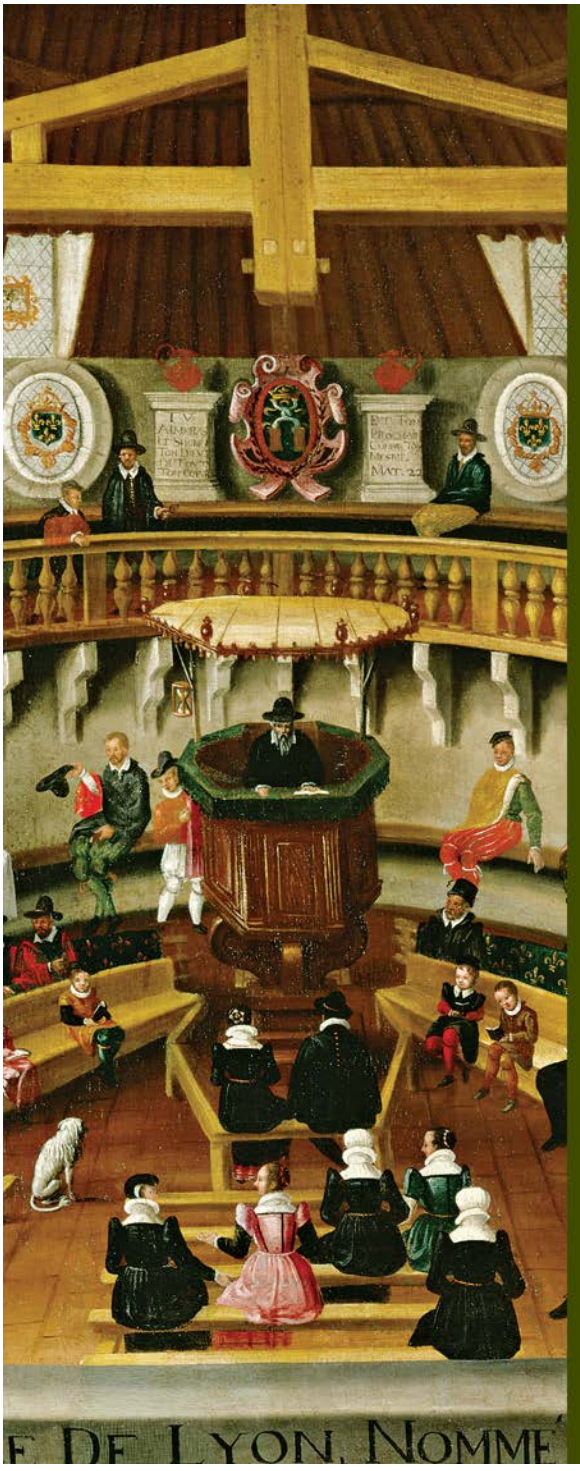

Reformation Commentary on Scripture

New Testament XV

Revelation

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INTRODUCTION TO REVELATION

He will wipe away all tears from their eyes; there will be no more death, and no more mourning or sadness. . . . "Now I am making the whole of creation new. . . . It is already done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End."
Revelation 21:4-6, Jerusalem Bible

Authorship and Canonicity

Literature on the authorship and canonicity of Revelation has grown in recent years along with recognition of the diversity and significance of apocalyptic literature.[1] This section offers a brief summary of work on the authorship and canonicity of Revelation with its textual exegesis and interpretation insofar as it relates to sixteenth-century commentaries.[2]

Among the apocalyptic literature available to early Christian communities, Revelation is the only work to have been accepted as a part of the biblical canon. Despite the existence of Jewish and Christian apocalyptic literature, exegetes in the sixteenth century were aware that elements from Daniel, Ezekiel, Zechariah, and other books of the Hebrew canon had been imported into the text of John's Revelation. Daniel is generally regarded as marking the beginning of the genre of apocalyptic literature, dated as having been written during the persecution of Antiochus Epiphanes (175–164 BC).[3] Important Jewish apocalyptic writings outside the Old Testament exist, such as Enoch, the Apocalypse of Baruch, the Assumption of Moses, and the Ascension of Isaiah. Apocalyptic literature was associated with the destruction of the Jewish temple in AD 70, prior to or contemporary with the reign of the Roman Emperor Domitian (AD 81–96).[4] This history served as a foundation to later speculation on the meaning of the text.

According to historian Irena Backus, "The chief characteristic of apocalyptic literature is its recourse to one or several visions of the past, the present, and the future," visions normally granted by

[1]See William C. Weinrich, introduction to *Revelation*, ACCS New Testament 12 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005); Adela Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse* (Philadelphia Westminster, 1984). On apocalyptic literature generally, see *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*, vol. 1, *The Origins of Apocalypticism in Judaism and Christianity*, ed. John J. Collins; vol. 2, *Apocalypticism in Western History and Culture*, ed. Bernard McGinn; vol. 3, *Apocalypticism in the Modern Period and the Contemporary Age*, ed. Stephen J. Stein (New York: Continuum, 2000–2003).

[2]On apocalyptic literature affecting the exegesis and interpretation of Revelation during the Reformation, see Irena Backus, *Reformation Readings of the Apocalypse: Geneva, Zurich, and Wittenberg* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), xi-xx, 3-36.

[3]Paul Hanson, *The Dawn of Apocalyptic: The Historical and Sociological Roots of Jewish Apocalyptic Eschatology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1979); John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016).

[4]Elaine Pagels, *Revelations: Visions, Prophecy, and Politics in the Book of Revelation* (New York: Penguin Books, 2013).

God but "mediated by one or several angels. This enables the author to transmit new prophecies without fearing accusations of excessive self-importance."[5] Differently from Jewish apocalyptic works, Revelation is written in the author's own name (Rev 1:9)—whichever John it was, he wanted his name known to the communities he was addressing. How one reads a piece of apocalyptic literature shapes interpretation: as happening in the time of its authorship (preterist), in the future (futurist), throughout the events in the history of the church (historicist), or as symbolic of those events (spiritualist).

Revelation was held in high regard by the millenarian ante-Nicene Fathers, including Justin Martyr and Irenaeus, who took it to be the work of John the Evangelist. However, as Backus writes,

> as millenarianism began to lose hold in the Eastern, and particularly the Alexandrian, church, the respectability of the Apocalypse was challenged. Dionysius of Alexandria questioned its apostolic authorship, ca. A.D. 250, on grounds of difference in style and content from the Fourth Gospel. Eusebius of Caesarea admitted its place in the canon with some reluctance. Some subsequent Eastern writers and councils (Cyril of Jerusalem, Council of Laodicea, John Chrysostom) did not include it in the canon.[6]

This negative perspective on Revelation eventually reached Western Europe, when Erasmus and others discovered the Greek fathers, but it was not characteristic of the Latin Middle Ages. In the churches of the West the attribution of Revelation to John the Evangelist was maintained in the Muratorian fragment or canon (c. 170) and by Tertullian (c. 155–c. 240) and Hippolytus (d. 235). Here the perspective on Revelation was more positive.

Commentaries and the Interpretation of Revelation

Five periods of interpretation of Revelation contributed to how the text was understood in the sixteenth century.

1. Patristic and early Greek commentaries: Spiritual interpretation. The thrust of an early and literal exegetical tradition was shaped by the work of such later commentators as Origen (185–254); Victorinus of Petovium (d. 304), a disciple of Origen; and Tyconius (d. c. 380). In particular, Victorinus, Tyconius, and their predecessors shaped the exegesis of Revelation in the West around a method of textual recapitulation, in Victorinus, and symbolic interpretation, in Tyconius, in late antiquity and the early Middle Ages.

A Platonist, Origen was author of the *Hexapla*, a critical edition of the Hebrew Bible in six versions. It was central to knowledge of the LXX and imperative for a knowledge of the true text of Scripture. This monumental analysis of the Old Testament, written in response to Jewish and Gnostic critics, heightened Origen's influence among sixteenth-century radicals, magisterial Reformers, and humanists on such issues as the nature of the soul, universalism, free will, and pacifism.

Victorinus, referred to as the first exegete of the Western church, suffered martyrdom under Diocletian. His commentary on Revelation is cited by later critics both for his comprehensiveness

[5]Backus, *Reformation Readings*, xii.
[6]Backus, *Reformation Readings*, xii.

and for his contribution to a theory of recapitulation, according to which similar spiritual truths are embedded in different but logically parallel symbols.[7] As an example, the vision of the angel with the seal of the living God (Rev 7:2) is understood to be Elijah. Victorinus gives this figure a threefold task: (1) to anticipate the time of antichrist, (2) to preach penance, and (3) to convert to faith many from Israel as well as from the Gentile nations. This image comes together with the warning cry of the eagle who flies across the heavens (Rev 8:13), which Victorinus views as the Holy Spirit speaking, as it were, through the mouths of the prophets (Rev 11:3). Victorinus reads Revelation not as a prophecy but as an unveiling by Christ of the true sense of Scripture. Through recapitulation, Revelation relates the same events in different ways, for example, the bowls of wrath (Rev 16:1-17) do no more than elaborate on the persecutions already revealed by the trumpets (Rev 8:6–11:15). At issue is not chronology but an understanding of the text.[8] Victorinus's way of reading the text was handed down to the medieval church under the authoritative name of Jerome (c. 342–420), who, however, was uncomfortable with Victorinus's millenarian viewpoint and therefore revised the ending of Victorinus's commentary, bringing the heavenly Jerusalem down and to the realm of prophecy.[9]

The spiritual or symbolic interpretation of the text was taken up by Tyconius and given structure by his *Book of Rules*. No longer extant, the contents of this work have been reconstructed from later commentaries that cite it, for example, Primasius (d. c. 560), Bede the Venerable (c. 673–735), and Beatus of Liebana (730–785). Contemporary scholarship on Tyconius circled around the question of whether this lost commentary could be recovered and reconstructed from such later sources as those cited. Work by Kenneth Steinhauser (1987) and Roger Gryson (2011) led to Gryson's publication of a reconstructed Latin edition of Tyconius's *Exposition of the Apocalypse*.[10]

Tyconius's comments on Revelation were guided by the hermeneutical orientation set forth in his *Book of Rules*. He begins the *Book of Rules* with this prologue:

> Before anything else that seemed good to me, I considered it necessary to write a little guidebook and to fabricate, as it were, keys and windows to the secrets of the law. For there are certain mystic rules which maintain the inner recesses of the entire law and make the treasures of truth invisible to some people. If the logic of the rules is accepted without ill will, as we communicate it, then whatever is closed will be opened and whatever is obscure will be elucidated, so that anyone who walks in the vast forest of prophecy guided by these rules as, in a way, by pathways of light, may be kept from error. Now, these are the rules: (1) on the Lord and his body, (2) on the bipartite body of the Lord, (3) on the promises and the law, (4) on the particular and the general, (5) on times, (6) on recapitulation, and (7) on the devil and his body.[11]

[7]Wilhelm Bousset, *Die Offenbarung Johannis* (Göttingen Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1906), 54; R. H. Charles, *Studies in the Apocalypse* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1913), 10-11.

[8]On Victorinus, see Claudio Moreschini and Enrico Norelli, *Early Christian Greek and Latin Literature*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005).

[9]See Martine Dulaey, "Jerome 'editeur' du Commentaire sur l'Apocalypse de Victorinus Poetovio," *Revue des Etudes Augustiniennes* 37 (1991): 199-236; Victorinus of Poetovio, *Sur l'Apocalypse et autres ecrits*, ed. Martine Dulaey, *SC* 423 (Paris: Cerf, 1997).

