Apocalypse (Washington-Cleveland: Corpus Books, 1969), p. 24. For Martyrdom see also M.G. Reddish, The Theme of Martyrdom in the Book of Revelation (Southern Baptist Theological Seminary: Doctoral Dissertation, 1982) and W.H.C. Frend, Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church (Oxford: Blackwell, 1965).

concerning Jesus (Lk 24:48; Ac 1:18; 10:41; 22:20).

Those who witnessed to their faith were liable to suffer in some way (Ac 5:41; 9:16), and so martus came to mean one who suffered even unto death. In Ac 22:20 reference is made to "the blood of Stephen thy martyr." A witness bears witness by his life and teaching, a martyr by his suffering and death. It is not possible to say when the word martus took on the new connotation. Frensdorff thinks that in Rev 12:11 marturia is used in the technical sense of being a blood-witness, the sense that it was to retain from now on.[46]

Martus appears several times in Revelation, and should be translated sometimes as witness (1:5; 3:14; 11:3), and sometimes as martyr (2:13; 17:6).[47] There are other references to Christians suffering death (6:9-11; 13:15; 18:20; 20:4).

During the Roman Republic, Roman provincial officials and the publicani had systematically exploited the wealth of Asia Minor, and a short term of office encouraged their rapacity. Augustus brought relative peace and prosperity with responsible and stable administration. He was welcomed, therefore, and Asia Minor soon developed a strong sense of loyalty to the emperor,

46. Frensdorff, Martyrdom 91.

47. Abbott-Smith, A Manual Greek Lexicon 279.

and he began to be considered worthy of worship.

Asiarchs were men of wealth and public influence and were appointed as protectors and promoters of the expanding imperial cult and the worship of the goddess Roma. At times the connection of the Asiarch with the emperor cult brought him the appointment of high priesthood in the local temple. Asiarchs were introduced by Luke as an elite group, supporting Paul against the Ephesian rabble.[48]

It has been said that emperor worship grew out of the blend of religion and patriotism among the Persians, the custom of hero worship, and the worship of the Ptolemies.[49] At any rate it was a form of expressing loyalty and patriotism. It had its temples, sacrifices, choirs and priesthood. In Asia Minor the emperor was often regarded as an incarnation of the local god.

The clash between this cult and the monotheism of Judaism first took place in the reign of Caligula (39-41 AD) and thereafter there was fear in Jewish breasts, although Judaism was recognized as a religio licita and had the shelter of the imperial aegis. But the Christian church had no such protection, and it had to suffer. The active persecution of Christianity

48. Acts 19.

49. J. Moffatt, "Revelation of St. John the Divine" in EGT (London: Nelson, 1912), p. 307.

began in Domitian's time. All were asked to give the emperor the name of deus or divus, and those who refused "to worship the image of the beast" were liable for death. John himself was imprisoned and banished, and others had suffered martyrdom.

Out of this situation came the book of Revelation. One of the letters is written to the church at Pergamum, and "Pergamum summed up in itself the intolerable offence and horror that such a cult, the observance of which was synonymous with loyalty to the emperor, provoked in the mind of our author." [50] John wrote of the certainty of Christ's return, and of the comfort of God for the churches in the interval, and of the bliss and punishment in the world to come. He was particularly concerned with the lot of those who remained loyal to God.

There seem to have been some who could distinguish loyalty to the empire from worshipping the emperor. This was impossible for John of Patmos for whom religion was bound up with hatred and fear of the civil power. He shared the belief of the writers of apocalyptic (2 Esd 12:11f; Ap of Bar 4:4f) that the fourth kingdom of Daniel was the Roman Empire, and that it would be overthrown at the advent of the Messiah. To John the empire was the agent of the devil. Obviously much had changed since Paul wrote Rom 13: 1-6 and even since Asiatic Christians had received

50. Charles, The Revelation I 61.

the counsel of 1 Pet 2:13f, "Fear God. Honour the emperor".

The reality of that persecution has been questioned. E.S. Fiorenza says: "The death of Antipas, however, was probably not owing to a general persecution but a lynch law exercised by the citizens." [51] A.Y. Collins also questions the extent of the imperial persecution. While there are references to martyrs in the book, we must not conclude that there was such a spell of persecution in Domitian's time. Opposition to Christians was sporadic during the first two centuries, and John's strictures may have been due to the fear of a coming persecution, or they may have been due to the situation in Asia Minor where the citizens were eager to show their loyalty to the Emperor, or to flatter him, and where some Christians did indeed pursue a course of accomodation (e.g. the Nicolaitans). [52]

It seems to the present writer that the danger and reality of martyrdom must not be played down in view of the numerous references there are in Revelation to suffering for the faith.

In his book on I Peter, J.H. Elliott studies the situation in Asia Minor and makes one or two references to Revelation. One of his phrases is very significant: "the direct confrontation

51. Fiorenza, The Book 128.

52. A.Y. Collins, Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984), pp. 69-71.

with the imperial cult in the cities of Asia Minor (see the Apocalypse of John)."[53] He also writes: "In clear contrast to the later bloody martyrdoms attested in John's Apocalypse, the hour of testing and tribulation envisioned in 1 Peter had not yet been brought about by any direct confrontation with Rome".[54]

Resurrection

Although there is a certain ambiguity in the idea of resurrection, it normally means that the bodies of the dead are resuscitated and reunited with their spirits, perhaps in a new form. It is normally thought of as taking place at the end of the present world, and means rebirth in a world which will be vastly superior to the present one or to a rarefied eternal existence in another plane.

There is only one clear reference to the raising of individuals in the Old Testament and that is at Dan 12:1 & 2: "Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life and some to shame and everlasting contempt". This takes place following the appearance of Michael, the peculiar angel of Israel. There is also a reference to resurrection in a late passage in Is 26:19: "Thy dead shall live,

53. J.H. Elliott, A Home for the Homeless (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981), p. 62.

54. Elliott, A Home 86.

their bodies shall rise", and another in Ezek 37, the vision of the valley of dry bones, though both of these passages are usually understood metaphorically as referring to the nation of Israel rather than to individual members of Israel.[55]

In later Judaism there are many references to the resurrection of the dead and we may note a few of them. In 2 Macc 7:14 in the passage about the martyrdom of seven brothers and their mother, we have the words addressed by one of them to his slayer: "It is meet for those who perish at men's hands to cherish hope divine that they shall be raised up by God again; but thou - thou shalt have no resurrection to life." 1 En 51:1, 5 is devoted to the subject: "Sheol will return all the deposits which she has received and hell will give back all which it owes...and the earth shall rejoice; and the righteous ones shall dwell upon her and the elect ones shall walk upon her." 1 En 91-105 predicts that the wicked shall be condemned to eternal punishment in Sheol, whereas the righteous shall have a blessed resurrection to enjoy the bliss of heaven. In Sib Or 4:178 it is written: "God will raise up mortals again as they were before. He will fashion the bones and ashes of men," of which J.J.

55. See H.H. Rowley, The Faith of Israel (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1956); G.W.E. Nickelsburg, Resurrection, Immortality and Eternal Life in Intertestamental Judaism HTS, XXVI (1972); C.V. Pilcher, The Hereafter in Jewish and Christian Thought (London: SPCK, 1940).

Collins says, "Belief in a resurrection is attested in the Jewish Sibylline Oracles 4 but only very tersely." [56] In the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs there are several references. Test Benj 10:7 has : "Then shall we also be raised, each of us over our tribe." (Of this passage H.C. Kee comments: "A doctrine of the resurrection as in TJud 25:4; but here, as in Dan 12:2, there is the expectation that both the just and the unjust will be raised in the last day".) [57] Test Jud 25:4 reads: "And after this Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob will be resurrected to life." In Test Sim 6:7 we have: " Then I shall arise in gladness and I shall bless the Most High for his marvels," of which Kee says : "Possibly an affirmation of the resurrection of the righteous at the end of the age." [58] He makes a similar comment on Test Zeb 10:2: "I shall arise again in your midst as a leader among your sons." [59] Pss Sol 3:16 has the words: "They that fear the Lord shall rise to life eternal." In 2 Bar 30:1 we have: "And it will happen after these things when the time of the appearance of the Anointed One has been fulfilled and he returns with glory, then all who sleep in hope of him shall rise". 2 Bar has also some interesting thoughts on

56. J.J. Collins, "Sibylline Oracles" in OTP 323.

57. H.C. Kee, "Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs" in OTP 828.

58. Kee, "Testaments" 787.

59. Kee, "Testaments" 807.

the nature of the resurrection body in chs. 49-52. Finally we may note 2 Esd 7:32: "The earth shall give up those who are asleep in it", after which the Most High will speak to the nations that have been raised from the dead.

(a) What is suggested by some of these passages is that it is the righteous who will be raised at the last, a point that has some significance for what John calls the first resurrection. Gaster says: "The most common form of the belief is that all souls will be summoned to judgment at the last day but only the righteous will be resurrected." [60]

(b) Gaster also points out that there was some divergence of opinion about the nature of the resurrection, whether it was to a life of immortality or to a newly created world, whether it was spiritual or corporeal. Nickelsburg makes the important observation about the texts on bodily resurrection in this literature: "with the exception of 2 Macc 7 & 14 and their own peculiar formulation, the body of the resurrection is conceived of as qualitatively different from the earthly body". [61]

(c) We might also note that in En 51:1 and 61:5 the resurrection is connected with the coming of the Son of Man.

60. T.H. Gaster, "Resurrection" in IDB IV 41.

61. G.W.E. Nickelsburg, "Future Life in Intertestamental Literature" in IDB Supp. 350.

The New Testament seems to teach that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust. This is implied in Jesus' parable of the sheep and the goats (Mt 25:23ff). Jo 5:28f reads: "The hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come forth, those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment." In Ac 24:15 we are told that there will be a resurrection of the just and the unjust.

However, room is given by Luke for the belief that there may be some kind of separation between the resurrection of the just and the resurrection of the unjust. Lk 14:14 speaks of the resurrection of the just only, and Lk 20:35 has the significant phrase "those who are accounted worthy to attain to that age and to the resurrection of the dead."

The resurrection is a resurrection of the body as well as a resurrection of the spirit. It involves the whole man. The power of God has an effect on the spirit; we are raised with Christ and that may happen in this life, before death. But the resurrection that we are speaking of is one that takes place after the death of the individual. The raised body is a transformed body. It is a body that is like the risen body of Christ and has super-normal powers. In 1 Cor 15 Paul calls it a spiritual body and sets forth its special powers.

In the New Testament the resurrection is associated with the work of him who is called the Son of Man, or of God working through the Son. "For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who sees the son and believes in him should have eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day" (Jo 6:40). We may compare Rom 8:11: "If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies."

While ours is the only passage in the New Testament which specifies clearly two resurrections, there is some support for John's position in some of the passages above about the just and the unjust. We may add that Paul does seem to stress the rising of those united with Christ. In 1 Thess 4:18 he describes the resurrection of the dead in Christ and their being united with living Christians in Christ's presence. The general resurrection of all the dead at the judgment is not mentioned in that passage, although he does believe that all men must appear before the judgment-seat of Christ. "Apparently that means that the general resurrection of all the dead (of the non-Christian dead) will follow at a later point in time." [62] The resurrection of non-Christians Bietenhard finds in Paul in 1 Cor 15:21f. [63]

62. Bietenhard, Das tausendjährige Reich 56.

63. Bietenhard, Das tausendjährige Reich 58.

It is also possible to argue here that John was influenced by the schema in Ezekiel. Before the attack of Gog in chs. 38 and 39 there is the description of the Messianic kingdom in chs. 33-37, and this involves not only the coming of the prince of the line of David (34:23f), but the picture of the resurrection of the dead in the valley of the dry bones. After this resurrection, which will involve the union of Judah and Ephraim, there will be a united kingdom: "my servant David shall be king over them, and they shall have one shepherd (37:24)...I will make a covenant of peace with them (v. 26)...My dwelling place shall be with them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people(v. 27)."

The Christ

With the use of the word "Christ" in vv. 4 and 6 our author was using a concept which had a long and complex history. We plan to make a short reference to Old Testament ideas and say a little more about the inter-testamental period in an effort to reveal John's background on the subject.

"Mashiach" means anointed, and early in Israel's story certain servants of God were chosen and anointed with oil for the performing of their task. This applied to prophets and priests and kings.

We are particularly concerned with kings for they were the

rulers of the kingdom. They were the anointed of the Lord and they reigned as his representatives. We must note that "messiah" in the later technical sense does not appear in the Old Testament even although kings were anointed.[64]

The prophets looked forward to a better day for their people, to a kingdom which would be ushered in by the day of the Lord, a period of peace and justice. The occasion of their vision could be the ineptitude of the reigning king, or the prevailing dissatisfaction after the exile when there was no king at all. In many of their visions of the future there might be no royal figure. This is true of the prophecies of Amos, Zephaniah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Joel and Daniel. In others there would be a leading royal figure and he would often be described in reference to David as a scion of David. This description would be due partly to the respect for the kingship of David and partly to the influence of the southern kingdom where the house of David reigned.

Sometimes it is a real historical ruler who is in view, as in Hagg 2:23; Zech 3:8; 6:12. Here Zerubbabel is the Branch who would restore David's line.

Sometimes it is an ideal ruler that the prophet is speaking

64. Russell, The Method 307.

of and the passages that are relevant here are such passages as Is 11:1-9; Jer 23:5; Ezek 34:23, 24; Hos 3:4, 5; Mic 5:1-3; Zech 9:9. Psalms like 2 and 110 have also to be considered in this connection. The king is the Lord's chosen and receives from him superhuman wisdom. He is God's son and lives by righteousness. He upholds justice and universal harmony. Zion shall be his centre.

It is difficult to date many of these passages although they appear in the writings of specific prophets, and Mowinckel may be right in contending that the majority of the passages about the ideal ruler belong to the post-exilic age.[65] He does seem to be right when he reminds us that the emphasis is always on the kingly rule of Yahweh rather than on the rule of the scion of David, though there is no real conflict between the two.[66]

If the messianic figure is absent from some of the prophets, likewise in the later literature he does not seem to be an indispensable figure. He does not appear in 1 & 2 Maccabees, Tobit, Wisdom of Solomon, Judith, Ben Sira, Jubilees, 1 En 1-36, 91-104, Assumption of Moses, 1 Baruch and 2 Enoch. In the majority of apocalyptic writings Messiah plays a secondary role

65. S. Mowinckel, He That Cometh (Oxford: Blackwell, 1956), p. 20.

66. Mowinckel, He That Cometh 144.

for the coming kingdom is the work of God himself.

But he does appear. Charlesworth notes that five pseudepigrapha contain clearly Jewish traditions about the Messiah:[67]

1. Psalms of Solomon. Here, in a book dating from late in first century BC, we have the first appearance of the word "messiah" in a technical sense. The messiah is God's instrument for the establishing of his kingdom, and his foremost task is the destruction of God's enemies. This king will be strong in "the fear of God" and "in holy spirit". He will overcome the enemies of his people not by military force but by "the word of his mouth". He will gather a righteous people who will be the sons of their God and among whom there will be no more unrighteousness. But the blessings of his reign are for Israelites only; other peoples, if they are not destroyed or reduced to servitude, are permitted to come from the end of the earth to see his glory. In ch. 17 the anointed of the Lord is a descriptive phrase. In ch. 18 "his anointed" seems to be a title.