[10]Tyconius, *Exposition of the Apocalypse*, trans. Francis X. Gumerlock (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2017).

[11]Tyconius, *Exposition of the Apocalypse*, 7.

Tyconius's *Exposition* was written after a period of persecution of Donatists, of which Tyconius had been one. Rather than finding in Revelation the time of the antichrist and the end of the world, Tyconius interpreted John's visions as figurative of the struggles facing the church in the period between the incarnation and the second coming of Christ.[12] The satanic forces of the text represented worldly and decadent ecclesiastical powers. The two witnesses of Revelation 11 were not seen as persons from the past or present but as symbolic of the church holding the two Testaments. Similarly, a corporate identity was granted the antichrist, not as a specific person but as a body, the *corpus diaboli*, omnipresent evil and false Christians.

Tyconius "completely neutralized the millenarianism of the Apocalypse by referring the thousand years of the chaining up of Satan to the incarnation."[13] Backus continues,

> However, while doing away with the messianic interregnum [Rev 20:1-3], the Donatist did not minimize the importance of the Apocalypse as the text of the latter days, seeing himself as living at the end of time. Taking the cosmic week as the basic scheme of the duration of the world, he thought that Christ was born halfway through the sixth day, the seventh day being already situated after the Last Judgment. The three and half years of Apc 12 thus stood for 350 years, the period of the church's testimony. By the time Tyconius was writing, 850 years of the "sixth day" had passed, which meant that around 150 years were left until the Last Judgment.[14]

Augustine of Hippo (354–430) also influenced the Reformers' thinking on Revelation. Three points are important for the use of Augustine's theology by sixteenth-century commentators. First, with respect to the millennium, in *De civitate Dei* 20.7-20 he adopts Tyconius's interpretation of one thousand years, beginning with the chaining of Satan at the incarnation. He writes that the millennium (Rev 20:2) runs from the incarnation to the second coming of Christ as associated with the last judgment. In his *Sermon* 259, he adopts a millenarian position and envisages a period of earthly peace for the righteous before the final resurrection. Second, while believing he was in the last days, what interests Augustine most is not the days left to the millennium but rather, as Backus writes, "the identity of 'the devil' and the relative nature of both his captivity and his release. For Augustine as for Tyconius, 'the devil' represents all the wicked and the enemies of the Christian church, whose power is contained by Christ."[15]

A third point of interest relates to a spiritual resurrection. The first resurrection for Augustine is that life of true believers during the time of the chaining of Satan, a sort of spiritual millennium. As Backus says, "The spiritual school of the exegesis of the Apocalypse which was to dominate the Western interpretations of the book for several centuries was thus born."[16] In the medieval period, this was especially visible in Primasius and Bede, both of them making use of Tyconius while adopting his work to ecclesiastical use.

[12]Tyconius, *Exposition of the Apocalypse*, 177.
[13]Backus, *Reformation Readings*, xiii; see Tyconius, *Exposition of the Apocalypse*, 130. The same period of time is designated by 1,260 days, forty-two months, and three and a half days (see Tyconius's comments on Rev 11:3, 9; 12:6).
[14]Backus, *Reformation Readings*, xiii-xiv; see Tyconius, *Exposition of the Apocalypse*, 176-77.
[15]Backus, *Reformation Readings*, xiv.
[16]Backus, *Reformation Readings*, xiv.

The oldest Greek commentary on Revelation is said to be that of Oecumenius (early sixth century), probably a contemporary and supporter of Severus, monophysite patriarch of Antioch (c. 465–538).[17] While there remains debate as to the identity of Oecumenius, he appears to be, like Origen, interested in the spiritual or intellectual meaning of the text rather than a literal meaning. This alignment is indicative of a strong mystical interpretation. Oecumenius draws out the layered symbolism of the text by turning to the Hebrew prophets, particularly Zechariah.[18]

Also of importance is Primasius (d. c. 560), who was bishop of Hadrumetum and primate of Byzacena, in North Africa.[19] His commentary on Revelation makes use of the commentary of Tyconius. A Latin contemporary of Oecumenius, Primasius was also drawn to a spiritual interpretation of the text and wrote in the tradition of Tyconius.[20] His allegorical commentary can be seen to represent a symbolic interpretation through the tenth century.[21]

Turning to the West, it is important to mention Caesarius of Arles (468/470–542), a Gallic bishop, administrator, preacher, and theologian. Caesarius foresaw the institutional shape of medieval Christendom and also focused on the idea of the millennium. This focus is given graphic orientation in the *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, a book written in the eighth century by Spanish monk and theologian Beatus of Liebana (730–785) and copied and illustrated in manuscript in works called "Beati" during the tenth and eleventh centuries. "Beati" also refers to any manuscript copy of this work, especially the twenty-seven extant illuminated copies.

The influence of these Greek and patristic commentaries on exegetes in the sixteenth century primarily concerned a hermeneutical orientation that affirmed recapitulation. While some tension existed in the church of the second and third centuries around an earlier literal interpretation, Tyconius's orientation and affirmation of the figurative and corporate identity of the church as Christ's body, granting also a corporate body to the devil, was carried forward to the Carolingian period. This contributed to the idea that European Christianity was favored by God.

2. Early Western Latin exegetical tradition. A lively exegetical tradition of the interpretation of Revelation took place in the Latin churches in the West.[22] Interpretation of apocalyptic literature in Eastern Orthodoxy tended not to advance beyond early Greek and patristic literature, except in Kievan Russia of the thirteenth century. However, an awakened interest in the Apocalypse can be discerned in the Carolingian age with Bede "the Venerable" (c. 673–735), whose commentary on Revelation evinces historical movement under apocalyptic symbolism. Together with Ambrosius Autpertus (d. 778/781), Bede moved interpretation forward to the sharpened historical and

[17]The text was rediscovered by Franz Diekamp. See Oecumenius, *The Complete Commentary of Oecumenius on the Apocalypse*, ed. H. C. Hoskier (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1928), 1-25.

[18]Oecumenius, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, trans. John N. Suggit (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2006), 4.

[19]M. L. W. Laistner, *Thought and Letters in Western Europe: A.D. 500 to 900*, 2nd ed. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1957), 114.

[20]*Primasius, Comentariorius super Apocalypsim* (PL 68.793-936). Others who follow Tyconius are summarized by Bousset, *Die Offenbarung Johannis*, pp. 65-72.

[21]Bousset finds Primasius's adoption of Tyconius's exegetical method of recapitulation important for later exegetes who will follow Primasius (see *Die Offenbarung Johannis*).

[22]Matthew Gabriele and John T. Palmer, eds., *Apocalypse and Reform from Late Antiquity to the Middle Ages* (New York: Routledge, 2018); K. Emmerson and Bernard McGinn, *The Apocalypse in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993).

polemical exegesis associated with apocalyptic thought in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.[23] In the introduction to his commentary Bede acknowledges dependence on Tyconius and lists Tyconius's seven exegetical rules.[24] The thrust of his work is typological rather than allegorical.[25] It is more attuned to historical models in a fixed biblical pattern than to symbolic truth. Bede shows a greater interest in history than either Tyconius or Primasius. It is still the case, Bede argues, that the world has entered its sixth and last age.[26] Into this thinking drawn from Augustine (*De civitate Dei* 22.30; see also 22.77), Bede finds an integral sense of development, a process like that which he observed within each day of creation: initial creative activity, development, and decline.[27]

Bede's intent was to divide Revelation into seven sections or summaries, which became the seven visions, the standard division of the text.[28] This would be of importance to sixteenth-century commentators on the text. Backus describes Bede's seven divisions:

> The first section comprises the address to the seven churches which represent the church universal and the promise of the return of the Son (Apc 1–3). The second section describes the opening of the seven seals of the book in which the Lamb will read the conflicts and triumphs that the church has been confronting since the Incarnation. The order of opening is maintained until the sixth seal; the contents of the six seals are then recapitulated in a narrative section, before the narrator moves on to the seventh seal (Apc 4–8.5). The third section follows the same pattern, depicting the same events in the form of seven trumpets (Apc 8.6–11.19). The fourth section (Apc 12–14) describes the joys and tribulations of the church, while the fifth "afflicts the earth with seven plagues" (Apc 15–16). The sixth section describes the judgment on the great whore, Babylon (Apc 17–20), and the seventh (Apc 21–22) describes the heavenly Jerusalem and the eternal peace after the Last Judgment.[29]

Bede used the seals of Revelation to picture a similar division in the sixth age, as in every other, in distinction from Augustine, who had left the last period undifferentiated.[30] The opening of the first seal was symbolic of the primitive church's triumph. The next three seals reveal forms of

[23]*Bede, Explanatio Apocalypsis* (PL 93.129-206). Wilhelm Kamlah maintains that the door from the patristic to the medieval age is Bede and Ambrosius Autpertus. See Kamlah, *Apokalypse und Geschichtstheologie: Die mittelalterliche Auslegung der Apokalypse vor Joachin von Fiore* (Berlin: Emil Ebering, 1935), 12-13. The awakened interest in apocalyptic speculation in the Carolingian age is illustrated by C. Heitz as a part of his general thesis, followed here, that "every profound change in society has been triggered by a notable vogue for apocalyptic thought." ("Chaque profond changement de societe a ete procede par une vogue notable de la pensée apocalyptique.") See Heitz, "Retentissement de l'Apocalypse dans l'art de l'epoque carolingienne," in *L'Apocalypse*, ed. Yves Christe (Geneva: Droz, 1979), 217.

[24]Bede, *Explanatio Apocalypsis* (PL 93.131-33). Backus writes, "The Apocalypse was thus stabilized in the spiritual and ecclesiological realm. However, changing social conditions soon dictated a different way of reading the text" (*Reformation Readings*, xv).

[25]Gerald Bonner argues for the dominance of typological thinking in Bede's works in *Saint Bede in the Tradition of Western Apocalyptic Commentary* (Newcastle upon Tyne: J. and P. Bealls, 1966), 5-31.

[26]Richard K. Emmerson gives a tabular presentation of these ages in *Antichrist in the Middle Ages: A Study of Medieval Apocalypticism, Art, and Literature* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1981), 18.

[27]R. W. Southern writes, "Each age acquired a distinct momentum . . . an act of restoration, succeeded by a period of divergent development, leading to a general disaster which set the scene for the new act of restoration." See Southern, "Presidential Address: Aspects of the European Tradition of Historical Writing. Vol. 2: Hugh of St. Victor and the Idea of Historical Development," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 21 (1971): 162.

[28]Rodney L. Petersen, *Preaching in the Last Days: The Theme of "Two Witnesses" in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 28-30.

[29]Backus, *Reformation Readings*, xiv-xv.

[30]Bede divides his commentary into three books, which conflate apocalyptic imagery in the manner prescribed by Tyconius's sixth rule.

warfare against the church: the attack of tyrants, consequent martyrdom, false brethren, and heretics. The fifth seal, not a part of the historical sequence, reveals the glory of deceased martyrs. The sixth seal represents the time of antichrist's persecution. The seventh seal marks the beginning of eternal rest. "As well as 'conveniently' dividing the text into easily distinguishable sections, it had the advantage of concealing any millenarian tendencies of the text and of focusing the reader's attention on the trials and tribulations of the church since the Incarnation. In other words, it provided an ecclesiological as well as a spiritual framework."[31]

A strong moral thrust is added to the temporal tendencies found in Bede's work by the commentary on Revelation by Ambrosius Autpertus. Intent on discovering the mystical or spiritual sense of the text, he not only follows Bede but also draws on the allegorical and recapitulative exegesis of Tyconius and Primasius. Autpertus's moral interests are developed in relation to Jerome and Gregory the Great. Israel's prophets are held up as examples for moral modeling.

In the commentary attributed to Alcuin (c. 735–804), the Carolingian "schoolmaster," a work that evinces the influence of Bede and Autpertus, Bede's division of history and Tyconius's exegetical rules are first cited as guiding principles. Alcuin notes the work of Victorinus and Tyconius and then discusses the spiritual value to be gained by studying Revelation. When Alcuin addresses the question of the identity of the witnesses of Revelation 11, he notes the interpretation of Victorinus but believes it is better to understand them literally and not as the revivified Enoch and Elijah. Yet, following Tyconius's fourth exegetical rule, he concludes that one may find in their persons a figurative description of the church. This church is based on two Testaments, two peoples (Jew and Gentile), and two love commandments. Alcuin adds an additional dyad, two kinds of martyrdom, physical and monastic, and concludes that the time of their ministry is the entire age of the church.

The witnesses and their foe, antichrist, are perceived symbolically in Haimo of Halberstadt (d. 853). The prophets of Revelation 11 preach repentance and work in their humility for restitution. The whole church is understood in their persons and preaching, both in the present as well as at the end of history. He adds, pointedly, that at the time of their appearance prior to the reign of antichrist, there will be a spirit of deception and persecution, but this will not destroy the work of the church.[32]

This recapitulative, allegorical, and at times typological interpretation that emerged in medieval interpretation of Revelation is continued in several other commentators of interest to sixteenth-century exegetes of the Apocalypse. They include Walafrid Strabo (c. 808–849), Berengaudus (ninth century), Anselm of Laon (d. 1117), and Bruno of Segni (d. 1123). Both Strabo and Berengaudus added historical concerns in their understanding of apocalyptic symbolism. Strabo carefully correlates periods of history since the inception of the church with the seven seals. Berengaudus connects a long systematic outline of history with the seals and their apocalyptic symbolism. God's saints, the witnesses of Revelation 11, are tested in seven days of world history, as

[31]Backus, *Reformation Readings*, xv.
[32]Petersen, *Preaching in the Last Days*, 29.

was the faith of Israel in its seven-day journey around Jericho. The angel of Revelation 10 is Christ at his incarnation. The book given to John (Rev 10:9) is the Scriptures, to be preached by John, by all apostles, and by Christian teachers. This history continues in Revelation 11, which pictures the church from the expulsion of the Jews (Rev 11:1-2) to their return. They will be called back to true worship by Enoch and Elijah, the two who will fulfill the prophecy of Revelation 11 in a specific way and fight antichrist. They will precede the second coming of the Lord as John the Baptist preceded the first.

The question of the identity of the witnesses of Revelation 11 raises the question of the identity of the antichrist. The rules for interpretation laid down by Tyconius allowed for a corporate identity as well as individual identity. The play *Antichrist* (c. 1160), dependent on the work of Adso Dervensis (d. 992), presents one of the more complete apocalyptic plots found in medieval literature. It introduces the growing use of apocalyptic themes, particularly their politicization in the papal-imperial conflicts that characterize the period ahead. With the Carolingian Renaissance in the rearview mirror, the play *Antichrist* leads into a period in which the witnesses will be called on as symbolic representations of good versus evil among competing claims of social legitimacy.

Antichrist suggests insight into sixteenth-century conflict. The play offers implicit criticism of the medieval church, which under Pope Gregory VII had sought to reorganize itself independent of the political imperium. Antichrist is at first defeated by the Germanic king, then converts the king by his miracles. Next, *Synagoga* and the Jews are converted by antichrist, but Enoch and Elijah draw them to Christ. These prophets preach for three and a half years and "unmask" antichrist but are finally killed by him. He, in turn, is destroyed by Christ. The appearances and work of the witnesses help to mark the last stage of history as time hastens to the last judgment.

Whether in drama or apocalyptic commentary, symbolic representatives of ethical dualism emerged for reformist purposes in an envisioned development of history. By the eleventh century new questions were being raised about the church's place in society. These pertained not only to issues of political order, such as how church and civil ideals were to relate, whether canon law was definitive in civil court, and who was to govern the church. Such questions inevitably opened the debate about the nature of history and of historical periodization, which had been worked on by authorities such as Augustine and Bede. In different ways commentators and social theorists of the day sought a deeper understanding of patterns of political and religious legitimacy through society's heritage of biblical narrative. Augustine's (and Tyconius's) sixth age, contemporary history for medieval Europe, had been defined through recourse to such narratives and in particular to apocalyptic symbolism.

3. Medieval Latin church and reform movements. Such a symbolic understanding of history was developed by Rupert of Deutz (1070–1129/1135?) in support of monastic reform with attendant social implications. Known for his historico-prophetic method of interpretation, which according to Wilhelm Kamlah by the sixteenth century became integrated into a spiritual

hermeneutic, prophecy was united to politics.[33] The two characteristic representatives of this exegetical approach are Rupert of Deutz and Nicholas of Lyra (see further below on Lyra's interpretive approach). According to Backus, "The basic feature of the historical approach was to divide the Apocalypse into six rather than seven parts and to read it as a history of salvation from Adam until a certain date in the present or proximate future. Depending on the *terminus ad quem* chosen by the exegete, John thus became either a historian or simultaneously a historian and a prophet." She goes on to contend, "For Rupert of Deutz, John was basically a historian and the Apocalypse a history of salvation from Adam until the Council of Nicaea, although the commentary also contains numerous references to Rupert's own time and to the life of the church in general."[34]

History was becoming a mode of prophecy. History was viewed as the unfolding or historical working out of the trinitarian Godhead (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), divided into periods reflective of the personalities and work of each of the members of the Trinity: a historical age before the law (i.e., before God had begun to reveal God's nature [*ante legem*]), an age characterized by the revelation of his law for humankind (*sub lege*), an age revealing God's graciousness (*sub gratia*), and eventually a unifying age of the Spirit. Each age was further divided into periods characterized by particular virtues that were at the same time proper for the whole church through all history. These virtues marked a growth in grace through history and provided a set of spiritual symbols and examples available for polemical purpose.

Rupert's eschatological mysticism is reflected in his treatment of antichrist, the beast of Revelation (Rev 13:1-18; 16:13; 19:20) but a term not found in Revelation (see 1 Jn 2:18; 2 Jn 7), and the two witnesses. In Rupert's elaborate historical scheme, antichrist is not denied a final appearance but may be seen spiritually as internal decay and hypocrisy.[35]

Honorius of Autun (early twelfth century) continued the interest in historical periodization noted with Rupert of Deutz. Honorius marked history by a continuous line of ten *ordines* or states of the church (five before and five after Christ), each indicating a specific conflict between God and Satan. Similar tendencies are found in Otto of Freising (c. 1110–1158) and Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179).

In the more optimistic historical understanding of Anselm of Havelberg (1100–1158), the new monastic orders in the church, pointedly the friars, Dominicans and Franciscans, are given deepened spiritual significance. Anselm's use of apocalyptic symbolism to understand reform adds significance. Successive states of the church, natural changes or mutation, are foreshadowed in the seven apocalyptic seals. The present church is located under the fourth of seven periods, a time of conflict between true and false disciples. The end of history is still distant.

[33]Kamlah, *Apokalypse und Geschichtstheologie*, 12-13.

[34]Backus, *Reformation Readings*, xvi.

[35]See Backus, *Reformation Readings*, xvi: "The sea of glass evokes to Rupert the crossing of the Red Sea in the Old Testament, and baptism in the New Testament. Both denote liberation. The Christocentric nature of his commentary coupled with his interest in the Old Testament and his interest in the history of the early church in general was probably what made Rupert's commentary popular with reformers like Sebastian Meyer."

More immediate conflict characterizes the work of Gerhoh of Reichersberg (1093–1169), as he put the periodization of church history in the service of reform, thus shaping its prophetic thrust. Despite Gerhoh's commitment to holiness and social purity, a certain ambiguity in his work exists as he first wrote in defense of the papacy (viewing Emperor Henry IV as antichrist). Following Jerome's reflection on the two witnesses of Revelation 11, Gerhoh found in these symbols a spiritual work of the Law and Prophets in the church, without denying a possible literal interpretation, arguing that before the end new spiritual men (possibly the friars) living in a state of apostolic purity would reform the church. Later, Gerhoh grew disillusioned with the church's leadership and charted a less obvious path of reform: the black night of history is periodically broken by the night watches of those who name evil and deception for what they are.

4. Joachim of Fiore and his successors. The optimistic historical perspective just referenced came as the result of the exegetical work of Joachim of Fiore (c. 1132–1202), whose work ensured the greater visibility of spiritual renewal and established an apocalyptic tradition from which Protestants and others drew in the years ahead.[36] Joachim wrote his commentary around 1195, but it was not published until 1527. This was due to the papal condemnation of the Franciscan Gerard of Borgo San Donnino in 1254 for his proclamation of the Eternal Gospel, excerpts of which were drawn from Joachim's work. This was a Gospel that was intended to supersede the Old and New Testaments. Joachim's own doctrine was condemned in 1215 by the Lateran Council and by the Council of Arles in 1263.[37]

Joachim's ideas underlay some of the commentaries of the sixteenth century. Backus writes,

> Two features of Joachim's hermeneutic would have been of interest to the Protestant commentators of the Apocalypse—first, his idea that after a series of struggles there would emerge an age in which the faithful would be in some sense "closer to God" than hitherto, and, second, his idea that the Antichrist was an unspecified individual (emanating from Rome) who would combine all the heresies. The latter idea in fact captured the imagination of the spiritual Franciscans long before the Reformation.[38]

Joachim divided Revelation into eight parts. Unlike Bede, Joachim begins part seven with Revelation 20 (not Rev 21) and ends part seven at Revelation 20:10. For Joachim, part eight begins with Revelation 20:11, the vision of the last judgment, and carries on to the end of the book, Revelation 22, which defines a state of eternal rest.

Revelation encapsulates the latter two *status* in history, according to Joachim the Age of the Son and the Age of the Holy Spirit. The first six parts of the commentary depict the Age of the Son (forty-two generations, each about thirty years). Part one, which comprises Revelation 1–3,

[36]I follow Backus, *Reformation Readings,* xvii-xviii.

[37]Riedl Matthias, *A Companion to Joachim of Fiore* (Leiden: Brill, 2017); Marjorie Reeves, *Joachim of Fiore and the Prophetic Future* (New York: Sutton, 1999); Kevin Madigan, *Medieval Christianity: A New History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015); Julia Eva Wannenmacher, *Joachim of Fiore and the Influence of Inspiration* (New York: Routledge, 2016); Bernard McGinn, *Apocalyptic Spirituality, Classics of Western Spirituality* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1979).

[38]Backus, *Reformation Readings,* xviii.

contains seven generations and represents the struggle of the apostles against the synagogue, or the Jews. Part two, which comprises Revelation 4:1–8:1, illustrates the struggle of martyrs with pagan persecutions. Part three, which comprises Revelation 8:2–11:18, depicts the doctors of the church against heretics up until the Constantinian settlement. Part four, which comprises Revelation 11:19–14:20, illustrates the struggle of new monastic orders, or more precisely with friars, against Islam. Part five, which comprises Revelation 15:1–16:17, shows the conflict between the Church of Rome and the Holy Empire. Part six, which comprises Revelation 16:18–19:21, shows the struggle of spiritual men (represented in two new religious orders, Franciscans and Dominicans) against the dragon and the two beasts, understood to be "Saladin and the 'maximus Antichristus,' a person who combines the heresy of Islam and all the Western heresies."[39] The Age of the Son would come to an end around 1260.