2. 2 Baruch. This and the following two books come from late in the first century AD. (a) chs. 29f. When "all is

67. J.H. Charlesworth, "Introduction" OTP xxxi.

accomplished", the Messiah will be revealed. (b) chs. 39-42. The Messiah will act decisively, putting to death the last evil leader. (c) chs. 72-74. Here the Messiah is also a militant warrior slaying the enemies of Israel by the sword.

3. 2 Esdras. (a) In ch. 7 the Messiah brings joy for four hundred years and eventually dies. "The idea, which sometimes occurs in precisely those circles where the new, other-worldly eschatology had taken root, of the death of the messiah at the end of the interim kingdom, is entirely in accord with the original view of the messiah." [68] The original view was that he was at first a human, political figure. (b) 11:37-12:34. The Messiah, "the lion", will destroy the ungodly and deliver the faithful. (c) 13:3-14:9. The Messiah who is "my son" and "a man" will consume the warring multitude with "a stream of fire" from his mouth.

4. 1 Enoch 37-71. The Messiah is identified with the Son of Man, the Righteous One, the Elect One. The Messiah is no longer a human figure. He is a transcendental being, pre-existent and exalted above all creatures. He is to be manifested both to establish God's kingdom and to rule in it. In 71:14 he is individualized in the person of Enoch, who is divinely appointed to pronounce judgment on the ungodly at the last assize.

68. Mowinckel, He That Cometh 325.

5. 3 Enoch. This is a late document and portrays a Messiah who is a son of Joseph and a Messiah who is a son of David. Charlesworth comments that "The possibly early date of these traditions has been raised by the discovery of similar ones in the Dead Sea Scrolls (especially IQS, CD, IQM)".[69]

The history of the idea in the inter-testamental period is very complex and we have not entered into all aspects of it, e.g. the influence of the priestly Hasmonean house and the possibility of two Messiahs, one princely, one priestly. There is little agreement among scholars.

It does seem that in those years before the first century AD the Messiah was not considered an essential figure in God's establishing of his kingdom. Mowinckel contends that had it not been that in certain circles in the later period the conception of Messiah was powerfully influenced by other religious and eschatological ideas, e.g. the Son of Man, the title might well have passed out of eschatology altogether.[70] However, it did not, as is evidenced by the gospels.

There are several allusions to popular messianism in the gospels. Christ is the son of David (Mt 22:42). He has the power

69. Charlesworth, "Introduction" xxxii.

70. Mowinckel, He That Cometh 280

of clairvoyance (Mt 26:68). He is the king of Israel and a wonder-worker (Mk 15:32). He will appear from a place known to no one (Jo 7:26). He is a scion of David from Bethlehem (Jo 7:41) and remains for ever (Jo 12:34).

One of the key passages in the gospels about the Messiah concerns Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi (Mk 8:29; Mt 16:16ff). Far from disclaiming the title Jesus acknowledged it, but he enjoined secrecy on his disciples, doubtless because of its current political associations and because of his desire to change the thinking of his disciples.[71] It was going to be fulfilled not by the immediate establishment of a visible kingdom but by his passion and resurrection (Mk 8:31; 9:31; 10:33).

Jesus revealed the true nature of the Messiah by linking himself with the promise of the king "meek and lowly and riding upon an ass" (Zech 9:9) and with the promises of the Suffering Servant. While he nowhere quotes directly from the Servant Song passages, he did quote a kindred passage (Is 61:1-2 in Lk 4:17-21). It is clear that Jesus thought of his sufferings as having been "written of him" (Mt 26:24, Mk 9:12, Lk 18:31), and it is natural to think of such passages as Is 53. Likewise the "many" of Mk 10:45 recalls the "many" in Is 52:14-15 and 53:11-12.

71. For discussion see J.L. Blevins, The Messianic Secret in Markan Research, 1901-1976 (Washington: University Press of America, Inc., 1981).

After his resurrection he further linked his own identity with this aspect of Old Testament expectation (Lk 24:26f). A passage like Jo 4:26 reveals the faith of the early church. In Mk 9:41 the followers of Jesus are recognized as those who belong to the messiah. The burden of the apostolic preaching to the Jews is often described as the proclamation that Jesus is Messiah (Ac 3:20; 5:42 et al.). In Paul the title Christ is used. Jesus is the Messiah of the Jews (Rom 9:5). He accomplishes his mission through suffering and death (Rom 5:6; cf. also Rom 1:3f and 1 Cor 15:3). In many passages Christ takes on a dimension larger than that of the historical Jesus, but Paul does not think of two distinct personalities. Jesus through his passion, resurrection and glorification becomes the Christ.

It is with this glorified Messiah that Revelation is concerned. Jesus has passed through suffering and death to his triumph.

There are several references to Christ in Revelation. The first (1:1, 2, 5), linked with the name Jesus, are really part of the proper name.[72] The other four (11:15; 12:10; 20:4, 6) are

72. Christ became a proper name like Jesus itself. "The latter development was all but inevitable among Greek-speaking Gentile Christians, who were not interested in a Christ who should restore the kingdom to Israel, and who did not understand the literal meaning of the word" J.Y. Campbell, "Christ" in Theological Word Book of the Bible (London: SCM Press, 1950), p. 46.

used more in the technical sense. "The Kingdom of the world becomes the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ." "Now is come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ." "They reigned with Christ a thousand years...they shall be priests of God and of Christ."

It is to be noted that in the last passage, at v. 4, Christ alone is used to describe the reigning one, although at the beginning of the verse there is a reference to Jesus. So it would seem that it is the Messianic figure that is being stressed.

It is of course Jesus who is the Christ. The Messiah is not some mysterious figure from heaven. He is the Jesus who was crucified, himself the faithful witness. The firstborn of the dead becomes the ruler of the kings of the earth. The Lamb who was slain has power to conquer and be the Lord of lords and King of kings. The martyrs do not reign on their own, they reign with Christ. They shall be priests of God and of Christ.

The Messianic Kingdom

Swete thought that any serious attempt to interpret the Millennium had to begin with an examination of contemporary

Jewish belief on the subject of the Messianic reign.[73]

In this note we are particularly interested in the hope of a temporary kingdom, but to understand it we have to be aware of the other views.

A. The Earlier View of the Kingdom

The national hope of Israel was directed towards an earthly kingdom which would be initiated by the action of Yahweh. The kingdom would be characterized by peace and relief from suffering, the fertility of the land, abundance of children, and length of life. The happy picture of the future would also include justice and holiness, piety and religious devotion. The latter would be shown even by the Gentiles who would come as pilgrims to Jerusalem. While there is this kind of universalism, there is also strong emphasis on Jewish nationalism. The whole of creation will have a share in the final kingdom. The very birds of prey will lay aside their savage nature and the serenity of Paradise will be recovered (Is 35).

The idea of a future monarchy was first conceived during the monarchy in Israel. The success of David and the glory of his reign made a deep impression on the consciousness of Israel and the kingdom was largely thought of in terms of his reign. The

73. Swete, Commentary 264.

later tension between the ideal and reality of the monarchy was also a factor; the wicked or weak kings of the period after David created the longing for the return of a reign like David's. Such ideas were hammered out on the anvil of Israel's history. After the destruction of the monarchy and the dispersion of the people there was a new longing for restoration to the land, and this was coupled with a new hope for the kingdom.

The view finds most distinctive expression in the prophecies of Isaiah and the Old Testament hope of the messianic kingdom was given by him its definitive form. Some of the relevant passages in Isaiah are 2:2-4; 9:1-6; and 11:1-9.

It is possible to speak in general about the earlier view as a this-worldly one. The kingdom will arise as a historical event in the world known to men. The concern is about specific historical and political entities. Jerusalem is the city that is known, and pilgrimage will be made to it by the nations of the present world.

The prophets look forward to a state of blessedness and glory for Israel, to be introduced either by the advent of Yahweh himself (Is 40:9-11; 52:7-12) or of the messianic figure (Is 9:5; Zech 9:9,10). The eternity of this kingdom is emphasised (Ez 37:25; Joel 4:20) but the individual members of the redeemed Israel are not represented as immortal.

B. The Later View of the Kingdom

The question of the kingdom in later Jewish writers is a complicated one and there is no uniformity of outlook. On the whole it is true to say that the idea has been transcendentalized; there is a shift of emphasis from this world to another. However there is a great difference in detail. C.V. Pilcher suggests that the ideas can be classified under five heads:

1. The Kingdom as Earthly
2. The Kingdom on a Renewed Earth
3. The Kingdom in Heaven
4. Temporary Kingdom on Earth, the Eternal State in Heaven
5. Temporary Kingdom on Earth, the Eternal State on a Renewed Earth

It is perhaps better to say with him that sometimes the kingdom appears as earthly, sometimes as heavenly, sometimes as a blend of the two. It may be materialistic or spiritual, temporal or eternal.[74]

74. C.V. Pilcher, The Hereafter in Jewish and Christian Thought (London: SPCK, 1940), p. 55.

In Daniel the kingdom is set up by God to whom belong all wisdom and might. It is universal and the culmination of four kingdoms of this world, Babylonian, Medean, Persian and Greek. It will last forever. It is hard to tell what the nature of the kingdom is; it is not described in terms of righteousness and peace and justice. It seems to be on this earth: "his dominion is an everlasting dominion and his kingdom endures from generation to generation." Judgment is involved and the kingdom is given into the hands of the saints of the most high, and all peoples and nations and languages will serve them. Resurrection will also be involved: "many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt." It will arise after the downfall of the arrogant and blasphemous ruler. A fair comment has been made by A. Jeffery: "The shift has not yet been made from an earthly kingdom to that of a purely spiritual kingdom." [75]

In Enoch 6-36 the kingdom is thought of as arising on the earth, with Jerusalem as its centre.

In Enoch 83-90 the kingdom is less sensuous than in Enoch 1-36 and is set up on a renovated earth.

75. A. Jeffery, "Daniel" in IB 351.

In the Assumption of Moses God's kingdom will appear throughout the whole creation and the devil will have an end. Israel will be exalted. Here there is no messiah, and no resurrection. Israel's reward seems to be simply translation to heaven (10:9, 10).

Such then is the variety of view-point that we find in the later literature. But standard themes appear:

"a final cosmic struggle between God and the powers of the world or the powers of evil; a cosmic catastrophe that includes the collapse of the visible world as well as of human institutions; the defeat and judgment of the powers opposed to God; the beginning of a new world and a new age in which God reigns supreme." [76]

There does seem considerable truth in Pilcher's statement: "So a circle arose about the time of Christ which advanced one stage further in the direction of the Greek idea of immortality and one stage further away from the older earthly and nationalistic hope of Judaism". [77]

C. The Temporary Kingdom

As we have seen, the Old Testament conception of the kingdom was that it was of eternal duration and would be set up on the

76. J.L. McKenzie, "Aspects of Old Testament Thought" in the The Jerome Biblical Commentary, II 764.

77. Pilcher, The Hereafter 58.

earth. This view appeared in later works but other views were developed. The kingdom might be a blending of heaven and earth, or it might be looked on as existing entirely in the heavenly world. There was also a belief in a kingdom that was of temporary duration.

Perhaps the first trace of this is to be found in the Apocalypse of Weeks (En 91, 93) a fragment assigned by Charles to the pre-Maccabean period, though the date is doubtful.[78] Here we have a period of righteousness in which the temple is to be rebuilt and there is missionary work resulting in the conversion of the world. This precedes the final judgment which introduces the new heaven. There is no mention of a messiah nor of resurrection nor of the earth.

It is Bailey's opinion that many passages in pre-Christian apocalyptic reflect the fact that the idea of a temporary messianic era is felt to be implicit in the general conception of the course and consummation of history. "But with the exception of the passage in Enoch (91, 93) no definite indication is given in this Jewish literature of the duration of the reign of the messiah....It is to continue through three full weeks, but the

78. Charles, APOT II 171.

period cannot be stated with any further precision." [79]

The thinking is conceived in more definite terms in the literature of the first Christian century.

In 2 En 32:1, 2 there is a period of a thousand years intervening between the end of creation and the eternal age, and this is considered by Bailey to be the oldest passage in the literature of Judaism in which there is explicitly reflected an intermediate period of a thousand years. [80] The date is about 50 AD. Russell also thinks that we have the beginnings of a belief in the millennium in this passage. [81] The account in Genesis of the first week of creation came to be regarded not only as a history of the past but as a forecast of the future history of the world. Thus, as the world was created in six days, its history was to last six thousand years, for a thousand years are with God as one day (Ps 90:4). As God rested on the seventh day, so at the close of six thousand years there should be a rest of a thousand years, i.e. the millennium. Thereupon followed the future world of eternal bliss, designated as the eighth eternal day, "the beginning of a time not reckoned and

79. J.W. Bailey, "The Temporary Messianic Reign in the Literature of Early Judaism", JBL (1934) 180.

80. Bailey, "The Temporary" 181.

81. Russell, The Message 293.

unending, neither years, nor months, nor weeks, nor days, nor hours" (33:2).

Moore writes that there are three apocalypses in the period of the years 70 AD and following in which a definite limitation to the messianic age is expounded, 2 Esdras, Apocalypse of Baruch (also known as 2 Baruch) and Revelation.[82]

In 2 Esd 7:26-30 we read that the messiah shall be revealed together with the survivors of the predicted evils and shall bring joy to them for four hundred years. At the end of that period he shall die. Then after seven days' silence there shall be a general judgment, a resurrection of the good and evil, and the final end.

In 2 Bar 40:1-4 the kingdom of the messiah is temporary and will endure until the world of corruption is at an end. The phrase in 2 Bar 40:3 is "and his dominion will stand forever, until the world of corruption is at an end and until the times aforesaid are fulfilled", of which Mowinckel says: "the original thought of the everlasting dominion of the Son of Man is still perceptible in the blend of two theological ideas." [83]

Although it is later than our period in the rabbinic

82. Moore, Judaism II 338.

83. Mowinckel, He That Cometh 404.

tradition the rabbis gave much attention to the calculation of the duration of the messianic age.[84] The periods suggested range from forty years to three hundred and sixty-five thousand years! We may note that R. Eliezer ben Jose the Galilean reckoned the period to be a thousand years on the basis of Ps 90:4 and Is 63:4.

It is Bailey's judgment that the millennial conception was fully domesticated in Jewish thought before the Apocalypse of John was written, and he quotes Strack as writing that "the possibility that the Apocalypse depends for its thousand-year period upon Jewish tradition cannot be denied on chronological grounds." [85]

Whatever the reason for the origin of the temporary kingdom it does represent, in Gunkel's words "a compromise between the old hope of the prophets, which they expected to be realized in the present world, and the transcendental hope of later Judaism." [86]

The presence of the idea of the temporary kingdom was undoubtedly a factor in shaping the thinking of the seer, though

84. Moore, Judaism II 376.

85. Bailey, "The Temporary" 187.

86. J.A. MacCulloch, "Eschatology" in ERE I 380.

it does not follow that he wished his reference to be understood in the same way.