Part seven begins the Age of the Holy Spirit, which comprises Revelation 20:1-10. Under these verses Satan is chained and the church freed from persecution. Following a final conflict, the contemplative order takes control of the church and promotes spiritual renewal. There is spiritual progress in this part, but Joachim is not a hard and fast millenarian. Revelation 20 distinguishes between the chaining of Satan, which does not begin until the defeat of the beast and the false prophet, and the one thousand years, symbolic in nature, which begins with the resurrection of Christ. Part eight, which comprises Revelation 20:11 to the end of Revelation 22, describes the last judgment and heavenly new Jerusalem.[40]

That Joachim of Fiore was influential, even within his own generation, is without debate.[41] Who his heirs were is another question: whether the free-thinking sects of the later Middle Ages or the Franciscans and others within the church.[42] When the orders of Dominic and Francis appeared in the thirteenth century, they seemed to express concretely the aspirations embodied in Joachim's prophecies.[43] Within the Franciscan Order itself there developed a strong attachment to the Joachite prophecies, particularly among the spirituals with their strict adherence to Francis's Rule.[44] Having caught the imagination of his age, Francis of Assisi (1181–1226) embodied for many the dramatic sense of history defined by Joachim's figural imagery.[45]

[39]Backus, *Reformation Readings*, xvii. Saladin was a contemporary of Joachim.

[40]Backus, *Reformation Readings*, xviii.

[41]Morton Bloomfield and Marjorie Reeves, "The Penetration of Joachimism into Northern Europe," *Speculum* 29 (1954): 772-93; see also Marjorie Reeves, *The Influence of Prophecy in the Later Middle Ages: A Study in Joachimism* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969), 37-44.

[42]Herbert Grundmann contends that Joachim's proper heirs were the free-thinking sects attempting to break with religious authoritarianism. Grundmann later modified this view, offering them a measure of orthodoxy. See Grundmann, *Studien uber Joachim* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1927), 182. Ernst Benz held that the spiritual Franciscans were the heirs of Joachim but that their "reformation" was rejected by ecclesiastical authority. See Benz, *Ecclesial Spiritualis: Kirchenidee und Geschichtstheologie der Franziskanischen Reformation* (Stuttgart: W. Kollhammer, 1934).

[43]Reeves cites the joint encyclical issued in 1255 by the generals of the two orders, Humbert de Romanis and John of Parma, describing the two orders in Joachim's parallel twos (*Influence of Prophecy*, 146-47).

[44]Reeves, *Influence of Prophecy*, 45-58; cf. Ruth Kestenberg-Gladstein, "The Third Reich: A Fifteenth Century Polemic Against Joachimism, and Its Background," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtald Institute* 18 (1955): 245-95. She holds that Joachim's followers generally held three ideas: (1) an imminent future will soon overtake an imperfect present, (2) the present is evolving into that future perfected state, and (3) a heightened sense of anticipation is present among the believers.

[45]Reeves writes about the Franciscans, "Thus they transformed Joachim's system into a drama shaped by the clues he had given and leading towards a final act which would embody his expectation. . . . For those who were too impatient to wait for divine

From the middle of the thirteenth century, pseudo-Joachite works such as the *Commentary on Jeremiah* and the works of Salimbene of Parma and Gerard of Borgo San Donnino portrayed an impending sense of the end of history that appealed to new orders in the church as well as to Apostolic Brethren, flagellants, and other late-thirteenth century movements. Even in the work of Bonaventure (1221–1274), author of the official biography of Francis, the *Legenda Maior* (1263), Francis was more than just another saint. He is said to have come in the spirit and power of Elijah. He is identified as the second angel of Revelation (Rev 7:2).[46]

For Peter John Olivi (c. 1248–1298) and Ubertino da Casale (c. 1259–1330), the coming of the person of Francis signaled the beginning of Joachim's Age of the Spirit. Ubertino wrote *The Tree of the Crucified Life of Jesus* (1305), drawing relationships between his order and the ministry of Jesus and commenting on them in connection to Revelation. In this classic expression of apocalyptic mysticism, the two beasts (Rev 13:1, 11) have arisen, Boniface VIII and Benedict XI, but are countered by the renovation of the evangelical life in Francis, the second (spiritual) of three comings of Christ.[47] As Backus writes, "Slowly, the idea of the Roman Antichrist took shape and was ready for use by the reformers. However, at the same time, the Franciscan exploitation of the Apocalypse certainly did not improve the reputation of the book."[48]

Spiritual apocalyptic speculation continued in such persons as Jacopone da Todi (c. 1230–1306) and Angelo of Clareno (c. 1255–1337).[49] Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) emerged as the chief critic of their theology of history.[50] The Joachite view of history tended to find more of a role for outstanding prophets. Francis was a new man in spiritualist exegesis, effecting a new covenant with a Spirit-filled band of prophets.[51] Aquinas's theology of history ran differently. His two eras of old and new law (Old Testament, New Testament) appear to leave little room for fresh prophetic insight and even pump the brakes on religious enthusiasm. The state of the new law (the gospel) is imperfect, but no state of present life can be better than that embodied in and brought by Christ.

Thomas argued pointedly: (1) perfection can only be achieved in heaven, not in some further age on earth; and (2) the church's theology of the Spirit has emphasized that the Spirit was given when Christ was glorified—not separately or at a different time. Thomas emphasizes immanence over economy with respect to the Trinity and history. The gospel of Christ is the only gospel of

intervention to reshape the authority of the Church the revolutionary implications of Joachimism offered an opportunity to cast themselves in the key roles in the final age" (*Influence of Prophecy*, 62-63, 67).

[46]Bonaventure, *Legenda Maior S Francisci*, preface.2; 13.10; Marion A. Habig, ed., *St. Francis of Assisi: Writings and Early Biographies: English Omnibus of the Sources for the Life of St. Francis* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald, 1973), 632, 736. See Bernard McGinn, "The Significance of Bonaventure's Theology of History," *Journal of Religion* 58 supplement (1978): 565-81.

[47]Gordon Leff, *Heresy in the Later Middle Ages: The Relation of Heterodoxy to Dissent c. 1250–c. 1450* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1967), 1:152-53.

[48]Backus, *Reformation Readings*, xviii.

[49]Bernard McGinn, *Visions of the End: Apocalyptic Traditions in the Middle Ages (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979)*, 205-7.

[50]Bernard McGinn, "The Abbot and the Doctors: Scholastic Reactions to the Radical Eschatology of Joachim of Fiore," *Church History* 40 (1971): 30-47; cf. Y. D. Gelnas, "La critique de Thomas d'Aquin sur l'exegese de Joachim de Fiore," in *Tommaso d'Aquino nel suo settino centenaria* (Rome, 1974), 1:368-75; Peter Meinhold, "Thomas von Aquin und Joachim von Fiore Deutung der Geschichte," *Speculum* 27 (1976): 66-76.

[51]Olivi's sermon on Francis as filled with the Spirit so as to become another man follows 1 Sam 10:6. See Ernst Benz, "Die Kategorian des eschatologischen Zeitbewusstseins," *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte* 11 (1933): 203-5, 215.

the kingdom. It is to be publicly proclaimed throughout the world. When the church has been established among all peoples, then the end will come (ST 1a2ae, 106, 4).

Aquinas's criticism of Joachite history was pointedly refuted by Arnold of Villanova (c. 1240–1312), for whom Thomas was prefigured in the star that fell from heaven (Rev 9:1).[52] Disappointed with the papacies of Boniface VIII and Clement V, Arnold promoted an apocalyptic piety of great lay appeal with hopes focused on Frederick II, Aragonese king of Sicily (1296–1337).[53] But it was another Franciscan, Peter Aureoli, and his fellow Franciscan Nicholas of Lyra who carried interpretation forward. Both viewed Revelation as a "prophetic compendium" of church between the two advents.[54] Aureoli drew on the work of Joachim and Olivi. He marked out seven epochs of church history, the seventh falling after judgment. Many of the favorite spiritualist images were turned to support the church. For example, Gregory VII, not Francis, is seen to be the sixth trumpeting angel. Still, appearing in the sixth epoch are the two witnesses of Revelation 11, the Franciscan and Dominican Orders. The first resurrection (Rev 20:5) is the renewal of piety through their efforts.[55]

Nicholas of Lyra (1270–1340), regent master at Paris, is a figure often cited by sixteenth-century exegetes.[56] Lyra drew widely on the work of Jewish scholars, particularly the commentator Rashi (1040–1105), in his effort to combat allegory in favor of a more literal sense of the text. In his discussion of Revelation (1329), he identified the two witnesses of Revelation 11 as Pope Silverius (c. 536) and Patriarch Menas of Constantinople (522).[57] The significance of this identification lies not so much in these individuals as in the precedent that was set for a specific identification of the prophetic vision with historical events.[58] Such focus was of determinative influence through the balance of the later Middle Ages and into the sixteenth century.

5. Revelation and the dawn of the Reformation. The history of patristic and medieval commentaries and their use in Carolingian and Gregorian reforms, together with the heightened spiritual interests of Joachite interpretation, created an incendiary atmosphere for the historical interpretation of efforts at church and social reform by the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The path to the commentaries written on Revelation in the sixteenth century must go by way of the late medieval Hussite revolt in central Europe. The unity offered to European identity in a postclassical Roman world, seen many years earlier in the work of Caesarius of Arles as found in the visionary text of

[52]Arnold can be seen as the second of three types of Franciscans: radical followers of Peter John Olivi, exponents of a spiritual lay movement, and (with Peter Aureoli) those faithful to the church. See Ernst Benz, "Die Geschichtstheologie der Franziskaner-spiritualen des 13 und 14 Jahrhunderts nach neuen Quellen." *Zeitschrift fur Kirchengeschichte* 52 (1933): 92.

[53]Benz, "Die Geschichtstheologie der Franziskaner-spiritualen," 99-111.

[54]The term is Charles's, from *Studies in the Apocalypse*, 27-30.

[55]Benz, "Die Geschichtstheologie der Franziskaner-spiritualen," 113-19.

[56]Philip D. W. Krey and Lesley Smith, eds., *Nicholas of Lyra: The Senses of Scripture*, Studies in the History of Christian Thought (Leiden: Brill, 2000).

[57]*Nicholas of Lyra, Postlla super Apostolorum, Epistolas canonicales, et Apocalypsim* (Mantua: Paulus de Butzbach, 1480). The pages are unnumbered, but the text is divided into chapter headings.

[58]The seals describe the events in history through Domitian; the seven trumpets, history from Arius through Patriarch Anthemus. Revelation 12 pictures the conflict between Chosroes of Persia and the Byzantine general and emperor Heraclius. The first beast is the son of Chosroes, while the second is Muhammad. Revelation 14 describes Charlemagne, the seven vials the history of the Crusades, and Rev 20 the conflict between Pope Calixtus and Henry V.

Revelation, was now about to face its greatest challenge. What happened would determine the extent to which a common European culture would continue intact.

It is helpful to begin a survey of the influences drawn on by sixteenth-century commentators to assess their historical context with Matthew of Janov (c. 1355–1394), in whom is found a polemical periodization of history. The Hussite reform movement had its origin in the imperial desire of the king, Emperor Charles IV (1347–1378), and in a succession of preachers beginning with Conrad of Waldhausen, called to preach in Prague. Critical of privileged wealth and clerical simony, Conrad anticipated many of the themes of interest to sixteenth-century commentators, particularly the visible purity of the church, Christ's body. This theme runs throughout the movement from Milic of Kromeriz (d. 1374), often referred to as the father of the Bohemian reform, into the split between Utraquists and Taborites to the later Bohemian Brethren. In his brief work *Libellus de Antichristo*, Milic reminds his readers of the close connection of the proclamation of the gospel, the coming of antichrist, and the Lord's return to rule. On the basis of detailed calculations, he was convinced that antichrist was already at large. Placing his confidence in the promise of a new Jerusalem, he worked to establish a foretaste of this hope by founding a school for preachers and a house for repentant prostitutes in Prague. Frequent reception of the Eucharist in bread and wine became the eschatological symbol of one's new spiritual identity in Christ.

Matthew of Janov was the chief biblical theorist for the Czech reform. His primary work, *Regulae veteris et novi testimenti* (begun in 1388), had as its aim the recovery of the apostolic life. Critical of papal or curial institutionalism and moral hypocrisy, it distinguished true from false Christians against an eschatological horizon. Reform was to be carried out by a holy people within the existing church. With the triumph of ecclesial hypocrisy (c. 1200), antichrist had been slowly growing in power. Rather than being some figure reserved for the future (Jew, pagan, or Saracen), antichrist was best understood as a hypocritical Christian, conceived corporately and spiritually, both singly and a body with many members.[59] At the height of antichrist's power, inspired prophets, preaching with the zeal, innocence, and humility of Enoch and Elijah, would begin to slay antichrist. This was the work of the preachers and teachers in the Bohemian reform, specifically that of Conrad of Waldhausen and Milic.[60]

Bohemian students were increasingly attracted to Oxford for study as the Western Schism (1378–1417) continued. This had the effect of adding the influence of John Wycliffe to the Bohemian reform. Jan Hus (d. 1415) employed much of Wycliffe's theology, particularly the idea of the indestructibility and purity of Christ's church, his mystical body and pure bride. This church was grounded in the grace of predestination, not in the habitual grace of the visible church. Adherence to the wrong church could mean complicity with an antichurch, even antichrist, an issue already implied by Janov. Schism could only come to the body of antichrist, not Christ's true body. The

[59]R. R. Betts, "The Regulae Veteris et Novi Testamenti of Matej z Janova," *Journal of Theological Studies* 32 (1931): 344-51. On the edition by V. Kybal, see Kestenberg-Gladstein, "Third Reich," 288n112, who sees stronger resemblances to Olivi than to Joachim. Leff finds Janov's ideas distinctly individual and dissimilar from either (*Heresy in the Later Middle Ages*, 615).

[60]Petersen, *Preaching in the Last Days*, 40-43; cf. Amadeo Molnar, "Le movement préhussite et la fin des temps," *Communio Viatorum* 1 (1958): 30.

current ecclesial turmoil raised the historical question of when antichrist had entered the institutional church. Wycliffe argued that after the church's first one thousand years Satan has been loosed in the world. The visible church declined markedly from that date despite the efforts of Francis and Dominic.[61]

In the Lollard commentary on Revelation, written by a student of Wycliffe, the two witnesses of Revelation 11 are identified with true doctrine and emerge triumphant over antichrist, the papacy. The eschatology of followers of Hus and Wycliffe was sharpened in its historical dimensions when Hus came under attack by the papacy. Called before the Council of Constance (1414), Hus was martyred on July 6, 1415. From 1415 on, Hus's martyrdom along with that of his fellow preacher, Jerome of Prague (c. 1370–1416), became for some the image and fulfillment of the death of the witnesses of Revelation 11.

The Hussite movement divided into Utraquists, who were moderates (emphasizing the laity's right to Communion of both bread and wine), and Taborists, those who were more radical and separatist (see Mount Tabor in Josh 19:22, in the New Testament identified with the Mount of Transfiguration). The militant Taborites read the political events of the times through an apocalyptic lens.[62] Tabor soon became a theological and political center filled with refugees, while Prague was identified with Babylon (Rev 18:4). Ensuing civil conflict and subsequent defeat led to the absorption of Taborites into another Hussite-influenced group, the Unity of the Brethren, known today as the Moravians (see John Amos Comenius, 1592–1670).

A prophetic, even apocalyptic horizon characterized the years leading up to the sixteenth century. The church drew on the rich exegetical heritage reaching back to its foundation and embedded in the christological assumptions separating synagogue Judaism from Messianic Judaism associated with Jesus.[63] There was literal interpretation of apocalyptic imagery, but a symbolic representation was added by Tyconius and furthered by Augustine. Tyconius's exegetical rules gave strength to the recapitulative methodology pioneered by Victorinus. In this the temporal or apocalyptic horizon was not completely lost, but it was muted. The Carolingian period grounded apocalyptic symbolism in historical movement. Drawn into the reformist impetus following the Gregorian reforms, interest in the imagery of an antichrist grew and became associated with Revelation. Interest in a spiritual age on earth, for which there would be spiritual prophets as forerunners, became envisioned in new orders and in Joachite exegesis. This history of exegetical understanding was placed within a framework of temporal periodization related to the septenary imagery of the text. Late medieval exegetes such as Nicholas of Lyra set the drama into a firm historical mold, matching prophetic vision with historical event. In the Hussite-Taborite movement the entire history of interpretation was drawn into contemporary politics.

[61]H. B. Workman, *John Wyclif: A Study of the English Medieval Church*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1926). Workman discusses the prevalence of Joachite ideas at Oxford and Wycliffe's early attraction to the Franciscan spirituals, whom he later rejected (2:97-108).

[62]Leff, *Heresy in the Later Middle Ages*, 1-46. References to final witnesses and antichrist are found in the Taborite, *De Anatomia Antichristi* (1421).

[63]Paula Fredriksen, *When Christians Were Jews: The First Generation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018).

There was not a uniform way in which Protestants appropriated this tradition of the complex history of interpretation. Some rejected it outright; others followed it only at points and then cautiously. Some, more inclined to Joachite interests, to a spirituality and spiritual age on earth, adopted it wholly. Interpretation of Revelation affected Protestant-Roman Catholic polemics.[64] Generally, Protestant exegetes adopted a corporate or Tyconian reading of the text together with varying degrees of historical periodization, influenced in various revival movements, in particular by Joachite interpretation. As Backus argues,

> Lutherans saw the Reformation as an upheaval ushering in the Last Judgment just as John had predicted. The Zürich reformers saw it mainly as a movement affecting social ethics in the daily lives and behavior of states and individuals, which accounts for the practical tone of their exegesis. Neither they nor the Calvinists saw themselves as fulfilling John's prophecy to the letter in the sense that the Lutherans did.[65]

This is not to say that Catholic commentators in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries did not use these texts.[66] Indeed, Protestant historicist appropriation helped to stimulate Jesuit preterist and futurist explanation of apocalyptic drama even as the book was interpreted in deeper literal, spiritualist, and proto-rationalist ways. This is delineated by George H. Williams in his study of the "radicals"—evangelical rationalists, spiritualists, and Anabaptists—of the Reformation.[67]

If the Reformation proper is viewed as two centuries of conflict extending from the Franco-Habsburg wars in Italy in the 1490s through to the onset of the Thirty Years' War of 1618–1648, then in the roughly one hundred years between Luther's two prefaces to Revelation in his translation of the Bible (1522, 1530) and the *Commentary on the Apocalypse* by David Pareus (1618) commentaries on Revelation gave vision to the violence of the times as well as to its deepest hopes for social order and moral renewal.

The work of Erasmus of Rotterdam set the stage for the early interpretation of Revelation in the sixteenth century. Luther quickly built on this scaffolding but was himself caught up in the early sixteenth-century apocalyptic fervor that was characteristic of radical Reformers such as Thomas Müntzer, Hans Hut, and Melchior Hoffman.[68] In their different approaches to interpretation—Erasmus emphasizing style and philology while Luther focused more on theology—they marked in broad strokes the exegetical positions taken by subsequent commentators.[69]

[64]The break with catholic universalism and developing use of history was clearly seen early on in the use of history for verification of ecclesial authenticity by Mathias Flacius Illyricus (Lutheran) and Robert Bellarmine (Roman Catholic). The inception of national churches across Europe replicated this process in different national settings. See, e.g., Felicity Heal, *Reformation in Britain and Ireland* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2003).

[65]Backus, *Reformation Readings*, 137-38.

[66]Ludovici ab Alcasar, *Vestigatio Arcani Sensus in Apocalpsi* (Antwerp: Heredes Martini Nutii, 1614, 1619), as a period of time in the first century (preterist); or, as argued by Francisco Ribera, *Commentarius in Apocalypsim* (Salamanca, Spain: Excudebat Petrus Lassus, 1585, 1591), as in the future (futurist). Protestant futurist views would be championed by the Plymouth Brethren leader John Nelson Darby (see Petersen, *Preaching in the Last Days*, 244-46).

[67]George H. Williams, *The Radical Reformation* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962).

[68]Peter Way, "A 'Lutheryan' Copy of St. Augustine," *Humanae Literae* 8 (2003): 69-116; *Lutheran Quarterly* 14, no. 4 (Winter 2000): 373-408; Petersen, *Preaching in the Last Days*, 59-119.

[69]Michael Massing, *Fatal Discord: Erasmus, Luther, and the Fight for the Western Mind* (New York: Harper One, 2018).

Most of the earlier influential commentaries on Revelation that affected sixteenth-century commentaries are from the churches of the West. Irena Backus summarizes the problems of canonicity for the churches of the early Reformation.[70] She argues that Erasmus's textual objections to the book and Luther's theological reticence with reference to it gradually gave way through the sixteenth century to the acceptance of Revelation as a book of New Testament prophecy that could answer the question of the meaning of history since the incarnation and the significance of the historical present. By tracing the history of the exegesis of the text of Revelation, this volume illustrates her contention.

Sixteenth-Century Commentaries

These sixteenth-century commentaries on Revelation and related literature in the Christian Bible provided a means to measure the church's fidelity to the gospel message. They offered pastoral encouragement for Christians confronted with opposition and persecution. Through their rich symbolism, they also offered a warning to those tempted to find profit or partnership with seductive worldly systems.

But commentaries on Revelation offered even more. They also gave vision to the search for reform and moral order in church and society. They provided cover to such ensuing conflict as the violence of the Peasants' Wars in German lands (1524–1525) and the Lutheran-inspired Schmalkaldlic Wars from 1547, which was succeeded by the Reformed-inspired wars of religion between the 1560s and 1590s. This civil unrest was followed by the Thirty Years' War (1618–1648), with a continuing impact on English reforms and civil wars (1642–1651) and their shaping of colonial settlements.[71] In a word, it was a period of uncertainty.

The theological intentions in these sixteenth-century commentaries have sent continuing eddies of historical interpretation into twenty-first-century commentaries and schools of thought even as they pick up on themes developed in the early Western and medieval churches and schools.[72] Commentaries on Revelation serve as a distillation of medieval worldviews in Europe. They chart lines of direction in the modern world insofar as the latter remains connected to the biblical narrative for social interpretation.

The social upheaval in these hundred years, marked by the wars of reform and resettlement that were a part of the Reformation, exacerbated the biggest population movement in European history between the years that dismantled the western Roman Empire and the twentieth century's First and Second World Wars. This movement of European peoples involved a transplanting of population into previously largely uncharted lands by Europeans, later identified as colonialism.

[70]Backus, *Reformation Readings*, 3-36.

[71]Diarmaid MacCulloch, *The Reformation: A History* (New York: Viking, 2003); see also Mark Greengrass, *Christendom Destroyed: Europe 1517–1648* (New York: Viking, 2014). See also Carter Lindberg, *The European Reformations, 2nd ed.* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), who sheds light on both the sixteenth century and our own.