III - EXEGESIS OF 20:7-10

7 And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be loosed from his prison 8 and will come out to deceive the nations which are at the four corners of the earth, that is, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea. 9 And they marched up over the broad earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city; but fire came down from heaven and consumed them, 10 and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulphur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

These verses deal with the loosing of Satan before his final effort to muster forces against the saints, and his ultimate destruction.

v. 7 "And when the thousand years are ended (kai hotan telesthē ta chilia etē)

We have been told in v. 3 that Satan will be loosed for a little season. This point in time arrives at v. 7. hotan means whenever and suggests that there is uncertainty about the time.

v. 8 "the nations which are at the four corners of the earth" (ta ethnē ta en tais tessarsin goniais tēs gēs)

He gathers the nations from the four corners of the earth. Rissi attempts to reconcile the mention of the nations here with 19:11-21, where the flesh of all men, free and slave, small and great, were destroyed. At the time of the millennium there were no people living on the old earth other than the resurrected

ones. He believes the passage deals with the kingdom of demonic powers and of the dead from the prison of the underworld, the entrance to which lay on the fringes of the earth. So Satan has enticed the ghostly nations of the dead and the demons in order to make war on the righteous.[87]

Beckwith has a different solution. He thinks the two versions are quite distinct and considers that ch. 19 is not so much on the extinction of the nations as upon the defeat of the antichrist. In ch. 20 the essential part is the onset of the nations.[88] Mounce believes that this final battle was to follow the millennial reign.[89]

The better explanation seems to be that the events are identical. Harrington thinks the same battle as 19:11-19 is being described again but this time the author is concentrating on the dragon.[90] "Il faut bien que ce soient les mêmes que l'armée des Bêtes de ch. 19, puisque tous les rois de la terre convoqués à Harmagedôn ont déjà été exterminés avec l'Antéchrist. Nous voyons donc ici une récapitulation." So

87. Rissi, The Future 35.

88. Beckwith, The Apocalypse 745.

89. Mounce, The Book 362.

90. Harrington, Commentary 237.

writes Allo.[91]

Gog kai Magog

In Ezek 38, 39 God entices Gog of the land of Magog to attack Israel with a great host. But God destroys them with hailstones, fire and brimstone. Birds of prey and wild beasts gorge themselves in a great feast, and the bones of the slain are buried east of Jordan lest they defile the land of Israel.

Similar ideas about the attack of nations in the latter days appear in Biblical literature of the post-exilic period: Is 29:5; 63:1-6; 66:15-19; Obad 15, 16; Joel 2:20; 3:19-21; Zech 12:3, 4; 14:2, 3.

In later Jewish apocalyptic sources Gog and Magog appear together as enemies of the Messiah. See Sib Or (3:512), and also Talmud, where Gog and Magog are said to be rebellious nations of Ps 2 (Ber 7b, 10a, 13a etc.). In 1 En 56:5-6 the author substitutes the name of Parthians and Medes for Gog and Magog.

Allo is probably right in suggesting that there is something intentionally vague in the phrase. John is not thinking of any particular people or geographical location, nor of a specific organization, political or religious, as might be symbolized by

91. E.B. Allo, Saint Jean, l'Apocalypse (Paris: Gabalda, 1933), p. 313.

the Beasts. These names are the emblem "des instincts de rapine et de carnage de la bête humaine, de ce qui restera toujours de bestial et de diabolique dans l'humanité, pour faire obstacle perpétuellement au Règne de Dieu." [92]

Most commentators attempt to interpret the symbolism in this passage and similar suggestions have been made.

J. Sweet thinks that the loosing of Satan reflects the conviction that life on this earth, however nearly perfected, is always precarious. Further, he writes that the devil was not liquidated sooner because he represents man's free will, the capacity God has given for sin and the terrible reality of the consequences. The earth we know cannot exist without him. He may be suppressed for a time but "dualism can only be overcome in a new order of existence - when there is no more sea!" [93]

G. Caird makes a similar point about the loosing of Satan and the invasion of Gog. This myth enshrines a deep insight into the resilience of evil. "However far human society progresses, it can never, while the world lasts, reach the point where it is invulnerable to such attacks." [94]

92. Allo, Saint Jean 313.

93. Sweet, Revelation 291.

94. Caird, A Commentary 257.

Whether these ideas were in John's thoughts we do not know. But all are agreed that the passage conveys the truth that at the last the forces of evil will be annihilated. "Beyond doubt St. John intends at least to teach that the forces, personal or impersonal, which have inspired mankind with false views of life, and antagonism to God, will in the end be completely subjugated." [95]

This destruction is described in the last two verses of the passage, on which we would make only a few comments.

v. 9 "They marched up over the broad earth" (anebēsan epi to platos tēs gēs)

This verb is always used to describe going up to Jerusalem. cf. Ezek 38:11, 16. The second phrase is found in Hab 1:6 (LXX). It may suggest (1) the high plateau of Judea, around Jerusalem or (2) that the armies were of great extent, for the phrase means literally "the breadth of the earth".

"the camp...the beloved city" (tēn parembolēn.....ten polin ten ēgapēmenēn)

The first noun is the equivalent of the Hebrew mahneh, a camp, and recalls the picture of Israel marching through the

95. Swete, Commentary 270.

wilderness (Nu 2:2ff). The beloved city looks back to Ps 78:68, "Mount Zion which he loves". These phrases indicate that the seer is thinking of the saints as a spiritual Jerusalem.

"fire came down from heaven" (katebē pur ek tou ouranou)

The Targum of Pseudo-Jonathan on Nu 11:26 is worth quoting in full: "And they (Gog and his forces) wage war in the land of Israel against the sons of captivity. The Lord, however, is near them in the hour of affliction and kills all of them by a burning breath, by a flame of fire, that goes out from beneath the throne of glory...and after this all the dead of Israel shall come to life...and shall receive the reward of their deeds."[96]

v. 10 The devil is cast into the lake of fire and sulphur, like the Beast and the False Prophet before him. cf. Mt 25:41.

The Coming of Gog and Magog

The story of the nations John has taken from the book of Ezekiel (chs. 38 & 39). The nations mentioned in Ezek 25-32 are nations that have been located close to Israel and have had dealings with her. The nations envisaged in chs. 38-39 are from far beyond the frontiers of Israel, and have lurked there as a threat and a source of danger. Their liquidation in the Gog

96. Harrington, Understanding 238.

prophecy ensures that the returned people will never again have to fear an enemy from without. There was a widespread consciousness in Israel of the existence of other nations, of which the people were constantly reminded by invasion. Nevertheless, while the general source of the Gog idea was the real or imagined environment of nations, the more particular source for Ezekiel was the sacred writings.

The author was familiar with Gen 10 where he would find the names Gomer and Magog. The great sacrificial feast in Ezek 39:17 recalls passages like Zeph 1:7; Jer 12:9 and 46:10; and Is 56:9. But important verses for our purpose are Ezek 39:8 (This is the day of which I have spoken) and 38:17 (Are you he of whom I spoke in former days by my servants the prophets of Israel who in those days prophesied for years that I would bring you against them?) The reference is to such passages as Is 5:26; Jer 4:6; 5:15-17; 6:1; 6:22. The Isaianic passage reads: "He will raise a signal for a nation that is afar off, and whistle for it from the ends of the earth, and lo, swiftly, speedily, it comes", where the nation is Assyria. Jeremiah in similar language speaks in different places of another evil which Yahweh is bringing from the north: "Behold, a people is coming from the north country, a great nation is stirring from the furthest part of the earth", with Babylon in mind. Our Ezekielian author takes such ideas and gives them a wider application. We might call this the

re-interpretation of prophecy, a feature common in later apocalyptic work.

W. Zimmerli comments on the Ezekiel passage: "In this prediction Jeremiah's message concerning the foe from the north, coupled with Isaiah's assurance that Assyria will meet defeat upon the mountains in the land of Yahweh, attains its final form." [97]

We may ask why the prophecy is placed exactly where it is in the Restoration section, and if there is any significance in the order of the chapters. Chs. 33-37 describe the return and the setting up of the new kingdom. Then in chs. 38-39 we read of the attack of the nations when Israel seemed secure. Finally in chs. 40-48 after the defeat of the nations the city with its temple is constituted.

A defeat of the nations has already been described in earlier chapters. Is there indeed another attack by the nations after the kingdom has been established? Does 40-48 really take place after 38-9 or is it a kind of appendix describing 33-37 in greater detail?

Boehmer's view is most radical. He holds that the hope in

97. W. Zimmerli, Old Testament Theology in Outline (Atlanta: John Knox, 1978), p. 229.

33-37 clashes so fundamentally with that of 40-48 that they cannot refer to the same period. 33-37 refer to the eschata, the consummation of history, whereas 40-48 describe only the preparation for that period, a phase marked by hierocracy.[98]

Frost thinks that Ezekiel envisages a double eschaton. The earthly foes are dealt with, then the more sinister, the mythical and primaeval.[99] Kaufmann quaintly puts forward the thesis that, since Ezekiel prophesied after the fall of Jerusalem, he must differ from the pre-exilic prophets who imagined a great attack by the heathen before the final redemption. Ezekiel must place the attack after the restoration for what point was there in the barbarians falling upon a ruined desolation?[100]

W. Eichrodt thinks that the return of the nation in chs. 33-37 fulfilled only one side of the prophetic promise of salvation; the other equally important side, the setting up of God's dominion over the nations still remained unfulfilled.[101] Tkacik suggests that the final editor inserted chs. 34-37 as a

98. Described in J.D. Levenson, Theology of the Program of Restoration of Ezekiel 40-48 (Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1976), p. 60.

99. Frost, Old Testament Apocalyptic 90.

100. Y. Kaufmann, The Religion of Israel (New York: Schocken Books, 1972), p. 446.

101. W. Eichrodt, Ezekiel (London: SCM, 1970), p. 520.

fitting explanation of the messianic community described in 40-48, inasmuch as the restoration depicted in 34-37 seemed too modest to prepare for it in view of the forces of evil and hostility that continued.[102] Zimmerli feels that the chapters appear where they do, before 40-48, because "it is a threat which is no longer conceivable after Yahweh has finally taken up his abode in the rebuilt temple."[103]

It does appear that, from its description in chs. 38-39 after chs. 34-37, the prophet or editor imagined this attack after the setting up of the kingdom. This idea of a second conflict with the enemies of Israel appears therefore for the first time in Ezekiel, and so the book supplies us with the forerunner of the later view of the messianic age as an inter-regnum.[104]

It is relevant to ask if the author conceives of this event taking place in this world or beyond this age, and it is difficult to give a definite answer. Von Rad writes that "whenever Ezekiel speaks of the lot of the new Israel he always assumes a historical and also a political existence for God's

102. A.J. Tkacik, "Ezekiel" in The Jerome Biblical Commentary 362.

103. W. Zimmerli, Ezekiel 1-24 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), p. 65.

104. Beckwith, Apocalypse 36.

people within their own historical land." [105] Yet Frost contends that Ezekiel's "future age, while in this world and within time, is nevertheless beyond history." [106] This is rather a mystifying statement until we study the chapters.

Persia and Cush and Put are names of real countries, yet Gog itself is a name that cannot be historically identified. Here is the mention of the mountains of Israel and a land of unwalled villages to which the great army of Gog comes, yet the army is decimated by a strange supernatural power, with no human help, and the remains of the vast host are mysteriously transported to a burial place to the east of the Dead Sea. At one point, in the Restoration chapters, the period in question seems to be at the end of the exile, and at another, in the latter days, at the end of time. The contrast is most evident in ch. 47, where water issues from the temple in Jerusalem and eventually enters and sweetens the Dead Sea. This is hardly possible in the earth as we know it.

J. Muilenburg puts it thus: "Historical considerations are by no means primary here [i.e. in 38-39]. Legendary and mythological motifs intermingle: materials from the primaeval

105. G. von Rad, Old Testament Theology, vol. II (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), p. 234.

106. Frost, Old Testament Apocalyptic 92.

Urzeit, prophetic representations of the Day of Yahweh and floating oral traditions." [107]

The answer to the dilemma lies probably in the date of the text under consideration. We have in these chapters a synthesis of the terrestrial and the supramundane, and the result is what is to be expected in a transitional period.

As Zimmerli puts it, with the announcement of an ultimate event after the return of the house of Israel to its land, the prophet opens up a new path. He starts out on the way that leads in apocalyptic to a fuller description of historical events. [108]

We find similar ideas about an attack of the nations in the latter days in what might be called contemporary and later literature of the post-exilic period. Illustrative passages are Is 29:5; 63:1-6; 66:15-19; Obad 15, 16; Jl 2:20; 3:9-21; Zech 12:3, 4; 14:2, 3.

This battle theme becomes a familiar motif in the later apocalyptic books and colours the picture of the final battle between God and his enemies. We might consider I En 56:5-8, where the author substitutes the names of Parthians and Medes in

107. J. Muilenburg, "Ezekiel" in Peake's Commentary (1962) 586.

108. Zimmerli, Ezekiel 66.

the place of Gog and Magog, and also 2 Esd 13:5, 8 and Lk 21:24.

Our conclusion is that the story of Gog in Ezekiel had a strong influence on the conception of the temporary kingdom which is found in later Jewish writings and in the book of Revelation, and also helped to form the apocalyptic view of the great battle at the end.

CHAPTER THREE

THE CONTEXT OF THE PASSAGE

We have considered the exegesis of Rev 20:1-10 and made extended notes on some of the principal ideas. Before we state our final arguments, we will look at the context of the passage, first in the book of Revelation, and then in the New Testament.

A. The Context in the book of Revelation.

There has been considerable discussion about the structure of Revelation, but in general the outline is fairly clear:

1. Ch. 1 - Prologue, with vision of the Son of Man.
2. chs. 2 & 3 - Letters to the seven churches.
3. chs. 4 & 5 - Visions of the Creator and the Redeemer.
4. chs. 6 to 16 - The three series of judgments; seals, trumpets, and bowls.
5. chs. 17 & 18 - The fall of Rome.
6. chs. 19 & 20 - The destruction of all enemies. The resurrection of the martyrs to the millennium and the Last

Judgment.

7. ch. 21 to 22:5 - The Eternal City or New Creation.

8. Ch. 22:6 to end - Epilogue.

John the author has a deep concern for the state of the Asian churches. He writes to them from the background of a vision of the Son of Man and with a strong sense of the power of the divine Creator-Redeemer. The time of the troubles is not over for the world and the church, but the end is near. In the providence of God all temporal and spiritual enemies will be destroyed. Then the glorious kingdom of God will be set up.

We learn in 1:1 that the book is a revelation of 'what must soon take place'. This purpose is further amplified in 1:19, "write what you see, what is and what is to take place hereafter". Some scholars have suggested that "what is" refers to what appears in chs. 2 & 3, and "what is to take place hereafter" to what is described in the remaining chapters.[1] It is better to think of the two as mingled throughout the whole book. There are the things which are, like the condition of the churches or the great realities of heaven. There are the events that are going to take place, the divine judgments on earth, and, after these, the destruction of the hostile powers and the

1. e.g. Harrington, Understanding 80.

setting up of the kingdom.[2]

There is a strong emphasis on the events that are to take place; e.g. 4:1, "I will show you what must take place after this". The Epilogue returns to this theme. God has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place (22:6). This is immediately followed by "And behold I am coming soon", as if the main event to come were the Parousia. See vv.10, 12, 20.

From the letters to the churches we learn not only of the state of the churches, but of events that are going to take place in the churches' life. God will both chastise and bless.

The main events that are recorded in the middle chapters of the book are the divine judgments on the world, the purpose of which are, like the plagues of Egypt, that men may repent. See 9:20f; 11:13; 14:6f; 16:9, 11. They are conveyed in three different sets of images - seals, trumpets, and bowls.

1. The Seals. We are told that Christ opens the seals. This indicates the crucial part he has in interpreting and carrying out God's purposes. The judgments are in forms familiar

2. According to W.C. van Unnik, "A Formula Describing Prophecy", New Testament Studies 9 (1962-3) 86-94., Rev 1:19 is simply an instance of a well-established mode of expression. Such a formula involving the past, present and future is characteristic of prophecy. The words were never intended to serve as a clue for dividing the book into three parts.

to men in their human experience - invasion, war, famine, plague, persecution, earthquakes and other cosmic disturbances.

While these events are taking place, it has to be noted that there are other facts in the situation. The servants of God are protected during these judgments (7:1-8), and the church is preserved on earth. Those who have perished in the great tribulation are safe in heaven (7:9-17), and the church in heaven glorifies God.

2. The Trumpets. These are described in chs. 8 & 9 with the seventh at 11:15. The first four are reminiscent of Egyptian plagues. It is probable that these seven judgments are not to be considered as a new series but simply as a variation of the old under a new image.

The seventh trumpet reveals how closely the judgments are connected with the coming kingdom. It is followed by the proclamation of that kingdom, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever" (11:15).

This phrase presumably has to be understood proleptically. It is an announcement of the coming kingdom. John's phrases are carefully chosen, and we have to notice 11:17, "We give thanks to Thee, Lord God Almighty, who art and who was". No longer is it said that he is to come; the coming of the kingdom (11:15) means

the coming of God.[3]

Further, the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Christ are one. There is one kingdom and it is eternal.

In the next chapters (12f) we read of the devil and of his agents on earth. The devil is cast out of heaven after warring with Michael. The victory is really won by Christ and his cross (12:11). The devil proceeds to persecute the church. As he is the antichrist of the spiritual world, so he gives his authority to an earthly antichrist, named the beast, and this latter is abetted by a second beast, later called the false prophet.

3. The Bowls. Again we are not to understand these as a new series of judgments, but the same under a different image. We should notice that the three images form a kind of spiral with the judgments increasing in intensity (compare 8:7-13 with 6:8). With these the wrath of God is ended (15:1).

We have to note that, while the book does not present us with a strict chronological time-table, there is nevertheless a rough chronological scheme.

As has been said of the seals the sequence does not

3. Those who believe in a literal millennium see in 11:15 the millennial reign merging into the eternal bliss of the new creation. See G.R. Beasley-Murray, "The Revelation" in The New Bible Commentary (London: I.V.Press, 1970), p. 1294.

necessarily reflect the sequence of events. "It reflects the order in which John was shown certain aspects of human history, but these events may well take place in a different order, or at the same time, or frequently repeat themselves".[4]

There are some descriptions that have to be called proleptic, e.g. 11:15, the kingdom has come; 14:8, Fallen is Babylon the Great; 16:14, 16, forecast of Armageddon. All of these events are described later in greater detail.

Yet the book does move forward to some kind of climax. We go from the woes and suffering of different kinds of judgment to the complete annihilation of the prime enemies. While wars and famines are happening, the devil or antichrist is active, as are the earthly powers through which he does his work. But the day will come when the beasts of the Roman Empire will be incapacitated and when the devil himself will be enchained and destroyed. After the destruction of death and Hades, the eternal kingdom will be set up.

The principal theme of the book of Revelation is a view of the last things. "The end is only the consolidation and completion of what happened with the appearance of Christ. It is

4. D.H. van Daalen, A Guide to the Revelation (London: SPCK, 1986), p. 72.

he who sets the last events in motion".[5] The same writer tells us that in the struggle between the church and the Roman state John sees the decisive struggle between God and Satan which ends with the victory of God. This struggle ushers in the end of this world period and the beginning of the everlasting kingdom.[6]

So our passage is set in the midst of a section which describes the destruction of the enemies of God and man, namely, the beast, the false prophet, the devil and also death and Hades. What is clear in this description is the finality of it. Here we are not dealing with a judgment within history, but with one at the end, when destinies are settled by the righteous action of God. The whole passage is a truly eschatological one.

We would like to comment on two other passages in this closing section of Revelation, for we believe that 20:4-6 is related to both of them. One is the passage on the coming of Christ in 19:11-21, and the other is the great section on the final kingdom which we find in 21:1-22:5.

There are several references to the Parousia in Revelation (1:4, 7; 3:3, 11; 14:14; 22:7, 12, 20). The letters to the seven churches begin with the words: "Grace to you and peace from him

5. A. Wikenhauser, New Testament Introduction (New York: Herder and Herder, 1958), p. 546.

6. Wikenhauser, New Testament 561.

who is and who was and who is to come." He is described, in language that goes back via Mt 24:30 to Dan 7:13 and Zech 12:10, 14, as coming with the clouds to be seen by every eye. He will come like a thief and he will come soon. He will come as a king and as a judge, with a crown on his head and a sickle in his hand. He will reward everyone according to his deeds.

But the most detailed description of his coming is to be found in our passage at 19:11-21. The passage describes the necessary preliminaries to the millennium, namely, the coming of Christ and the destruction of his enemies, especially the beast and the false prophet. The coming of the heavenly rider is said by Moffatt to be "the only event in the Apocalypse at all corresponding to the second advent." [7] Glasson writes that it is "one of the most detailed and vivid presentations of the Return of Christ in the New Testament." [8] This is the position also of Schnackenburg, [9] and of Rissi. [10] To the Post-millennialists of course these verses in ch. 19 do not describe the Parousia. In their view ch. 19 is not concerned with the Parousia but is a symbolic way of describing the

7. Moffatt, "Revelation" 467.

8. Glasson, The Revelation 109.

9. Schnackenburg, God's Rule 340.

10. Rissi, The Future 18.

struggle between Christ and the power of evil, the triumph of Christian principles in human affairs and the victory of Christ through his church. It is after this period that Christ will return to raise the dead, to judge the world, and to establish the new order.[11]

The battle in which he engages seems to be the Armageddon which is forecast in 16:16. The blood with which his garment is stained has been variously understood as 1. that of his enemies 2. that of his followers 3. his own blood. The last interpretation seems likely; the whole process of action in Revelation has been initiated by the sacrifice of Christ (ch. 5).

There are many echoes of the Old Testament in this passage. The picture of the warrior-Christ has its origin in Is 63, where Yahweh is the warrior who comes from Edom in crimsoned garments. He has trampled upon his enemies in his anger, for the day of vengeance was in his heart, and his year of redemption had come. In Revelation it is significant that there is no description of the massacre. Though the stage is set for the encounter, there is no battle. The battle is waged by the sword which is the mouth of Christ. This is all-powerful, like the word of God in the beginning when he said: "Let there be...."

11. See Ladd, A Commentary 261.

The great feast has obviously been inspired by that of Ezek 39, and the description in Revelation serves as a counterpart to the marriage-feast of the Lamb in ch. 18.[12]

The beast and the false prophet are the emperor's representatives, the first being the government official, and the second, the priest or his equivalent who ensured that the worship of the emperor was carried through. Glasson [13] informs us that over a century earlier a temple for the worship of Rome and Augustus had been erected at Pergamum. There was another of these shrines at Smyrna, and in Domitian's time it was the main centre of the cult in the area. The whole book of Revelation is written under the shadow of the Roman Empire, and towards the end the reality is made more explicit. The two characters are incarnations of Satan and their destruction takes place before his.

The theme of the Parousia is very important for our study and interpretation, and we shall return to it in the next chapter.

We must notice that there has been some discussion about the relation of chs. 19 & 20 to chs. 21 & 22. Various emendations and

12. Scott, Revelation 278.

13. Glasson, The Revelation 9.

re-arrangements have been suggested. Boismard has one in his introduction to Revelation in the Jerusalem Bible.[14] Charles has another.[15]

Charles thinks that the final chapters have been disarranged by an editor whom he describes as faithful but unintelligent! He would thus re-order these chapters:

1. Destruction of Rome (17 & 18). Thanksgiving of angels and martyrs (19:1-4; 16:5b-7; 19:5-8)
2. Destruction of hostile nations, the beast and false prophet (19:11-21). Satan chained (20:1-3)
3. Millennial kingdom. Jerusalem came down from heaven to be the capital (21:9-22:2, 14, 15). Reign of martyred saints (20:4-6)
4. Final attack of evil powers and their destruction with Satan (20:7-10)
5. The Last Judgment (20:11-15)
6. The Everlasting kingdom (21:5a, 4d, 5b, 1-4c; 22:3-5)

14. Jerusalem Bible, p. 429.

15. Charles, Revelation II 144.

What is mainly of interest here is that 19:11-21 and 20:1-3 are linked together and that 20:4-6 follows 21:9-22:2. In other words the binding of Satan follows but is coupled with the destruction of the beast and the false prophet. The rule of the martyrs follows the coming down of the holy city, and the everlasting kingdom follows the destruction of Satan and the Last Judgment.

Although he questions Charles' rearrangement of other parts of the book, A.H. McNeile thinks the suggestions for the closing chapters have some merit. "Some rearrangement is clearly needed and Charles makes it probable that the new Jerusalem which comes down from heaven is not that in which the saints live for ever, but the scene of the Messiah's temporary reign on earth with the martyrs only, during which Satan is bound and spiritual work is carried on for the conversion of the heathen." [16] The words of Rissi about rearranging the text have to be put beside these: "Such a tour de force should really be attempted only if absolutely certain indications of textual confusion are present, which is not the case here." [17]

16. A. H. McNeile, An Introduction to the Study of the New Testament (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1927), p. 246.

17. Rissi, The Future 96.

Preston and Hanson point out[18] that the order of events in chs. 20 to 22 is most confusing, e.g. all evil forces have been eliminated by the end of ch. 20, heaven and earth have passed away in 21:1, yet in 21:8 and 22:14-15 we have a state of affairs where the wicked are still very much in existence.

They think that John probably meant to describe two cities. One of them is a sort of earthly paradise set down in the midst of a pagan earth. The other is the heavenly city, which represents eternity, the state of bliss to which Christians look forward. Their rearrangement is similar to that of Charles:

1. The millennial city descends from heaven (20:4-10)
2. Description of the millennial city (21:7-22:2 and 22:14-5)
3. The Last Judgment (20:11-15)
4. The new heaven and earth, the eternal city (21:1-6, 22:3-5)
5. Epilogue (22:6-13, 16-21)

These commentators go on to say that the millennial city is a picture of what the Church Militant is called to be on earth,[19] while the eternal city shows us the Church

18. R.H. Preston & A.T. Hanson, The Revelation of Saint John the Divine (London: SCM Press, 1949), p. 129.

19. Preston & Hanson, The Revelation 132.

Triumphant, the church as she will be when time and space are no more.

There are other scholars who consider that in the whole or part of 21:1-22:5 we have a description of the millennium. G.R. Beasley-Murray considers that 21:9-22:5, 14, 15 relate to it. One of the reasons given is that 21:24-27 use terms that presuppose a continuation of earthly existence, "nations receive blessings from the city, kings bring their glory into it, the unclean are denied access to it". He finds it comprehensible to apply the healing of the nations from leaves of the tree of life to the millennium but not to risen humanity existing in heavenly conditions.[20]

But surely this may be an employment of the earthly to describe the heavenly (which is the only way we can describe heavenly realities), and this Beasley-Murray himself concedes.

To the present writer the verses in 21:1-22:5 speak more of a heavenly life: The sea is no more; death is no more; the former things have passed away; all things are made new; there is no temple in the city for the glory of God is its light; his

20. G.R. Beasley-Murray, "Revelation" in NBC 1305. A similar point of view is found in E.F. Scott, The Book of Revelation (London: SCM, 1949). He writes that "the city of John's vision is not the final home of the blessed...It is the ideal city which will arise on earth, and at best is only a vestibule to eternal life." p. 100.

servants see God's face.

Admittedly, the description of the millennial kingdom in 20:4-6 is somewhat sparse, and the addition of these extra verses from ch. 21 would add some substance to it. However, John may not have intended to give a full description. He may have been concerned merely with the fact of the martyrs' reward.

In 21:1-22:5 we have the ultimate hope that John holds before the saints in their suffering. It stands in contrast to the kingdoms of this world. Rome, as city or empire, had its own magnificence, but its finery was that of a harlot and it was as "a woman drunk with the blood of the saints and the blood of the martyrs of Jesus" (17:6). It was "the haunt of every foul spirit" (18:2) with "sins heaped as high as heaven" (18:5). How different is the heavenly city!

What then can we say of Rev 20:4-6 in the context of the book of Revelation? The passage appears at the end of the book, which looks forward to a great climax with the coming of Christ. The enemies of God and man will be defeated before the final kingdom of God is set up. Rev 20:4-6, with its description of the resurrection of the martyrs, is placed in the account of the liquidation of one of these enemies, the devil, possibly because the latter inspired the persecutions.

B. The Context in the New Testament

We have to ask if there is anything comparable to the millennial kingdom in the rest of the New Testament. It is possible to quote Jesus' words in Mt 19:28 - "Truly I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of man shall sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel". This does indeed speak of the new world (paliggenesia) but not of a temporary kingdom, and the reference is more likely to the final kingdom described in Rev 22:3-5 ("they shall reign for ever and ever"). Equally we cannot conclude that 1 Cor 6:2 refers to judgment in a temporary kingdom.

G.E. Ladd draws attention to the fact that there are other passages in the New Testament which hint at a partial resurrection (Lk 14:14; 20:35; 1 Th 4:16; Phil 3:11; 1 Cor 15:23) or a resurrection in two stages (Jo 5:29; cf. Dan 12:2).[21] His point is that the earlier resurrection refers to that at the beginning of the millennium. Lk 14:14 speaks of the resurrection of the just and 20:35 of those who are accounted worthy to attain to that age and to the resurrection from the dead. In Phil 3:11 Paul expresses the hope that he may attain to the resurrection, and Jo 5:29 separates at the resurrection those who have done

21. Ladd, Crucial Questions 183.

good from those who have done evil. This is a long way, however, from speaking of a temporary kingdom.

1 Th 4:13-18 and 1 Cor 15:23-28 need a little more detailed treatment. We propose to examine these two passages, and then consider the concept of the Two Ages in the New Testament.

1 Th 4:13-18 reads:

"13 But we would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. 14 For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. 15 For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16 For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel's call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first; 17 then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we shall always be with the Lord. 18 Therefore comfort one another with these words."

The Thessalonians had presented a problem to Paul. Did the death of those Christians who died before the Parousia mean that they were excluded from all the glory of Christ's coming? Paul's answer was that at Christ's coming the dead will be blessed equally with the living.

13 "those who are asleep". The word is a euphemism for death and as such is found in both Old Testament and New Testament (e.g. Gen 47:30, Jo 11:11-13).

"those who have no hope". Pagans who have no hope and so

their grief is of a different kind from that of Christians.

14 Belief in the resurrection of Jesus is the foundation for the hope in the resurrection of Christians, and they are raised to have fellowship with Christ.

I.H. Marshall here comments that "In view of his belief that the Parousia was imminent and as a result of the brevity of his visit to Thessalonica, it is possible that Paul had not mentioned or at least had said little about the resurrection of the dead." [22]

15 "word of the Lord". The reference is probably not to a special revelation to Paul or to a word to a prophet, but to the general teaching of the Lord on the subject. The resurrection of the dead was part of Jesus' expectation (Mt 8:11; 22:23-33) and he reckoned with the certainty of death before the Parousia for some of his followers (Mt 24:9; Mk 13:12; Mk 9:1).