[72]Examples of different schools of interpretation include Reformed, as with Kenneth Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell: Dating the Book of Revelation* (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1998); dispensational, as with Clarence Larkin, *The Book of Revelation* (N.p.: CreateSpace, 2017); spiritual, as with Bruce Metzger, *Breaking the Code: Understanding the Book of Revelation*, rev. ed., updated by David A. deSilva (Nashville: Abingdon, 2019).

The divisions in apocalyptic thinking shaped theology from New England south along the Atlantic Seaboard and wherever the currents carried European settlement.

These hundred years were marked not only by the trauma of shifting patterns of conflict and population settlement but also by the kind of technological change we have only seen in contemporary times. Then it was Johannes Gutenberg and the invention of the movable-type printing press; today it is Bill Gates and a digital world. Commentaries on Revelation were a means to make sense of social change and order.

A new heaven and a new earth were being born as the Peace of Westphalia opened up a new historical era after 1648, referred to in philosophy as the Enlightenment. In his *Eicasmi* (Greek for "speculations," 1596), English reformer and commentator John Foxe used the exodus analogy for the faithful remnant in the Middle Ages now coming into its own, as did Continental theologian David Pareus in 1618. English New Testament scholar and exegete Thomas Brightman heralded God's work in the world through outpourings of the Spirit together with new learning led by England's new Constantine, Elizabeth I. A new era was being birthed in the following four areas, and Revelation served as midwife.[73]

1. Historical context
2. Theological themes
3. Interpretive issues
4. Historical reception of Revelation by radicals of the Reformation, Lutherans, the Reformed, and English Reformers

1. Historical context. The social and political context for this volume is framed by the appearance of Martin Luther's 1522 *Commentary on the New Testament* and the English translation of David Pareus's *Commentary on the Apocalypse* in 1644, the latter published at the onset of the Thirty Years' War.[74] Andrew Cunningham and Ole Peter Grell present these years as an entire age subject to the underlying cause for apocalyptic anxiety—the human and the natural disasters of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[75] This period was already foreshadowed in Albrecht Dürer's famous 1498 woodcut *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*. It raised questions about the relation of an apocalyptic mentality and the confessionalization of Christianity, differences in the intensity and character of end-time outlooks in a time of social change. While three of the horses depicted war, famine, and death, the white horse was symbolic of the second coming of Christ.

A spirit of confessionalism tinged with apocalyptic fervor followed the Imperial Diet of Augsburg (1530), called by Holy Roman Emperor Charles V to deal with the defense of the empire against the Turkish threat, with disagreements about Christian doctrine and practice subsequent to Lutheran unrest, and with issues related to policy and public well-being in the empire. The diet, or conference, confirmed the resolutions embodied in the Edict of Worms (1521), causing the

[73]Brightman, *Revelation*, 123.
[74]Peter H. Wilson, *The Thirty Years War: Europe's Tragedy* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2009), 25-40.
[75]Andrew Cunningham and Ole Peter Grell, *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse: Religion, War, Famine and Death in Reformation Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

Protestant princes to come together in a defensive posture in the Schmalkaldic League (1531). At the diet, as the leading representative of the Reformation, Philipp Melanchthon prepared the Augsburg Confession (1530), which prompted division and other credal statements of protest. These included Huldrych Zwingli's *Fidei Ratio* (1530), an appeal to the sympathies of Venice and Francis I of France, partly in view of their political hostility to the empire.

Lutheranism had begun as an attempt to reform the church through a public debate around Luther's Ninety-Five Theses. With roots in late medieval reform and humanist learning, Lutheranism drew on religious movements in the late medieval period such as the Hussites, Waldensians, and followers of Girolamo Savonarola. The conditions created by the Renaissance allowed thinkers such as Erasmus to bring humanist learning to question the role and nature of the church. Lutheranism quickly allied itself with the office of the magistrate after an initial radical social phase. The period drew on prophetic scenarios, astrology, Neoplatonic philosophy and other extrabiblical materials. Concerning Lutheranism's focus on the end of all things, Robin Barnes writes,

> Martin Luther would have been disappointed to know that his five hundredth birthday would be celebrated on earth. He believed in the imminence of the end of the world and the Last Judgment; this belief was widely shared among his colleagues and followers. Much more than Catholics or Calvinists, Lutherans kept alive the tense hopes and fears for the future that had characterized the late Middle Ages.[76]

Those hopes and fears pervaded the Diet of Speyer, which nevertheless saw a growing separation of magisterial from radical Reformers and subjected those who envisioned a more radical reform to the penalty of death with the concurrence of Catholics and Lutherans. One of the first Anabaptist leaders, Felix Manz, was drowned in Zurich in 1527, and persecution eliminated other Anabaptist leaders. Thomas Müntzer typified the radicals and began drawing out Anabaptist apocalyptic expectancy. Such expectation characterized the political Münster uprising of 1535.

Politics also pervaded the reform movement as it became defined by magisterial leadership in the Swiss cantons and cities. In 1519, Zwingli became the people's priest of the Grossmünster in Zurich. There he began to preach on reform of the church. This included expository preaching through the entire New Testament, quite different from the Catholic Mass.

In 1529, a war within the Swiss Confederation was staved off at the last moment between those who preferred to remain Catholic and those supportive of reform. At the same time, Martin Luther and others became aware of Zwingli's ideas. They held the Marburg Colloquy (1529) and concurred in many areas of doctrine but could not come to agreement on the doctrine of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Heinrich Bullinger followed Zwingli, serving as a pastor to the pastors, but leadership among the Reformation defined as "Reformed" fell to John Calvin, Reformer of Geneva.

[76]Robin Barnes, *Prophecy and Gnosis: Apocalypticism in the Wake of the Lutheran Reformation* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988), 216.

The evolution of the science of history emerged by the 1550s, when Lutheran Matthias Flacius Illyricus (1520–1575) organized a collaborative century-by-century history (ending in 1298) of where Luther's doctrine of grace could be found, called *Magdeburg Centuries*.[77] This confessional project never reached completion and was criticized by his coreligionists and Roman Catholics, especially Cesar Baronius (1538–1607). However, the project provided a model for how history might be written. This conflict between Flacius and Baronius provides a background for stepping in the direction of a secular history seen in Pareus, Brightman, and Johann Heinrich Alsted, hastened by the Thirty Years' War.

The reading and interpretation of Revelation became an important source for establishing Protestantism in the sixteenth century as the movement emanated out of Wittenberg, Zurich, Geneva, and the Rhineland as well as elsewhere.[78] Defined in an age of increasing conflict, by midcentury the example of the flight of over 800 refugees (and 288 burned at the stake) from England of English Queen Mary's exiles, which took place less than two decades after the radical millenarian uprising at Münster, offered a lens to communities that by the end of the century "became the laboratories of a new ideology which inject an exegetical shock into conventional Augustinian amillennialism."[79] This laboratory largely took place under Reformed rather than Lutheran direction, but millenarianism continued suspect in the Protestant communities.

British historian Katherine Firth writes, "No six years were more important [in England] than those from 1553–1559" in the development of the native apocalyptic tradition.[80] The Geneva Bible, with its apocalyptic annotations from the commentary of Francis Junius and further development by commentators such as Pareus and Brightman, set the agenda for interpretation and conflict in the seventeenth century. Western European history was redefined as significantly as it had been since Augustine's *De civitate Dei* (*City of God*) up until the current era.[81] Crawford Gribben writes, "History would be rewritten as a polemical exposition of Revelation. And the imminent climax of the ages would be postponed to allow for an increasingly optimistic eschatology involving massive numbers of conversions of Jews and of unbelieving Gentiles into the Christian church."[82]

2. Theological themes. Paul Tillich's phrase "ultimate things" can function as a contemporary organizing principle to compare the eschatology of each Reformer of the sixteenth century and hence catch a bit of what made their movements so divergent while they agreed on so much.[83] One might do this with Luther and Calvin, as both stood out with such theological prominence.

[77]Lutheran theologian Werner Elert argues that the *Magdeburg Centuries* became the basis of modern church history. See Elert, *The Structure of Lutheranism: The Theology and Philosophy of Life Especially in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1962), 485.

[78]David C. Steinmetz, ed., *The Bible in the Sixteenth Century* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990).

[79]Crawford Gribben, "Deconstructing the Geneva Bible: The Search for a Puritan Poetic," *Literature and Theology* 14, no. 1 (March 2000): 2.

[80]Katherine Firth, *The Apocalyptic Tradition in Reformation Britain, 1530–1645* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 69; also Jane Dawson, "The Apocalyptic Thinking of the Marian Exiles," in *Prophecy and Eschatology: Studies in Church History, ed.* Michael Wilks, *Subsidia* 10 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 77.

[81]Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 2006).

[82]Gribben, "Deconstructing the Geneva Bible," 2.

[83]Paul Tillich's treatment of this theme is found in his *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951).

What is one to make of a relationship, that between Luther and Calvin, that was so close and yet so distant? R. Ward Holder raises this question in the introduction to his edited collection *Calvin and Luther: The Continuing Relationship*.[84] They represent two sides of the magisterial Reformation, that is, ongoing confessional antipathy. In speaking of Karl Barth, Holder writes, "Reformed and Lutheran faiths were foundationally and irreconcilably divergent."[85] The course of this volume will reveal lines of controversy opened up by a study of the eschatology of leading Reformation theologians.

Eschatology concerns what indeed is said or believed to happen in the last days, that is, what the universal cosmic narrative is and how it relates to a narrative of documented history. How is this tied to the afterlife, that is, what happens or is believed to happen to an individual after death? To what extent is this proclaimed personal expectation caught up in the larger picture of what happens to the church and the world, and to what extent is it individualized? All of this is often caught up in the concept of a church militant, a church expectant, and a church triumphant. What verses in Scripture might reflect these concerns? How do they appear in Luther, and how do any of his viewpoints appear in Calvin's work? How do they appear in the work of other leading commentators such as Bullinger, Junius, Pareus, and Brightman?[86] There are other eternal issues, such as eternal personal issues in an individual's life (sin, of course, but also growth, love, learning, and the shaping/narrative path of a lifetime) held up along the tensile continuum between the here-and-now and the eternal.

Luther's reform gave way to the rise of confessionalism throughout Europe and prompted similar confessionalisms among those adopting the term *reformed* as well as among the various groups identified as the "radicals of the Reformation" and then in the colonial diaspora of the regional European reform movements.[87] The biblical narrative discerned in Revelation provided the dominant lens for making sense of the times, and in this canon, recourse was frequently made to apocalyptic texts (Revelation, Daniel, 2 Thessalonians, the Johannine Epistles—and then, too, extracanonical material such as the medieval Joachite and other prophecies that characterized the early Greek and Latin traditions).

Event and interpretation come together in theology. Revelation was increasingly discerned as bearing theological foci for Christian doctrine. Theologically suspect at first, Revelation was increasingly understood to present a high Christology in opposition to antichrist. This Christology is seen in the Son of Man (Rev 1:9-18), the Lamb who opens the scroll (Rev 5:1-14), the child sequestered in the desert (Rev 12:5-7), the victorious Lamb (Rev 14:1-5), the wedding supper of the Lamb (Rev 19:9), the victorious rider on the white horse (Rev 19:11-16), the light of the heavenly

[84]R. Ward Holder, "Calvin and Luther: The Relationship That Still Echoes," in *Calvin and Luther: The Continuing Relationship*, ed. R. Ward Holder (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013), 7-12.

[85]Holder, "Calvin and Luther," 8.

[86]Carter Lindberg, *The Reformation Theologians: An Introduction to Theology in the Early Modern Period* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017).