"Precede" (phthano) has the idea of having advantage over because of an earlier arrival. Here Paul contradicts a view that was current in Judaism that those who were alive at the end of the world would be better off than the dead (Dan 12:12; Ps Sol 17:50; 2 Esd 13:24).

22. I.H. Marshall, 1 and 2 Thessalonians (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), p. 120.

"we who are alive" is a general statement which does not necessarily mean that Paul expected to be alive himself, though "who are left" suggests that those who are alive are an exception to the vast company who have fallen asleep.

16 Angels and trumpets were ordinarily associated in apocalyptic with the end and with judgment (Jude 14; 1 En 1:9; Rev 7:2; Is 27:13; 1 Cor 15:52; Mt 24:31; 2 Esd 6:13; Sib Or 4:174).

17 The dead who have had a relationship with Jesus will rise first, in contrast to the living Christians who meet Jesus at the next stage. Together they are caught up (Lat. rapiemur, hence rapture) to meet the Lord (hapantēsis - of going out to meet a dignitary on an official visit).

18 The Thessalonians may take comfort in the fact that at the Parousia both dead and living Christians will be united in the presence of the Lord.

It is Schweitzer's position that Paul borrowed the contemporary Messianic categories that he found in Baruch and 4 Ezra, and he ascribes to the apostle a belief in a temporary Messianic kingdom.[23]

23. A. Schweitzer, The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle (London: Black, 1931), pp. 65-68.

Schweitzer's schema can be summarized thus:

1. The sudden return of Jesus (1 Th 5:1-4)
2. The resurrection of believers who have already fallen asleep and the transformation of those still alive into the resurrection mode of living (1 Th 4:14-15)
3. All together are taken up into the clouds to be forever with the Lord (1 Th 4:16-17)
4. The Messianic Judgment (1 Th 4:6) By Christ (2 Cor 5:10) By God (Rom 14:10)
5. The Messianic Kingdom (1 Cor 15:23-28)
6. The last enemy, death, is overcome (1 Cor 15:26)
7. The Messianic Kingdom comes to an end
8. The End (1 Cor 15:24) The General Resurrection and the Last Judgment
9. The Consummation: God all in all (1 Cor 15:28)

W.D. Davies thinks that it is erroneous to make Paul conform too closely to current apocalyptic speculation. He drew upon this for his terms, but the character of his eschatology was determined by Jesus and by the significance that Jesus had given to that eschatological teaching.[24]

Davies thinks that it is not necessary to postulate two resurrections with a messianic kingdom in between to explain the passage 1 Th 4:13-18. The Thessalonians had been taught that the change of those in Christ into the resurrection mode of existence

24. W.D. Davies, Paul and Rabbinic Judaism (London: SPCK, 1962), p. 290. The following comments are from pp. 289-298.

would soon take place, and this without the experience of death. When certain Christians did die, the survivors were alarmed and wondered if their death meant that they would not gain the blessing. Paul reassures them that at the advent of Christ those who had died would be raised so as to share the same privileges as those who had survived. Accordingly there is no need to postulate a twofold resurrection.

It would certainly be difficult to conclude from this passage that Paul believed in a millennium.

It tells us that at the Parousia the dead will be raised and the living so transformed that they will be taken up in the clouds. Together with the others they will meet the Lord and have everlasting fellowship with him. All Christians are to be blessed in this way, not just the martyrs. Further, they are to be with the Lord not for a period but for ever.

In the next chapter, 1 Th 5:1-11, Paul proceeds to talk about the Day of the Lord, and associates judgment with it. It will bring either salvation or destruction and retribution according to the state of men. In the millennium passage in Rev 20 it would seem that judgment does not take place until the end of the thousand years.

Before we leave this passage, we may note a modern study in which there is propounded the view that there was a millenarian

radicalism at Thessalonica. The Thessalonians, or some of them, perceived the millennium to have already dawned, and so were perplexed by the fact that some of their number had died.[25]

1 Cor 15:23-28 has to be taken more seriously.

"in Christ shall all be made alive. 23 But each in his own order: Christ the first-fruits, then(epeita) at his coming those who belong to Christ. 24 Then comes the end(eita to telos) when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule. 25 For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. 26 The last enemy to be destroyed is death. 27 For God has put all things in subjection under his feet. But when it says - all things are put in subjection under him - it is plain that he is excepted who put all things under him. 28 When all things are subjected to him then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things under him, that God may be everything to everyone."

"In Christ shall all be made alive". H. Conzelman makes two interesting comments.[26] The first is - "Since it is not the mythical schema that holds [reference to Adam] but the Pauline transformation of it, "all" does not mean all men altogether but all who are in Christ". The second refers to the future tense where we might expect a present - "This is bound up with the orientation of existence on the parousia". cf. Rom 6:5, 8.

23 "Each in his own order"(tagma). This word means a military division or a rank. There are two such in the present

25. R. Jewett, The Thessalonian Correspondence (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986).

26. H. Conzelmann, 1 Corinthians (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975, orig.: 1969), p. 269.

passage: 1. Christ, the Risen One, the first-fruits (aparchē), precedent in time and honour, and also causal. 2. Those who are Christ's (1 Cor 3:23; Gal 5:24) who will reach the goal of resurrection at Christ's coming (parousia).

24 "Then (comes) the end". As the epeita in v. 23 is defined by "at his coming", so eita is defined by the "when" clause, which is the indefinite hotan. Rule has been committed to the Son for a certain purpose, that of rendering inoperative all powers that oppose God. When that purpose is completed the power is returned to the Father. This does not mean the end of Christ's sovereignty but the conclusion of the work assigned to him.

An alternative for eita to telos has been suggested, "then the rest", meaning the rest of the dead. This would refer to a third group at the general resurrection. Yet against this translation we have to notice that "Hering is unable to find a single text, sacred or secular, in which telos has this sense".[27]

25 It has been decreed by God that Christ reigns until he has vanquished all his foes. These words freely adapt Ps 110:1.

26 As last enemy death is brought to nought (cf. Rev 20:14).

27. Morris, 1 Corinthians 211.

Death is almost personified as in Is 25:8.

27a is a quotation from Ps 8:6, a Psalm which speaks of man's dignity in God's universe and which is here applied to Christ and his task. When Christ has subjected all things to himself, he will submit himself to the Father that God may "fulfil all relations in all creatures".[28] There will no longer be any need of a mediator for all relations will be direct. God's will shall be regnant.

Beckwith writes that many scholars attribute to Paul a belief in a millennial kingdom, and find it in this passage.[29] In their interpretation three steps are supposed: 1. The Resurrection of Christ. 2. The parousia with the resurrection of Christians and the setting up of the messianic kingdom. 3. After an indefinite interval, the resurrection of others, the victory of Christ over all hostile powers and the handing over of the kingdom to God.

They argue that the "all" of v. 22 must include all men as in the phrase "in Adam all die". tagma is understood as company and, as this cannot be applied strictly to Christ, the 2nd and 3rd groupings are necessary. The reign of Christ begins at the

28. A. Robertson and A. Plummer, 1 Corinthians (Edinburgh: Clark, 1929), p. 358.

29. Beckwith, The Apocalypse 98.

parousia and continues until all enemies are liquidated.

The more conservative scholars, for example Ladd,[30] argue that epeita and eita denote sequence, sequence depending on temporal succession. Thus the two words are used in the description of the series of appearances of the risen Christ to his disciples in 1 Cor 15:5-7. As the Parousia takes place a considerable time after the Resurrection so the End takes place some time after the Parousia. It is in the period between the Parousia and the End that the inter-regnum takes place. Paul does not define the duration of the inter-regnum but holds that at the end of it Christ will hand the kingdom over to God.

Beckwith answers : 1. The second "all" refers to those who are in Christ. 2. The word tagma is better translated station, rank or place, and the meaning is "Christ in his appointed place, and, afterwards, Christians in theirs". 3. The reign of Christ does not necessarily imply a period after the Second Advent. Already in the resurrection Christ has been raised to a kingship in this world and in the world to come (Eph 1:20f; Ph 2:9f), a reign which may be placed between the resurrection and the parousia.

30. Ladd, Crucial Questions 178.

Davies also makes several valid points.[31] He argues that eita does not imply an interval of time (e.g. Jo 13:4, 5; 19:26, 27; and 1 Cor 15:5, 6, 7). To illustrate from the first of these passages, we read that Jesus girded himself then he poured water.[32]

Other passages in the New Testament rarely speak of the kingdom of Christ. When they do, as at Col 1:12, 13, the kingdom is a present fact, in being before the Parousia. 2 Tim 4:1 links his kingdom with the judgment. Eph 5:5 seems to identify it with the kingdom of God.

There is no mention anywhere in Paul of an entering into the Messianic kingdom first.

Paul often connects the Parousia with the day of judgment (1 Cor 1:7f; 2 Cor 1:14; Phil 1:6, 10; 2:16). We may compare 2 Pet 1:11 where Christ's kingdom is linked with judgment.

Davies makes the above points in the passage quoted and also the final one that omitting the inter-regnum brings the resurrection of Jesus into closer proximity with the final consummation.

31. Davies, Paul 289-298.

32. E.B. Allo makes this and other points in his study "Saint Paul et la Double Résurrection Corporelle" in RB 41(1932) 187-209.

Beckwith acknowledges that there is in the form of this utterance some reminiscence of the apocalyptic and rabbinical doctrine of a temporary messianic kingdom.[33] Conzelmann also notes this:[34]

This section shows us Paul in the tradition of apocalyptic. The latter's fundamental notion that the course of the world follows a predetermined plan, along with a concrete conception of this plan, of the stages of its development is here taken for granted. "Christ" has been subsequently introduced into the schema, thereby modifying it....Paul refashions the Jewish notion in such a way as to make it a means to the presentation of his own eschatological intention, the distinction between present and future. He takes over from the schema the notion that death is not annihilated until the end of the messianic kingdom. But he transposes this kingdom into the present. For Christ is risen.

We can understand how traces of the temporary kingdom have been found here, but we cannot go so far as to say that Paul believed in the millennium. We may contend that if Paul had believed that there would be such a kingdom he would have been more specific. This is C.K. Barrett's argument: "It seems unthinkable that Paul, if he believed in such a kingdom, should pass it over without a word." [35] Ladd, himself a pre-millenarian, acknowledges this; "Paul indeed suggests this

33. Beckwith, The Apocalypse 100.

34. Conzelmann, 1 Corinthians 269.

35. C.K. Barrett, A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians (London: A. & C. Black, 1968), p. 356.

interregnum, but his words are not as explicit as is the Revelation".[36]

What Paul is saying in 1 Cor 15:23-28 is that the evil powers have to be dispossessed. Christ began this during his earthly ministry and continues to do it in the period between the Resurrection and the Parousia, one enemy after another being overpowered. At the end Christ will subordinate himself and hand over his reign to the Father.

It would seem that Paul's eschatology can be summarized: the expectation of the Parousia, the final judgment, the general resurrection of the dead, the transformation of the righteous, and the final consummation when God would be all in all.

The New Testament envisages two ages, not three. Ladd writes that one of the strongest arguments in favour of the amillennial position and one which is infrequently used is that New Testament teaching makes it appear that the age to come will follow directly upon the consummation of this age with no intervening period.[37]

We find the idea of two ages in apocalyptic literature. 2 Esdras 7 has the sentences: "For this cause the Most High has

36. Ladd, Crucial Questions 182.

37. Ladd, Crucial Questions 167.

made not one age but two"(v. 50) and "But the day of Judgment shall be the end of this age and the beginning of the eternal age that is to come"(v. 113).

Throughout the New Testament there runs this structure of eschatology, the antithesis of this age and of the age to come. We live now in this age, and the age to come will be inaugurated by Jesus at his coming.

In Mt 24:3 the disciples ask Jesus "What will be the sign of your parousia and of the close of the age?" The antithesis is clearly seen in Mt 24:3 (Whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven in this age or in the age to come); Mt 13:39 (The harvest is the close of this age and the reapers are the angels); Mk 10:30 (They will receive a hundredfold now and in the age to come eternal life); Lk 20:34 (The sons of this age marry but those who are accounted worthy to attain to that age and to the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage, for they cannot die any more).

The distinction is not confined to the Gospels. In Eph 1:21 we have the phrase "not only in this age but also in that which is to come". See also 2 Cor 4:4; Gal 1:4; Rom 12:2 and Heb 6:5.

In the New Testament therefore we cannot find much support for a millennium outside of Rev 20. We would hardly find the idea in 1 Cor 15 if we did not go to that passage with Rev 20, and the

idea is not favoured by the emphasis on the two ages.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE MESSAGE, FORM AND PURPOSE OF THE BOOK

So far we have described the main interpretations of the millennium passage and indicated our initial predilection. The exegetical examination of the passage convinces us that there are difficulties connected with every interpretation. Someone has spoken of the polyvalence of apocalyptic symbolism, and the phrase reminds us of the variety of interpretations.

We believe, however, in the light of the above study, that a good case can be made for an interpretation of the third type, and we have received support for our interpretation from the strong impression that the reading of the whole book has made upon us.

As we draw the threads of our argument together, we desire to stress three points. They are all closely related to the author and his outlook. The book originated with him and so his thinking is important for the origin and purpose of the book. There is much that is uncertain about John but the following statements may be made about him with confidence: (1) He held the

faith of the first century church. (2) He was influenced by Jewish traditional ideas, as they are to be found both in the Old Testament and in apocalyptic. (3) He had a close relationship to his readers and was concerned about their way of life.

We wish to consider these topics more closely, realizing that they have been touched upon in some ways in the above pages:

1. His Christian faith and especially his expectation of the Parousia.
2. His employment of the content and form of apocalyptic, especially symbolism.
3. His concern that Christians be faithful to their high calling, even if it led to suffering.

The verses about the millennium have to be related to the author and his purpose in writing. They have also to be related to the message of the book of Revelation and indeed to the Christian tradition in the whole New Testament.

As we read and re-read the book we find that the above three ideas assume a great prominence. We believe that they are as direction posts all pointing to a certain interpretation of the passage.

I - THE EXPECTATION OF THE PAROUSIA

First of all, we have to remember that John spoke and wrote as a Christian, and the faith that he held was the Christian faith, the faith of the New Testament and the first-century church. The elements of the faith are set forth in his first chapter.

God the Father is supreme over all. He is the Alpha and the Omega.

Jesus is the one who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood. He has given those who believe in him a certain status: they are admitted to his kingdom and they are priests in the very presence of God.

Jesus was one who died but he rose again and is alive for evermore, and has power over Death and Hades. He is not only the faithful witness but the first-born of the dead, his resurrection making possible that of those who believe in him.

He is now an authoritative figure, not only in the midst of the churches, where his authority is recognized, but in the midst of the nations, where it is not recognized. He is the ruler of the kings of the earth.

He will come again in judgment and mercy, destroying the hostile powers, and bestowing his blessings on the faithful. So

in 1:7 we read "Behold he is coming with the clouds and every eye will see him, everyone who pierced him, and all the tribes of the earth will wail on account of him".