[87]George H. Williams, *The Radical Reformation* (Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 1993); Carter Lindberg, *The European Reformations*, 2nd ed. (West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2004).

temple (Rev 21:22), and the root and offspring of David and bright morning star (Rev 22:16). Revelation was increasingly seen to be all about Christ.[88]

Having largely settled the issue of canonicity by midcentury, a host of issues become identified in the history of exegesis. These included characters and events associated with Christ's role in the midst of the churches, the seven seals, the identity of the Lamb, the martyrs under the throne, the antichrist, the dragon and the devil, the false prophet, the seven trumpets, the book to be eaten by John, the two witnesses, the woman clothed with the sun, the two beasts, the Lamb and the everlasting gospel, the destruction of Babylon, the seven bowls of wrath, the whore on the seven-headed beast, the fall of Babylon, the chaining and loosing of the serpent, the millennium, the new Jerusalem, the new heaven and the new earth, the first and second resurrection, rule of Christ, and the last judgment.

The nature of the millennium, the thousand-year rule of Christ and the church along with the binding of Satan, arose as a consuming theological theme driving politics. Subject to early Reformed debate, this theme became the focus of radical debate with Münster's Anabaptists, millenarians who insisted that Revelation described a utopian millenarian period that could be anticipated by revolutionary ferment (1534–1535). The writings of Antoine du Pinet are seen to represent the thought of Calvin's doctrine on the millennium (see Calvin's *Psychopannychia*, 1534) and context for the first edition (1536) of his seminal work, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1559).[89] Lutheran development took place around the three "solas" against an eschatology outlined by Flacius.[90]

The theological themes for Anglicanism at first were shaped by the Henrican and Elizabethan reforms and came to a head in the formation of an evolving Puritanism and its dissemination of the 1560 edition of the Geneva Bible project. Beginning in 1557 and carried into the seventeenth century, this project was intended to guard against an illicit reading of Revelation. In its definitive edition it carried the annotations of Francis Junius.[91] It taught a theme

> that was not explicated from *Revelation* 20, as in later postmillennialism and in the Münster theology, but found its roots in the annotations on *Romans* 11. These notes suggested that the elect Gentiles were to be called into the church for the duration of the time when the Jews had been blinded by God to the truths of Christianity, but that when the "fulnes of the Gentiles" had entered the church, grace would again be extended to the Jews and that their conversion *en masse* to Christian faith would encourage yet greater revival amongst the Gentiles. "The Jewes now remaine, as it were, in death for lacke of the Gospel: but when they & the Gentiles shal embrace Christ, ye world shalbe restored to a newe life" [Geneva Bible 1560, note on Rom 11:15]. Once adopted by [William] Perkins, this

[88]Frederick J. Murphy, *Fallen Is Babylon: The Revelation to John* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998).
[89]John T. McNeill, *The History and Character of Calvinism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 312.
[90]Elert, *Structure of Lutheranism*.
[91]Huguenot scholar Franciscus Junius, highly interested in apocalyptic thought, in 1589 published *Notae in Apocalypsim*, followed three years later with the longer *Exposition de l'Apocalypse* (1592). Both texts were translated into English, and the shorter work, now titled *Apocalypsis, a Brief and Learned Commentarie upon the Revelation of St. John* (1592), was adapted to become the marginal annotations on Revelation in the 1599 edition of the Geneva Bible, a fourth Genevan *Revelation*. This edition accounted for over half the Genevan Bibles printed, combining Thomson's New Testament with the new annotations on Revelation taken from the work of Junius.

> teaching would go on to influence the major puritan expositors throughout the evolution of the movement and remain a staple of mainstream protestant eschatology for ensuing centuries.[92]

A final theological theme to be raised at this point is that related to church and state, or national identity, a direct outgrowth over the struggle for the Geneva Bible and its acceptance.[93] Gribben calls the Geneva Bible the "flagship" of English reform. It was designed, he argues, "to counter one and a half thousand years of established commentary and argue that the Protestant exegesis was history's best" interpretative structure for understanding Revelation.[94] This becomes abundantly clear in the commentaries of Swiss Bullinger, French Reformed Junius, German Pareus, and English Brightman.

> It was vital for the Reformation project that this argument was enforced. . . . Within this overarching aim, Junius was forced into re-reading the Reformation's central document without drawing attention to his hermeneutical manoeuvring. Yes, Protestant readings were the best, but his Protestant reading was the best of all. It was highly ironic that Junius' ending was the fourth attempt to close the Geneva Bible.[95]

Although each of these four commentators demonstrates it differently, this view of the superiority of Protestant exegesis is clear once the Lamb breaks open the first seal (Rev 5:6) held by the one on the throne. Gribben writes,

> The first thing a reader would notice as he turned to Revelation [in the Geneva Bible] was a table of dates and historical events, describing itself as "The order of time whereunto the contents of this booke are to be referred." This table summarised the annotator's notes, and indicated Junius' attempt to provide a comprehensive explication of the text which was sensitive to Revelation's authorial context. It was an attempt at justification by history alone which would lead to a confusion of genres, investing futuristic speculation with the weight of proven fact. The similarity with [John] Foxe's method is immediately apparent, but despite their common historical project, the notes of the Geneva Bible offered a far more sophisticated and extensive reading of Revelation than did Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*. They also extended into the future in a way that Foxe never imagined.[96]

Gribben continues concerning the interpretation of Revelation in the Geneva Bible:

> Perhaps the most obvious difference between Foxe and Junius was their dating of the millennium. Both writers agreed that it was to be applied to the past, but while Foxe situated it as a period of initial glory which began with the accession of the archetypal "Christian emperor" Constantine in AD 324, Junius placed the binding of Satan as a period of martyrdom which began with the Roman sacking of Jerusalem in AD 70. This alternative explication was bound up with the competing political ideologies of the Genevan texts. Reflecting Puritan frustration at the continuation of the

[92]Crawford Gribben, *The Puritan Millennium: Literature and Theology, 1550–1682*, rev. ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008), 74, italics original. See Avihu Zakai, "From Judgment to Salvation: The Image of the Jews in the English Renaissance," *Westminster Theological Journal* 59 (1997): 213-30.
[93]Lewis Lupton, *History of the Geneva Bible* (London: Fauconberg, 1966), 157-83.
[94]Gribben, "Deconstructing the Geneva Bible," 6-7.
[95]Gribben, "Deconstructing the Geneva Bible," 7.
[96]Gribben, "Deconstructing the Geneva Bible," 7.

via media ecclesiologies throughout the three kingdoms, Junius was much less interested than Foxe in the theology of a "godly prince" who would promote reform.[97]

The theological theme of church and nation becomes clear as one moves into and through the seventeenth century.[98] In the case of Britain, it was played out in the English Civil War (1642–1651). So also on the Continent in the Dutch and Spanish wars, in conflict in France, and in the German principalities and Habsburg Empire. Nation and church remained contentious on both sides of the Atlantic.[99]

3. Interpretive issues. The content of Revelation is of great interest today. Such was also the case in the sixteenth century. In her *Reformation Readings of the Apocalypse*, Backus goes to the roots of the conflict over interpretation as she examines selected commentaries in Geneva, Zurich, and Wittenberg, three centers of Continental Protestantism.[100] She focuses on these select commentaries written between the 1520s and 1580s, with two main goals: (1) to consider various views of Revelation's status via commentators' differing methods of interpretation to illustrate the place of the text "in the religious and cultural context of the Reformation"; and (2) "to examine whether there was a single Protestant approach to the Apocalypse or whether varying social, linguistic and political conditions determined the way different writers read the text."[101]

In Backus's detailed analysis, she reflects on three distinct confessional orientations in the interpretation of Revelation in the first half of the century. First, there are the Genevan commentators, particularly Antoine du Pinet, Augustan Marlorat, and Nicholas Colladon.[102] These "combined a restrained and traditional form of exegesis with strong polemics against the papal Antichrist. The main concern reflected in their commentaries was . . . the battle for converts in France."[103]

Second, there are the Zurich commentators, scholar-prophets such as Leo Jud, Theodore Bibliander, and Bullinger.[104] These "took a far more historical, less spiritualized approach to the book.

[97]Gribben, "Deconstructing the Geneva Bible," 8.

[98]Christopher Hill, *The Century of Revolution: 1603–1714 (London: Routledge, 1961)*; Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution* (repr., New York: Penguin, 2020); Hill, *Antichrist in Seventeenth-Century England* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 3-4.

[99]Lindberg, *European Reformations*.

[100]Backus, *Reformation Readings*.

[101]Backus, *Reformation Readings*, xix.

[102]On Antoine du Pinet, see Backus, *Reformation Readings*, 37-59 and throughout. Du Pinet was considered Calvin's mouthpiece on the Revelation. Backus allows for du Pinet's use of François Lambert and Sebastian Meyer. Of Marlorat she writes, "Marlorat was not the first Protestant theologian to see that the object of the Apocalypse was to provide an answer to the problem of how to cope with the present in view of Christ's first (past) and (future) Second Coming and his intervening presence 'elsewhere.' He was, however, the first Protestant theologian to formulate the problem succinctly and to see that the Apocalypse of John provided a better solution to it than any other biblical book" (29).

[103]Robin B. Barnes, "Review: *Varieties of Apocalyptic Experience in Reformation Europe*," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 33, no. 2 (Autumn 2002): 266.

[104]Backus writes of Jud, "In 1542, Leo Jud published his German translation of Erasmus' *Paraphrases* on the New Testament. As Erasmus had left out the Apocalypse, Jud simply added his own Paraphrases of it in German" (*Reformation Readings*, 29-30). Of Bibliander she says, "Although Bibliander was the only one of the Zürich commentators to undertake a systematic defense of the book's canonicity, all three [Jud, Bibliander, and Bullinger] assumed that the text was a revelation divinely conferred on the apostle John and as such automatically part of the canon" (30). On Bullinger, see Herman Selderhuis, "Kirche unter dem Kreuz: die Ekklesiologie Heinrich Bullinger," in *Heinrich Bullinger (1504–1575): Leben, Denken, Wirkung. Internationaler Bullingerkongress 2004*, ed. Emidio Campi and Peter Opitz (Zurich: Theologische Verlag Zurich, 2007), 513-36.

Their orientation was not fundamentally eschatological. Rather, they tended to stress the use of Revelation for daily ethical and pastoral purposes."[105] Preeminently, this applied to Bullinger's commentary, which consisted of 101 sermons on Revelation preached in the German vernacular as well as in Latin, widely translated and publicized across all of Europe.[106] None of the Geneva or Zurich commentators interpreted Revelation in such a way as to find it unique to their day, except for what it revealed about the Roman (papal) antichrist.[107]

Third are the Lutherans, commentators such as David Chytraeus and Nicholas Selnecker. For them Revelation was

> a prophetic mirror for their own times, the last times of the world. Following Luther, they saw the Reformation itself as a final burst of the gospel truth preceding the Last Judgment, but they shared none of the early Luther's reservations about the clarity or value of the Apocalypse. They were heirs of the later Luther, who had come to see the book as a summary of God's plan for the world.[108]

They saw this history as played out in history in the *Magdeburg Centuries*."The Lutherans brought a more strongly apocalyptic orientation to their readings of Revelation than did other mainline Protestants."[109] These latter kept social radicalism, seen among select groups of Anabaptists, spiritualists, and evangelical rationalists, tethered to the political control of the magistrate. But for Lutherans—including Selnecker, who viewed Luther as a final Elijah—and their more radical brethren, the present age was a time of transcendent crisis.[110] From the last third of the sixteenth century and into the seventeenth century, the hesitancy about the canonicity of Revelation diminished. The issues that animated the intellectual struggle embedded in Revelation shifted from the study of Scripture to the study of history.[111]

Special note must be made in this volume of four interpreters of Revelation, each with his own unique contribution: Bullinger, Junius, Pareus, and Brightman.