There is also the Spirit, although the Trinity is not made explicit. John was in the Spirit on the Lord's day when he had his opening vision. "He who has an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" is a refrain in the letters.

He also believes in the church, and he has singled out seven churches to represent the whole.

While none of the above elements of the faith can be neglected, we believe that he has a particular interest in one, and that is the coming of the Lord, the Parousia. The Lord is the one who is and who was and who is to come. The book is concerned not only with what is (1:19) but with what is to take place soon. Among the imminent events is the coming of Christ, which gives significance to all the others. There are several references to it in the course of the book as we have noted,[1] and he returns to the thought in the closing chapter: "Behold I am coming soon" (22:12). We believe that it is closely related to what is set forth in the millennium passage.

1. See p. 135.

There are some scholars who deny the existence of the idea in Revelation.[2] In his short study of the subject J.M. Efird makes some valid points. He considers that the prophetic passages of scripture to which pre-millennialists appeal are poetic and must be understood poetically. He thinks that the intent and meaning of the prophetic passages have already been fulfilled.[3] The prophets said that the Jewish people in Babylon would be allowed to return home, that a descendant of David would sit on the throne of David, and that the people would become a political state again. All three things happened - the people returned in 538 BC, the Davidic descendant Zerubbabel sat on the throne 520-515 BC, and the people became a political state in 141 BC. There is no mention of a millennium in any Old Testament texts.

He goes on to contend that in Revelation there is no reference to a return of Jesus.[4] In ch. 20 there is a figure coming down from heaven but that figure is identified as an angel, a servant of God. Even in ch. 19 there is no reference to a return. He considers the incident in ch. 19 as part of the apocalyptic depiction, which began in ch. 17, of the destruction

2. e.g. J.M. Efird, End-Times (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986).
3. Efird, End-Times 71.
4. Efird, End-Times 73.

of Rome and the removal of persecution in Asia Minor. Jesus is God's agent to execute judgment.

His understanding of the millennium is that when servants of Christ are dedicated and devoted entirely to Christ and God's kingdom Satan is bound, but when they are unfaithful and ally themselves with Satan or his representatives Satan is loose, free to do damage to God's people. Those who are totally (one thousand) devoted to God, Christ and the kingdom will never be separated from them.

He is opposed to reading into the book schemes about the end times. There is no reference to a return of Jesus. There is no evidence in the passage or in the entire book that the author expected human history to come to a close. The new age in chs. 21-22 is a transformed period of human history with the persecution of God's people gone. "The simple truth is that the book of Revelation does not predict the end of the world or the return of Jesus." [5] The end that was to come soon was the end of persecution.

There are other scholars who do not deny the existence of the idea of the second coming so absolutely but who nevertheless downplay it. Their emphasis is on present experience not future

5. Efird, End-Times 83.

hope. The suffering Christians of Asia Minor are not encouraged by the promise of what will be but by the presence of Christ now. The Parousia is a present, not a future, event.[6]

D.L. Barr contends that the book failed spectacularly to deliver on its promise that Jesus would come soon (1:1, 7; 6:11; 10:6; 11:15; 22:6, 7, 20). The world stubbornly refused to end. But the book succeeded in conveying the reality of Christ's presence. The book has to be interpreted within the context of the public worship of the church, culminating in the Eucharist.

His view is similar to that of J.G. Gager, whom he mentions and who writes that the recital of the Apocalypse provides the believer with the "experience of millennial bliss as a living reality." Barr writes that to worship God is to experience his kingdom. "The eschatological world is realized in the cultic event." [7] The experience of Jesus can be so powerful that it is stronger than the experience of persecution. It is by this that the worshipping community is sustained rather than by the glimpse of some future day of bliss. This experience looks both backward to the coming of Jesus which brought salvation to the world, and forward to the coming of Jesus when every eye will see him. "But

6. e.g. D.L. Barr, "The Apocalypse as a Symbolic Transformation of the World: A Literary Analysis" in Interpretation, 38:1 (January 1984) 39-50.

7. Barr, "The Apocalypse" 47.

given the highly symbolic nature of the book it is not at all clear how John understood the future coming." [8] Jesus' coming need not be understood in the traditional millenarian fashion (2:5, 16; 3:3).

And so Barr concludes that these Christians received comfort not because they were naive enough to stake their lives on the imminent arrival of some oft-promised event. "They live in a new reality in which lambs conquer and suffering rules. The victims have become the victors." [9]

While it is true that the reality the persecuted Christians received in worship was an important factor in their being comforted, the fact remains that the object of their hope, viz. the future coming of Christ, with all that it would effect, had also a distinct reality, and this has a very prominent place in the book of Revelation.

What E.S. Fiorenza says of the position of Gager in his book "Kingdom and Community" from which Barr quoted above is applicable here:

Finally, it must be questioned whether the main goal of the author in composing the book was "to make possible an experience of millennial bliss as living reality" or "to experience the future as present." The

8. Barr, "The Apocalypse" 49.

9. Barr, "The Apocalypse" 50.

opposite appears to be the case. The author does not encourage the consistent resistance (hypomene) of Christians by eliminating the difference in time between the present and the eschatological future. Instead, he stresses that Christians do not yet actively exercise their kingship. Eschatological salvation is near but not yet present. Like the prophets of Israel, he encourages the churches by interpreting their situation and task in the light of the eschatological future. He speaks of future salvation for the sake of exhortation."[10]

We consider that John shared the first century belief in the near return of Jesus. He was mistaken in that belief; the end did not come. Yet the belief was sincerely held by him and it informs his thoughts in his book.

It is possible that it is because Christ did not come as expected that some scholars have argued that John could not have shared that belief or that he did not hold it very ardently. There were those in the early church who questioned the truth of the Parousia promise (2 Pet 3:3f), but the doubt was not the attitude of the New Testament as a whole, and certainly it was not shared by John.

Twentieth-century Christians may have different views about the final Parousia, but we are concerned in this essay with the thinking of John the seer and writer of the book of Revelation, and we believe that it was a dominant element in his thinking.

10. Fiorenza, The Book 167.

This is the great event to which John looks forward. As H.B. Swete puts it: "The whole book is a Sursum Corda, inviting the churches to seek strength in the faith of a triumphant and returning Christ".[11]

Indeed this is the event to which the whole New Testament looks forward. There are references to the Parousia in every book of the New Testament except Galatians, Philemon, 2 & 3 John and possibly Ephesians. Expression was given to the hope at every eucharist: "you do show forth the Lord's death until he come".

J.A.T. Robinson draws attention to a fact that is of great relevance to our thesis. It is that in the New Testament the focus of hope is always the Parousia rather than the raising of the dead, and there is no question of the dead being raised prior to this or independently of it. For Paul the important point is the theological unity between the resurrection of Christians and the Parousia of Christ. It is not merely that they occur together; the dead are raised precisely in order to participate in the messianic victory. Just as the resurrection of Christ was not simply restoration to life but exaltation to victory, so it is with the resurrection of those who are in him. The resurrection of Christians and the Parousia of Christ are

11. Swete, The Apocalypse xcvi.

essentially one.[12]

The first Christians were dominated by the expectation. When the Parousia was delayed, they had to come to terms with it. As N. Perrin points out, they did this in three ways: 1. The expectation was simply reiterated as in 2 Peter. 2. The Christians maintained the expectation but pushed it into the future. This is true of Matthew and especially of Luke. The hope was not lost but there was an awareness of work to be done and witness to be made. 3. There were those who believed that the Parousia had taken place. The Cross and Resurrection were final events. This is the position of the Fourth Gospel although we have to note that even there are to be found passages which speak of the resurrection on the Last Day.[13]

The book of Revelation falls into the first group. Although it was composed at the end of the first century the hope is not lost. "Behold he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, everyone who pierced him; and all the tribes of the earth will wail on account of him" (1:7). Perrin says of this: "This is a classic statement of the early Christian hope for the

12. J.A.T. Robinson, "Resurrection in the New Testament" in IDB IV 52.

13. N. Perrin, The New Testament: an Introduction (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Inc, 1974), p. 41.

return of Jesus as apocalyptic judge and redeemer".[14] We have noticed other references to the coming in the book.

We have to remember of course that Jesus comes in many ways. He comes at his resurrection and at the day of Pentecost. He comes to the church and the individual in the course of history and in many of the experiences of life, both in blessing and in judgment. He comes to us at the eucharist. He comes to us at the time of our death. There are references to such comings in the letters of Revelation. In 2:5, 16; 3:3, Christ threatens to come in judgment unless they repent.[15]

There is also a final coming, at the end, when history is wound up. The main expectation in Revelation is the last coming and this he refers to in many passages. One of the clearest references we find in 19:11, the passage of the rider on the white horse, of which Farrer says: "The rider on the white horse has brought the fullness of judgment".[16]

The answer to those who argue that in such passages John is

14. Perrin, The New Testament 82.

15. Collins suggests that in these passages the reference is to the final coming. Christ's coming hangs as a threat over the wrongdoers, a threat which is a powerful motivation to repentance. If they do not repent, the coming will be to punish not to reward. Apocalypse 22:6-21 as the Focal Point 41.

16. A.M. Farrer, A Rebirth of Images (Boston: Beacon, 1949), p. 177.

describing the coming of Christ in judgment in the course of history is to be found in the nature of the events that are described in the closing chapters. We are dealing not only with the judgment of the secular powers in the shape of the beast and the false prophet but with the destruction of the devil and with the end of death itself. These two latter powers are not simply restricted in their movements and influence; they are actually destroyed. Their annihilation means the end of the present age.

II - APOCALYPTIC AND ITS SYMBOLISM

A second prominent feature of Revelation is one that is closely related to the first, its apocalypticism. It is an apocalyptic book both as to content and form.

One of the earliest books of apocalyptic is the book of Daniel although the seeds are to be found in earlier Old Testament prophets. The ideas of Daniel were so stamped upon the nation's mind that they became part of the setting for future apocalyptic conceptions.

Apocalyptic is clearly a development of prophecy with its own distinctive features. It was evoked by a particular type of crisis. While in the time of the earlier prophets, Palestine had often been invaded by other races, these races had more or less respected the religion of Israel. But after the advent of Alexander the Great there was an aggressive new culture that confronted the Jews. There was a danger of Hellenic influences eating into Jewish ideals, and the danger arose before the year in which the abomination of desolation was set up in the temple.

The attack on Judaism's soul was perceived by the Maccabees and led to resistance. Out of this situation sprang the book of Daniel, with all its encouragement to the people of God to remain faithful to their high tradition. The writer believed that in the conflict God would be victorious and bring his purpose to

fruition. The ideas that he used to convey his teaching were ideas that had become familiar in the prophets. They were ideas like the Day of the Lord, Judgment, Resurrection, the Kingdom of God, and Angels.

The day of the Lord was a day of judgment and blessing. Israel is blessed and the nations are judged. In Dan 7 the heathen nations are typified in the form of beasts, a symbolic form that remained a feature of apocalyptic to the end.

The prophets had forecast a kingdom. In Daniel's vision their bright ideals are fulfilled, everlasting, universal, righteous and immediate (7:27). It is a messianic kingdom without a messiah, and it will be preceded by a time of trouble (12:1).

The resurrection of the individual appears in 12:1, a verse that speaks of a resurrection and sharply contrasts the destiny of the righteous with that of the wicked.

Angels are prominent. In Daniel they seem to occupy the place taken by God himself in the prophets. They have definite functions in directing temporal events. Some have names and some are guardian angels (10:13).

These ideas were developed in the next two centuries.

Always there was the thought that God would intervene and

bring deliverance to his people. His agent would be the Son of Man, a phrase probably taken from Daniel originally but appearing frequently in the parables of Enoch (37-71), where he is also called the Christ or Messiah (48:10), the Elect One (49:11) and the Righteous One (38:2).

The woes of the Messiah will precede his coming that men may be forced to repent. Calamity will follow on calamity and tribulation on tribulation (Jub 23:13). A gentile invasion and the terrors of war will serve as a discipline for God's people.

The time of distress will be followed by an annihilating judgment of the nations. At the great judgment Mastema, the evil one, will be condemned (Jub 10:8) and will disappear.

At first the kingdom of God is conceived as developing gradually (Jub 23:27), then it came to be considered that the earth was no longer a fit sphere for the kingdom. The writers turned their expectations to the catastrophic, and the new heaven and earth would follow the final judgment. In En 91-104 there is a temporary kingdom on earth, followed by a spiritual resurrection to the pure joys of heaven. In the parables of Enoch there is the hope of an eternal kingdom on earth but it is to exist in a new heaven and a new earth.

In the parables the resurrection was made a commonplace of Jewish theology and the resurrection of the body is put forward

clearly in 2 Maccabees. But there are other views about the after-life. When men die their bones shall rest in the earth, and their spirits shall have much joy (Jub 23:31). The book of Wisdom reveals Greek influence: there is no resurrection but there are the joys and certainty of immortality (9:15; 3:1).

Finally there is teaching about the angels and demons. In the Test Dan 6:2, 5 the angelology is advanced and Michael is regarded as a mediator between God and Israel. In the parables thousands and myriads, a multitude beyond number, stand before Him who is the Lord of spirits.

The above ideas provided the background to writers of apocalyptic in the first century AD, and are recognizable by readers of Revelation. Two outstanding events have to be taken into account in that period, however, the influence of Rome and the coming of Jesus.

The domination of Rome provided the perfect breeding-ground for apocalyptic ideas. The feeling against the conqueror was bitter and nationalism was strong. In the Assumption of Moses we have a picture of immediate judgment, preceded by convulsions of nature which were conventional symbols. There is the end of the devil and the abolition of evil, the exaltation of Israel and the punishment of her enemies and the establishment of the kingdom by God himself. In 2 Esdras there is the destruction of the Eagle

of Rome, the Son of Man destroying his enemies by the word of his mouth; there is also teaching about a temporary kingdom and a first resurrection.

Hatred of Rome was in the atmosphere and it has been said that "the bitterness of the Jewish-Christian feeling against Rome in our own Apocalypse was partly due to intense national and patriotic feeling and not wholly to religious persecution".[17]

The coming of Jesus was the second factor. The Christian church took over the outlook of Jewish eschatology. Apocalyptic was discarded by the Jews, but the ideas were congenial to Christians and were used by them to give expression to their faith. In Christian apocalyptic Jesus was the central figure, and the coming judge was identified with the one who rose from the dead and ascended to the throne at the right hand of God.

Jesus chose as his own the title of the Son of Man and identified himself with the being in the vision of Enoch who would come to conclude the present age with a final judgment. He focused all prophetic and apocalyptic teaching on himself. In the New Testament as a whole there is the assumption that all the foreshadowing of coming judgment and kingdom find a fulfilment in

17. W.J. Ferrar, From Daniel to St. John the Divine (London: SPCK, 1930), p. 79. To this author I owe many of the insights in this section.

him.

In Revelation we find a continuity with previous apocalyptic writers. John is not only steeped in the Jewish prophets, but he speaks in the idiom of the latest of them, Daniel, and of Enoch and of the apocalypticists.[18] But he writes as a Christian, as one who believed in the efficacy of the sacrifice of Christ, and of the reality of the resurrection and ascension and coming Parousia.

Christ is to come quickly, yet his coming is to be preceded by the woes long associated with the divine advent. The order in the vision of the seals, presaging various woes, is like that found in the Assumption of Moses and in the synoptic apocalypses.

The woes in the apocalyptic lists were the trials and afflictions that men had to face in every century. John himself had lived through a comparable series in his own century. G. Caird speaks of the earthquakes of AD 60, the defeat of the Roman army by the Parthians in AD 62, the persecution of the Christians after the fire of Rome in AD 64, the Jewish War of AD 66-70, the

18. See G.K. Beale, The Use of Daniel in Jewish Apocalyptic Literature and in the Revelation of St. John (New York: University Press of America, 1984). "The same kind of overriding universal concern for the overturning of the corrupt world kingdom and the installment of God as eschatological king in Revelation is best paralleled in Daniel". p. 273.

suicide of Nero in AD 68, leading to chaos as four claimants battled for the throne, the eruption of Vesuvius in AD 79 which created a pall of darkness so widespread that men feared the dissolution of the physical order, and the serious grain famine of AD 92.[19]

But John was probably using traditional apocalyptic material in the woes of the Vision of the Seals, although the reality of the afflictions would be underlined by the above events. We may compare them with the eschatological passages in the Gospels. We may note, for example, the order of messianic woes in Lk 21. Here we have wars, earthquakes, famines, plagues, persecutions. John consistently places earthquakes last in his order as immediate precursors of the consummation. See 8:5; 11:13; 16:18.

As the seals are related to the apocalyptic tradition found in the Synoptic Gospels, so the trumpets and bowls represent developments in the Egyptian plague tradition, emphasising first the call to repentance and second the consequent punishments. "The three sequences of plagues in the seals, trumpets and bowls show clearly the author's debt to traditional material; his work indicates a further stage in the use of imagery which originated

19. Caird, A Commentary 79.

in Israel's historical and prophetic traditions".[20]

There is also the question of form. Not only do the above ideas appear in apocalyptic but they are described with a plentiful use of imagery and symbolism.

The symbolism is often of a very bizarre kind, involving grotesque creatures. D.S. Russell tells us that some of the symbolism no doubt had its origin in "the fertile imaginations of the apocalyptists themselves through their experience of dreams, visions and the like".[21] But he goes on to point out that they were using stereotyped figures which belonged to a well-defined tradition whose roots went back into the distant past. This is particularly true of one of the major symbolic figures, namely the dragon.

This creature did not originate in the visionary apparatus of John. It can be traced to Old Testament passages which refer to the dragon and bring him into connection with kindred evil beings, such as Leviathan or Rahab (Job 26:13; Ps 74:13; Is 27:1 and 51:9). Its roots go further back still. Every major culture of the ancient Eastern Mediterranean has its version of the dragon and of the combat in which it was involved. This was a

20. J.M. Court, Myth and History in the Book of Revelation (London: SPCK, 1979), p. 160.

21. Russell, The Method 122.

struggle between two divine beings for universal kingship. The enemy of God is usually represented as a bestial creature, associated with disorder in society and sterility in nature.[22]

The account of these visions has a peculiar quality. We cannot believe that John was describing exactly what he saw. It would have been as difficult for him to see them as it is for us to represent them in a drawing or a painting. The truth is rather that he translated into symbols the ideas that God had given him in the visionary experiences.[23]

Figurative meaning was attributed to metals and the colours, and also to numbers. Such numbers as 3, 4, 7, 10 and 12 and multiples of them constantly appear. 7 appears fifty-four times in Revelation and 12 is to be found twenty-three times. 1000 appears six times in ch. 20 and often in multiples (e.g. 144,000) elsewhere. The duration of the persecution is given as 3 1/2 years (12:14). The Beast is referred to by the number 666 (13:18).

22. Collins, The Combat, passim in Introduction.

23. The words of Boismard, quoted by Harrington, are very illuminating: "His primary purpose is to convey ideas he has received, not to describe a coherent vision, an imaginable vision. It would be wrong to try to imagine visually the Lamb with seven horns and seven eyes, and to wonder how the ten horns should be shared among seven heads. These visions are not plastically conceived. One must be satisfied with understanding the symbols intellectually without lingering over the more or less surprising details". Harrington, Understanding 13.

The origin and meaning of the use of certain numbers is more clear in some cases than in others. 3 1/2 may be a half fragment of the perfect number 7, or it may be derived from the 3 1/2 years of the persecution of Antiochus Epiphanes. At any rate it stands for the days of evil, the period of the suffering of the church.

The number 1000 concerns us most. The origin is disputed. It may indeed be related in some way to Ps 90:4, as we have noted more than once.

In the cosmic week solution to the problem this verse was combined with the seven days in the Genesis Creation story, and the whole history of the world was considered to last six thousand years with the seventh millennium standing for the perfect period.

Daniélou has the attractive suggestion that the thousand years belong to the paradisaical symbolism which we find in Revelation, and represent the length of life in paradise which is presupposed in Gen 5:5, 8, 11, 27. According to the Book of Jubilees man in paradise should have lived for a thousand years but this span was cut short for Adam by his sin. "Adam died and he lacked seventy years of one thousand years, for one thousand years are as one day in the testimony of the heavens, and therefore it was written concerning the tree of knowledge 'On the

day that you eat thereof you shall die'. For this reason he did not complete the years of his day, for he died during it" (Jub 4:29, 30). Later Irenaeus confirms that there existed before him in Asia a tradition in which the span of life in Paradise was a thousand years.[24]

Accordingly the millennium is a restoration of the conditions of paradise. The thousand years bring back the length of life in paradise (Is 65:20-22). The LXX version of Is 65:22 reads: "The days of my people will be as the days of the tree of life".

The paradise symbolism, which we find also in the reference to the ancient serpent in Rev 20:2, is combined with another kind of symbolism, the messianic, and so we read that during the thousand years the just will reign with Christ.[25]

It is to be noted that even conservative scholars who believe in a literal millennium on earth still feel that there is symbolism in the number 1000.

"In contrast with the preoccupation (one is inclined to write mania) of apocalyptically minded Jews at this time with the dates in God's eschatological timetable, it is likely that John's adoption of the

24. Daniélou, The Theology 390-396.

25. J. Daniélou, "Millenarianism", in J.B. Bauer, ed. Encyclopedia of Biblical Theology (London: Sheed & Ward, 1970) 583.

figure 1000 for the messianic kingdom is intended to indicate not so much its length as its character, namely as the sabbath of history. Such a view harmonizes with the notion of importance to John that creation prefigures new creation, and it links with the idea, attested in Heb 4 of God's sabbath-rest as a type of the kingdom".[26]

Our conclusion in this section is that John stands in the apocalyptic tradition which looked for a divine intervention, and that there are valid grounds for understanding the thousand years symbolically.

26. Beasley-Murray, The Revelation 289.

III - JOHN'S CONCERN FOR THE MARTYRS

It is important to note the situation of the Asiatic churches to which John wrote. His book is not a theological treatise divorced from real life. The seven churches that he singles out for mention are in the north-west corner of Asia Minor. He has a kind of pastoral interest in them, if not as an ecclesiastical leader, then as a charismatic figure with some authority. He is concerned about the quality of life in these churches, especially as they are facing trials and may have to face more serious ones.

Their task as Christians was to bear witness to the word of God and the testimony of Jesus (1:2). Jesus himself was a faithful witness (1:5) who could inspire them with his example. John shared in their calling and was sent to Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

There was some kind of tension between the Christians and the following groups, and this made their witnessing a difficult and sometimes painful task: 1. False teachers within their fellowship. 2. Their Jewish neighbours. 3. Gentile citizens. 4. Roman authorities.

1. From the letters to the churches we learn of the delinquency of the false teachers who were a kind of fifth column in their midst. These were called Nicolaitans (2:6), sometimes

followers of Balaam (2:14) or of the prophetess Jezebel (2:20). Their teaching seemed to encourage idolatry and immorality. In other words they urged acquiescence in the practices of their neighbours. They counselled following the path of least resistance; Christians must learn to compromise and accommodate themselves to their surroundings.

2. The Jews also constituted a source of trouble. This was true from the first days of the church, as we know from the Acts of the Apostles. At Smyrna (2:9) and at Philadelphia (3:9) the Jews are called a synagogue of Satan. L. Morris tells us that at a somewhat later date, when Polycarp was martyred at Smyrna, the Jews' hostility to the Christians came out in their zeal to set forward the execution. "Such hostility may well go back to the time when John wrote".[27]

3. There were also the Gentile neighbours. In Ephesus the cult of Artemis was practised. In Ac 19:28 we read that no

27. Morris, Revelation 64. See also A.J. Beagley, The 'Sitz im Leben' of the Apocalypse with particular reference to the role of the church's enemies (Fuller Theological Seminary: Doctoral Dissertation, 1983). "Although the controversy with Rome can in no way be effaced from the book, it is not the author's main concern. The book is far more concerned with the controversy between Christianity and Judaism". p. 46. Although he expresses his view with some vehemence, he does admit that the solution of the charagma problem seems to be that the beast from the earth and its activities represent some unknown aspects of the efforts of the local Roman cult officials to enforce participation in the emperor cult. p. 150.

little stir concerning the Way arose over the threat that Christianity posed to this cult. The citizens were enraged and dragged two of Paul's companions into the local theatre. Only the action of an official prevented a riot. The Ephesian Christians in John's day needed a like endurance and patience(2:2).

There would be a similar peril in Pergamum where there were temples dedicated to Zeus, Dionysos, Athene and also to the serpent, the symbol of Asclepius.

In Thyatira, according to W. Ramsay,[28] there were many trade guilds. These strong groups would make it difficult for any Christian to earn his living without belonging to their number. If he did belong he would have to attend banquets and eat meat sacrificed to an idol. It was a situation that Paul himself had faced earlier. Did the Christians accept the contemporary standards? Or did they reject expediency and run the risk of social ostracism and economic boycotting and political powerlessness? Loyalty to the commandments of God would entail some kind of suffering.

4. Christians were exposed to a double threat to their religion from the Roman power. First of all, they were expected

28. W.M. Ramsay, The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1963), p. 324.

to acknowledge formally the gods of Rome, and , if they refused, they were liable to banishment, torture and even death. Secondly, there was the widespread tendency for the Roman emperor to be worshipped as a god. The demand for this varied from emperor to emperor and from region to region. There is no certainty that there was widespread persecution in Domitian's reign, but he did wish to be regarded as divine. It is possible that the intense loyalty to Rome felt in some of the provinces of Asia Minor led to problems for the Christians. They could well be subject to economic sanctions (13:17) and there would be the danger of banishment and suffering. John himself experienced exile.[29]

It is in the second part of Revelation that the Roman power looms large, and one feels there the force of the symbols of the

29. A.Y. Collins writes that Domitian did not persecute Christians and that the Emperor cult was not forced on Christians in the first century and early second century but that those who wished to flatter Domitian practised the ruler cult and this was the occasion for John to call for intensified Christian exclusiveness and to attack any kind of Christian accommodation. The section about buying and selling is not a reference to economic sanctions but a call to his readers to avoid using the coin of the realm. Collins does admit that there was sporadic opposition to Christians in the first two centuries. We have to note too that Pergamum, where Antipas was martyred, was a centre of Caesar worship. There are so many references to suffering for the faith in Revelation that it is hard to believe that John was moved only by the memory of the Neronian persecution or by the fear of another outbreak. Collins, Crisis 104. See also L. Thompson, "A Sociological Analysis of Tribulation" in A.Y. Collins, Early Christian Apocalypticism: Genre and Social Setting (Semeia, 36, 1986) 164-170.

dragon, the beasts and the harlot. The great red dragon is the spiritual power that is opposed to the Christian faith and church and goes off to make war on those who keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus. The beast is allowed to make war on the saints and conquer them. His is a very formidable power and is able to attract the devotion of many who dwell on the earth (13:8). It takes courage to witness to Jesus before such a power and those who do so run the risk of death. In fact many did so suffer. "Men have shed the blood of saints and prophets" (16:6). "I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints and the blood of the martyrs of Jesus" (17:6). "In her was found the blood of prophets and saints, and of all who have been slain on the earth" (18:24). cf. also our passage 20:4.

John is concerned that the Christians be faithful to the commandments of God and the testimony of Jesus. This means that their first loyalty is to God Himself. Worship God! (19:10) It entails also a behaviour that is consistent with such a faith. Purity of life is demanded. In lists like 9:20, 21 and 22:15 we learn that repentance means turning not only from idolatry, but from murder, sorcery, immorality, theft and all kinds of falsehood. "There is throughout the Apocalypse a special concern for the conservative virtues of fidelity: for a tenacity in remaining faithful despite everything in absolute loyalty to God

and his commands".[30] Collins also writes: "The Apocalypse certainly does not call for armed revolt as part of the Christian life, but rather looks upon the Christian as one who must actively change the character of the whole of his life so that he will be the kind of person who can qualify as a victor. That means, among other things, that he must be ready for martyrdom."[31]

John is well aware of the fact that if they do indeed live a moral life of that quality they may have to suffer many trials and even experience martyrdom.

A.A. Trites has an informative study of the use of martus in the book of Revelation. He finds five different meanings:

(1) A witness in a court of law with no expectation of death (11:3; 2:13). (2) A man who testified to his faith in a lawcourt and suffered death as the penalty for his witness. (3) Death is regarded as part of the witness (1:5; 3:14; 17:6). (4) Witness became equivalent to martyr. The idea of death is uppermost though the idea of witness is not entirely absent. (5) Idea of witness disappears and martus is used absolutely to refer to martyrdom. Trites considered that at the time of the writing of

30. Collins, Apocalypse 22:6-21 161.

31. Collins, Apocalypse 22:6-21 327.

Revelation the word is moving towards the fourth or fifth stages of semantic development.[32]

A. Farrer may have been going too far when he said that "the chief moral significance of the millennium in St. John's book is the special promise it makes to the martyr; and is not his whole work an exhortation to martyrdom?"[33] John is not urging his readers to be martyrs, nor is he necessarily expecting that all Christians will be martyred. But he saw martyrdom as a real possibility in the situation of the churches. He is concerned that the saints be loyal to the commandments of God even although that might involve punishment by death. He is saying in our passage that such witnesses will not be forgotten by God. Their enemies may imagine that they are extinguishing the flame both of their witness and of their lives. On the contrary they will be brought to life again on the other side of their martyrs' death.

Caird writes that in many instances John is writing mainly for martyrs and the message of Revelation is to "assure the prospective martyr that his evidence, given in the earthly court and leading to a sentence of death, is also evidence given in the

32. A.A. Trites, "Martus and Martyrdom in the Apocalypse: A Semantic Study", NovT 15 (1973) 72-80.

33. Farrer, The Revelation 206.

heavenly court".[34]

34. Caird, A Commentary 229.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE MIND OF THE SEER

John sought to hearten his readers and encourage them to be loyal with the message that the time is coming soon when God will intervene on their behalf; the Parousia of Christ will take place.

When this does happen God will deal with the hostile forces. There are the earthly ones, represented by the beast and the false prophet (the second beast). There are also the spiritual ones. These are the devil, represented by the dragon, and death along with its companion Hades, the place of the dead.

When these powers have been destroyed, God will set up his kingdom, the new heaven and the new earth.

In this scenario John does not forget the martyrs, and by mentioning their destiny he seeks to encourage fidelity unto death. Their rewarding is presented in a most graphic way. The account is inserted in the description of the disabling and destroying of the devil, most appropriately for he had been ultimately responsible for the persecution of the saints (2:10). To underline the formidable nature of the spiritual adversary,

John employs two myths, one of his initial binding and one of his last despairing effort to display his power. His discomfiture is not brought about readily, but nevertheless in the end he succumbs to the superior power of God.

At the Parousia, which is going to happen soon, those who have borne costly witness to the word of God and the testimony of Jesus will be rewarded by Jesus, himself the faithful witness.

They have already been admitted to the kingdom by his sacrifice. They have been faithful followers and their witnessing may have led to their death, but under God their sacrifice will not have been in vain. They will be united with their Lord. While the kingdom of God is for all his servants after the judgment, the martyrs are singled out for special mention.

Though their enemies may imagine that they have destroyed them forever, it is not so. They will be resurrected just as Christ was.

They will reign with him. Now they may be treated as slaves, but then they will be as kings and conquerors.

They will have the fullest experience of salvation. The thousand years stand for eternal life, just as the three and a half years represent the short time of their suffering and the

seeming triumph of evil. Their suffering is but for a moment, but their inheritance is incorruptible(cf. 1 Pet 1:4).

They may have been shut out of God's presence by the horror of their experience on earth, but soon they will enter it as priests.

They will be completely vindicated and exempted from the Last Judgment.

On earth they sought to keep the laws of God; hereafter they will be perfected in holiness.

Their bliss will be completed in the heavenly kingdom, and all the beatitudes about the persecuted will be fulfilled.

Our explanation may seem a feeble anticlimax after the grandeur we find in some of the interpretations of the millennium. We believe that this concept has been magnified out of all proportion and in an unjustifiable way. After all, the teaching appears in a few verses only in a book that is highly symbolic, of which no single interpretation is beyond dispute. "The millennium has dominated later speculation, although it occupies only a tiny part of John's canvas".[1] John's canvas would have been complete enough without the millennium verses.

1. Sweet, Revelation 12.

The brevity of the reference shows that the martyrs were in his thoughts but does not justify us in using it as the basis for a Christian doctrine about a special kingdom.

Here we enter the area of subjective judgments, but this is the viewpoint of many scholars. A modern conservative scholar, R.H. Mounce, writes "Without denying the significance of this important passage it should not be elevated to such basic themes as the return of Christ, the final judgment and a removal of all wickedness, and the splendour of the eternal state. A careful reading of the passage will show that it is perhaps limited to the resurrected martyrs alone, and that it contains no specific indication that their reign with Christ takes place on earth and that it necessarily follows the second advent". He himself follows the usual premillenarian interpretation but he feels that

2. R.H. Mounce, The Book 351. The comments of two other scholars are worthy of consideration.

"The overthrow of Satan and not the reign of a thousand years is the main theme of 20:1-10. So far is the latter from being the culminating point of the whole book that it is not even introduced at the beginning of any new and important section. It starts no new series of visions. It comes in the midst of a section devoted to an entirely different matter". (Milligan, The Book 336.)

"It may even be inaccurate to recognize the Millennial kingdom as a separate item in the Seer's order of events; R.H. Charles' painstaking reconstruction of the end of the book has the virtue of logic, but the Seer may not have been so logical in employing traditional features within a total collage of the consummation". (Court, Myth 3.)

the text itself does not rule out alternative explanations.[2]

Just as the few verses provide too slender a basis for the construction of an important doctrine, so we believe that the concept of a millennium is theologically unacceptable. Could a long temporary period before the final period of bliss really satisfy John's yearning for or his views about an immediate action of God?

If we argue that, because God made the world and has a purpose for it and controls history, therefore the kingdom must come within history, as suggested in some interpretations of the millennium, we have to remember that the coming again of Christ means the end of history and of this form of the world.

The book of Revelation forces us to ask certain questions. When and where will these events take place? In time or in eternity? Now or in the future? In history or beyond history? On earth as it is? In heaven? On a renewed earth?

These are difficult questions and their complexity has been succinctly stated by a modern scholar: "Time and eternity, present and future, are intertwined throughout the book of Revelation. But at the same time there is a movement toward the

3. D.J. Wiegand, Visions of Glory (Elgin, Ill: Brethren Press, 1979), p. 104.

end."[3]

Some contend that the experience of the martyrs begins at their death. "John has made use of Jewish tradition of a temporary messianic reign to symbolize that the martyrs already reign with Christ." [4] Harrington thinks that John "has no intention of reviving the naive expectation of an imminent parousia. His purpose was to convince the persecuted brethren that this Christ, risen and glorious, was absolute master of human history." [5]

This may indeed be true as far as it goes. The present writer thinks that John goes further. The whole event of the binding of the devil and the resurrection of the martyrs is in the context of the Parousia of Christ (19:11ff). It is interesting that the last quoted sentence of Harrington ends with the words: "that his victory was complete and that he would come to usher in the new world." The martyrs may indeed experience the glory of Christ's presence after their death, but the significance of the Parousia is that Christ will indeed come and make manifest to all that he indeed reigns. In other words John is not simply assuring his readers that the faithful continue to

4. Harrington, Understanding 241. cf. E. Corsini, The Apocalypse (Delaware: Glazier, 1983), p. 378.

5. Harrington, Understanding 56.

live in heaven, but that at Christ's Parousia their blessedness will be plain to all.

The happenings that are described after 19:11 take place at the end of human history or at the end of time. "The events described in the visions will not take place in time and space but belong to the "beyond" of human history." [6]

For this reason we have not to think of these events as happening seriatim. In these closing chapters we read of the destruction of the beast and the false prophet, of the devil, and of Death and Hades, and also of the coming of the heavenly city. The events read as if they were taking place one after the other. But they are really happening simultaneously, for time is no more. [7]

The Parousia involves such a transformation that the subsequent existence could not be on the earth as it is. The prince of this world is shackled and destroyed. Death itself is no more. Obviously such radically different conditions demand a different locale. There is a new heaven and a new earth.

It is hard to distinguish the rule of the martyrs in 20:4

6. Fiorenza, Invitation 194.

7. See point made in exegesis of 20:1. The formula kai eidon, which appears at 19:11, 17, 19; 20:4, 11, 12; 21:1 is not one which determines order of time.

from the rule of the servants of God in the coming kingdom of God in 22:5. All that we can say is that in this rule with Christ the martyrs are mentioned first because they are prominent in the mind of John. They are singled out because they are worthy of mention. cf. Mt 5:11: "Blessed are you when men persecute you...be glad, for your reward is great in heaven." But Jesus is not saying that only the persecuted reach heaven.

The message of the millennium passage and indeed of the whole book has been well expressed by F.C. Porter:

The undoubtedly real elements in our writer's prediction are the speedy coming of God (1:8; 14:7; 21:5) in judgment, with or in the coming of Christ as judge and ruler of the world (1:7; 22:7, 20). This coming Christ will divide true from false Christians, and reward each according to his deeds (2:23; 22:12). Through him also God will judge the tempting and oppressive power of evil dominant in the world, the Roman empire (19:11ff), and Satan himself, whose authority Rome possesses, whose spirit Rome embodies (ch. 20)..... Those who hold fast the faith during the present tribulations and the greater ones soon to come, and who endure in patience and faith even to death itself, shall be rewarded with special glory and power, and especially close association with Christ and his royalty (6:11; 14:1-5; 20:4-6). But the destination to be with Christ and God in blessed and eternal nearness and fellowship is at last for all the faithful alike (2:7, 11, 17, 26-28; 3:5, 12, 21; 5:10; 7:9f; 14:13; 21-22:5, 14)[8]

8. F.C. Porter, "Book of Revelation", HDB IV 259.

EPILOGUE

Why was the doctrine of the millennium never accepted by the church? It has been a major doctrine among some adventist sects, but the principal churches have always been critical. Possible reasons are:

1. The correct interpretation of the passage has never been certain.

2. This is the only passage in the New Testament that speaks of a thousand-year reign, and that very briefly. There is nothing to support it in the teaching of Jesus.

3. There is something that fails to satisfy the reason in the common understanding of the idea, that of two kingdoms, one temporary and one eternal. What is the purpose of the temporary when it is going to be followed by the eternal?

Why did the popular expectation of the millennium, that of a thousand-year reign on earth, survive for so many decades in the early church?

There is probably something in Gibbon's contention[1] that this hope was very pleasing to the mind of believers and so well adapted to the desires and apprehensions of mankind (though we may note that Gibbon identifies the millennium with the new Jerusalem of Rev 21 and 22). When the edifice of the church was almost completed, presumably he means with Constantine, "the doctrine of Christ's reign on earth was at first treated as a profound allegory, was considered by degrees as a doubtful and useless opinion, and was at length rejected as the absurd invention of heresy and fanaticism."

There were two forces at work in these early centuries. (1) One was the influence of Jewish views. There was the idea of the temporary kingdom which had become part of the messianic expectation. This came into the early church largely from Jewish apocalyptic. Corsini contends that "millenarianism found its way into the early church from many sources, quite independent of the Apocalypse, and earlier than this book." [2] He thinks that "contrary to general opinion, the connection between the Apocalypse and the origins of millenarianism is difficult to establish." [3] While Dionysus defends the inspired nature of

1. E. Gibbon, Decline and Fall of Roman Empire, ch. 13.
2. Corsini, The Apocalypse 369.
3. Corsini, The Apocalypse 18.

Revelation, and Eusebius regularly uses it as sacred scripture in his writings, both are highly critical of millenarianism, which suggests that they understood Rev 20:4-6 in a different way.

Corsini goes so far as to suggest that the general thesis can be reversed, and that Revelation did not introduce

4. Corsini, The Apocalypse 370. Corsini has some fine insights but his general viewpoint is unusual. So much so that his translator says in the preface: Corsini's contribution is so unique that it cannot be integrated into contemporary scholarship.

Corsini does not agree with commentators who favour a future eschatology in Revelation. He argues that the coming referred to is the coming of Christ in the Incarnation, and that the central event is the crucifixion of Christ. The Old Testament finds its culmination in the death and resurrection of Jesus. The deliverance Christ effected is a new Exodus. Further, the destruction of Babylon which John describes in later chapters is not about the material destruction of Rome but about the spiritual destruction and end of Jerusalem (p. 109). The second part of the book develops one theme - the death of Christ as the judgment of God on the world and on history, and the two consequences of this, the destruction of the forces of evil and the gathering of those chosen to become part of the new people of God, founded by Christ(p. 206).

The final battle of Armageddon is not something in the future but an allegory of the death of Jesus on the Cross(p. 351), and it is the same as the battle against Gog and Magog(p. 360). In ch. 20 we do not see a description of a series of events which will happen at the end of time. Rather, in ch. 20 the messianic event has already taken place in death and victory, and the author now attempts to explain the significance of the event, the death of Jesus, in the judgment of the wicked powers and the salvation of the chosen ones(p. 322).

The chains of Satan and the reign of a thousand years are events that precede the coming of Christ(p. 364). The thousand-year reign is an allegorical representation of the salvation obtained by some just ones within the context of the Old Economy(p. 366).

millenarianism but represents a reaction against that theory! [4]

Did these early Fathers believe in the millennium because it was in the book of Revelation and afterwards turn to the Jewish literature to illustrate it? Or did they believe in the millennium because of earlier Jewish expectations and then find confirmation of it in Rev 20? Did it arise among Jewish Christians to express what happened after Christ returned? Or, as Allo suggests, [5] when the illusions of the first century with regard to the proximity of the Parousia began to decline, did those most impatient for the glimpsed blessedness take refuge in the hope of an early conquest of the earth, copied from the hope which sustained for some time the Jews after the fall of the Holy City?

We do not know the answers to these questions, and in any case they take us into the period later than John. What is important for our study is that in the early centuries not all accepted the literal historical interpretation.

(2) The other force at work was Hellenization. A. Harnack finds two contrasted conceptions of Christianity in the early church - the eschatological and the spiritual. The earlier eschatological gave way, especially under the influence of Greek

5. Allo, Saint Jean 328.

thought, to the spiritual one. He writes that chiliasm is found wherever the gospel is not Hellenized.[6] We remember that John was probably a Palestinian, and certainly was steeped in Jewish concepts. This would account for his use of the imagery of a thousand-year reign, though it does not tell us what his understanding of the concept was.

With the advance of Hellenization, by the spirit of which Augustine was influenced, and with the new ecclesiastical situation under Constantine, when the relation between the church and the state had been changed, it was natural that the older view of the millennium should give way to a more spiritual one. This found expression in Origen, Tyconius and Augustine. The view of the latter was that the millennium refers to the whole history of the church after the ascension of Christ and before his Parousia.

But it does not follow that this second understanding of the passage was what was in the mind of John.

John would have had difficulty in recognizing his view in many of the ways in which the millennium has been understood. As N. Cohn points out, the original meaning was narrow and precise, and referred to the martyrs. But early Christians went on to

6. A. Harnack, History of Dogma, vol. 1 (London: Williams and Norgate, 1897), pp. 129ff and 167f.

interpret the prophecy in a liberal rather than a literal sense in that they equated the martyrs with the suffering faithful, i.e. themselves. Recently it has been customary to use millenarianism in a more liberal sense still, a convenient label for a particular type of salvationism.[7]

However, these considerations take us beyond the limits of our study. We have been concerned with the origin of the concept in the mind of the author. We have considered his background, and the literature and traditions with which he was familiar. We have looked at other ideas and beliefs which were the common stock of his day. We have drawn one or two conclusions.

1. John was under no compulsion to follow in detail whatever was passed on to him by the various traditions. In Rev 13, for example, he has been influenced by Dan 7. But in Dan 7 there are four great beasts which emerge from the sea, one like a lion, one like a bear, one like a leopard, and another even more terrible. In Rev 13 there are not four beasts but one, "and the beast I saw was like a leopard, its feet were like a bear's, and its mouth was like a lion's mouth." (v. 2) To make modifications like this is a feature of apocalyptic. This is a principle that John has

7. N. Cohn, The Pursuit of the Millennium (London: Paladin, 1970), p. 13. Cohn notes that millenarian sects picture salvation as 1. collective 2. terrestrial 3. imminent 4. total 5. miraculous.

applied to the idea of the temporary kingdom. He develops and transforms the concept of the thousand years to make his point.

2. His Christian faith is very strong. This is in evidence from the first chapter where we are aware of his Trinitarian doctrine. While God the Father is supreme, it is through the Spirit that John has a vision of what is and of what is going to come to pass, and throughout the book Christ has a great centrality. He is the one who has freed us from our sins by his blood, who was dead and is alive again, and "who is coming with the clouds and every eye will see him". Though he rules in heaven he has set up a society on earth in which the citizens are kings and priests. This kingdom will come to a great consummation in the transcendental world at his Parousia. The appropriate prayer for the church is "Come, Lord Jesus" (22:30).

3. He was particularly concerned for those who suffered for their faith. This was a pressing danger in a day when the imperial cult was so strong. Jesus himself was the faithful witness, and those who had been redeemed were called to follow in his footsteps. Their witness might lead them to suffering and death, but after death they would receive their reward and be blessed. "The millenary vision of this passage appears to be an outgrowth of familiar eschatological ideas transformed and glorified through the faith that God had a special guerdon laid

up for the martyrs".[8]

8. Beckwith, The Apocalypse 737.

One might consider whether the Er myth of Plato's Republic or the vision in Virgil's Aeneid (Book 6:749ff.) might have influenced John, but that is beyond the scope of this thesis.

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