1. Scholars and pastors drew on Bullinger's work throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. I have already noted his academic, pastoral, and civic contributions.

2. Junius produced a commentary on Revelation in 1592. His apocalyptic annotations were used in the notes of the Geneva Bible.

3. Pareus was aware that the intellectual struggle against the papacy had shifted from the study of Scripture to the study of history. History drew attention to questions such as why so many millions had consented to papal leadership. Pareus produced 237 theses for the *Reformationsjubileum*, which attempted to answer these questions. The historical problems presented by the

[105]Barnes, "Review: *Varieties of Apocalyptic Experience*," 266.
[106]See the preface to Bullinger's *Hundred Sermons*; also J. Wayne Baker, *Heinrich Bullinger and the Covenant: The Other Reformed Tradition* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1980), xi-xxvi.
[107]Backus, *Reformation Readings*, 137.
[108]Barnes, "Review: *Varieties of Apocalyptic Experience*," 266-67.
[109]Barnes, "Review: *Varieties of Apocalyptic Experience*," 267.
[110]Robert Kolb, Irene Dingel, and Ľubomir Batka, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Martin Luther's Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014). Selnecker states that Melanchthon referred to Luther as father, preceptor, and the Elijah of the last times (530).
[111]Daniel John Toft, "Shadows of Kings: The Political Thought of David Pareus, 1548–1622" (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin, 1970), 96.

papacy increasingly occupied Pareus's mind. History could not stand alone in the explanation of these problems, of course, but "history in the light of Scripture and experience" would exonerate and justify the Reformation.[112] In turning to history in the light of Scripture, Pareus made use of Old Testament prophecy, but above all his attention turned to Revelation. In 1618 his commentary on Revelation appeared, an astonishing document that linked the right of political resistance to papal depredations and intervention into the political sphere, an intervention that had taken place in Carolingian times and continued to the present to the corruption of the world.

This recourse to history for legitimation of the Reformation raised not only the question of the lineage or precursors to Luther's doctrine of grace, seen in Flacius's efforts, but also the question of where Protestantism was headed. Pareus put forward the idea of an ecumenical and perpetual reform envisioned in the millennium first expressed by Augustine. This amillennial vision had been suggested by Augustine in opposition to early church premillennialism, but these historical projects were now challenged at the end of the sixteenth century by the emergence of postmillennialism, seen in the work of Brightman and Alsted.[113]

4. Brightman was a leading commentator on Revelation.[114] His commentary was published posthumously and proved to be an important revision of the interpretation of eschatology set down by John Foxe. His work weakened the imperial associations to the Emperor Constantine I, condemning the Church of England as "Laodicean" (lukewarm), and helped to move English Puritanism in favor of the urgency of church reform as perceived in Revelation.[115]

In the sixteenth century, issues of interpretation of Revelation were overlapping but generally moved from the question of canonicity to issues of confessionalism, then historical legitimacy, and on to the direction of historical progression or the political embodiment of the new heavens and new earth. If we were to reach into the seventeenth century and the English civil wars, the issue of postmillennialism would be embodied in such questions as how King Jesus rules, raising issues such as "the First Resurrection (whether spiritual, corporeal, or political); the nature of the millennium (whether inchoate or perfect); Christ's appearance (whether invisible or corporeal); and the nature of Satan's binding (partial, spiritual, or literal)—in short, whether the millennium is part of the Church Militant or of the Church Triumphant," or merely that of the church expectant.[116]

[112]Daniel John Toft, "Shadows of Kings: The Political Thought of David Pareus, 1548–1622" (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin, 1970), 96.

[113]Reiner Smolinski, "Caveat Emptor: Pre- and Postmillennialism in the Late Reformation Period," in *Millenarianism and Messianism in Early Modern European Culture: The Millenarian Turn*, ed. J. E. Force and R. H. Popkin (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 2001), 145-69; see also Howard Hotson, *Paradise Postponed: Johann Heinrich Alsted and the Birth of Calvinist Millenarianism* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 2000).

[114]A. Crome, "Appendix: A Comparison of Editions of Brightman's Revelation of the Revelation," in *The Restoration of the Jews: Early Modern Hermeneutics, Eschatology, and National Identity in the Works of Thomas Brightman* (Dordrecht: Springer International, 2014), 213.

[115]Avihu Zakai, "Thomas Brightman and English Apocalyptic Tradition," in *Menasseh ben Israel and His World*, ed. Yosef Kaplan, Henry Méchoulan, and Richard H. Popkin (Leiden: Brill Academic, 1989), 31-44. See also William Lamont, *Godly Rule, Politics and Religion 1603–1660* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1969).

[116]Smolinski, "Caveat Emptor," 146.

4. Historical reception of Revelation by radicals of the Reformation, Lutherans, the Reformed, and English Reformers. In the first and second generations of the Reformers, most either condemned Revelation (Zwingli, Luther) or ignored it (Melanchthon, Bucer, Calvin). Among Anabaptists it was seen to be of immediate value. For those who were considered magisterial Reformers, "only Bullinger attempted to make it suitable reading for the faithful, no doubt due partly to his encounter with the English refugees whose enthusiasm for the book is well known."[117] By the latter third of the century, it was widely accepted for the light it shed on political revolutions on the Continent and in Britain.

Concerning the Lutheran and Reformed reception of Revelation, Luther was at first more uneasy with Revelation than with other apocalyptic or prophetic texts of the Christian Bible. Only later did he come to accept it as apostolic, despite the apparent congruence of prophetic and doctrinal arguments based on it. Daniel's prophecies had the seer's own interpretation; the description of antichrist in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4—which suggested to Luther certain medieval church developments—was Pauline.[118] But Luther, reading other writings on Revelation and other works critical of the papacy, gradually grew more confident in his use of the apocalyptic text.[119] With the growth of the Turkish threat, heresies, sects, and contemporary unbelief, Revelation's images clearly signaled the end of the age. Luther thus left a trail of his developing perspective on the apocalyptic vision from the crucial early years of his work to the end of his life. He subdivided known history into three periods, each with a witness and a mission, and he came to believe he was living at the end of the time of the third witness. For him, Enoch affirmed hope for the righteous of the first historic era. Elijah witnessed to the rewards intended for those who kept the Mosaic law in the second period.[120] And, with Christ as its witness, current history appeared to participate in the third and final world, with the gospel as a last word and promise that the life lost in paradise would be restored.

Special prophetic missions were not alone in Luther's thinking. Early in his work Luther had adopted a prevailing interpretation of the four world kingdoms envisioned by Daniel. In this view the fall of the last kingdom, Rome, would coincide with the end of the world.[121] In Luther's mind Revelation came to prefigure the chief eras of church history.[122] He concluded that the seals

[117]Backus, *Reformation Readings*, 35.

[118]Luther was easily drawn to the book of Daniel in the development of his historical perspective. "Vorrede vber den Propheten Daniel," in WA, DB 11:2.13.

[119]On works critical of the papacy, see, e.g., a document describing the vision of Nicolaus von der Fluhe and a collection of prophecies by astrologer Johann Lichtenberger in G. F. Hall, "Luther's Eschatology," *Augustana Quarterly* 25 (1944): 13-21. Concerning Revelation specifically, Luther read the commentary by John Purvey (ca. 1390), published under the title *Commentarius in Apocalypsin ante centum annos editus 1528* (cf. WA 26:123).

[120]His thinking about the name of Elijah begins at least with the completion of his treatise to the German nobility. See: WA, Br 2:167.7-8; a similar reference is found in a letter from Wartburg, dated May 26, 1521, in which Luther writes that he is only an Elijah in comparison with Melanchthon, his Elisha (WA, Br 2:348.49-50).

[121]The little horn arising on the head of the fourth beast is usually identified by Luther with the Turk, God's scourge on Christendom for its sin, which will in its own time be judged and fall (Ezek 39). See John M. Headley, *Luther's View of Church History (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1963)*, 228.

[122]There is a somewhat fuller sense of identification between prophecy and event in the later preface of 1546 compared with the earlier one of 1530 (WA, DB, 7:407, 409, 411, 413, 415, 417, 419, 421); see Headley, *Luther's View of Church History*, 106-56.

represented physical or political evils; the trumpets suggested the spiritual evils the church suffered from the early Christian era to the present. The first four trumpeting angels represented works-righteousness (Tatian), enthusiasm (Marcion), philosophy (Origen), and the quest for unwarranted purity (Novatian).[123] The three woes that beset the church were the teachings of Arius (Rev 9:1-12), the political threat of the Turks (Rev 9:13–11:14), and the papacy (Rev 11:15-19), particularly as the latter's secular hegemony grew.[124] This pattern in declension in the era of Christ's first advent paralleled that of previous historical eras, which had ended with the flood and the advent of Christ. History ended with acts of God's judgment, which was merciful even in its severity.[125]

Like Luther, the Reformed worked from an Augustinian paradigm of history. History was seen to be reflected in the duality of Augustine's *De civitate Dei*. But Calvin's reforming work was shaped differently from that of Luther. Written to explain the evangelical faith and defend the reform movement from charges of social sedition and religious radicalism after the debacle of Münster (1535–1536), the *Institutes* set forth Calvin's own ideas about church order, scriptural exegesis, and how to bring humanity into God's own realm.[126] His emphasis on sanctification and bringing all under the rule of Christ included a strong sense of history, which he perceived as a process in which God's purposes were progressively realized.

Like Luther, Calvin openly criticized Thomas Müntzer, Melchior Hoffman, and Nicholas Storch, who inspired dissent in the French Protestant congregation of refugees at Strasbourg, which he pastored during his exile from Geneva (1539–1541).[127] These individuals enthusiastically anticipated Christ's imminent second coming and stirred up hope for such among others. Calvin clearly distinguished between God's old and new dispensations of faith but strongly denied chiliasm.[128] He sought no new revelations or prophecies; willing even to see in Luther's work a parallel to Elijah, Calvin was yet unwilling to refer to Luther as "the Last Elijah."[129] He did not hope to rehabilitate an office of prophecy in any charismatic sense of the word. Word and Spirit were bonded together for Calvin: both pointed to Christ, and both were best understood by seeing Christ as the final prophet (Deut 18:18; Mk 6:15; Jn 6:14) while emphasizing personal sanctification and social justice.[130]

[123]WA, DB, 7:410.18-412.2; 411.26–413.2.

[124]WA, DB, 7:412.10-35, 413.10–415.2. See Friedrich Myconius to Martin Luther, December 2, 1529, WA, Br 5:191.29-37.

[125]Elert, *Structure of Lutheranism*, 485.

[126]I follow Willem Balke, *Calvin and the Anabaptist Radicals*, trans. William Heynen (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1981): 39-71; see also Walter Kohler, "Das Taufertum in Calvins *Institutio* von 1536," *Mennonitische Geschichtsblatter* 2 (1936): 1-4.

[127]CO 9:96. Calvin refers to these three self-proclaimed prophets as Thomas Monetarius, Melchior Pellionius, and Nicholas Pelagius, phrases written in defense of the Reformed position against Joachim Westphal's charges that the Reformed were one with the radicals (see Balke, *Calvin and the Anabaptist Radicals*, 297). On Hoffman, see Klaus Deppermann, *Melchior Hoffman: Sociale Unruhen und apokalyptische Visionen im Zeitalter der Reformation* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979), 331-32.

[128]*Institutes* 1.9.1. Most of the 1539 edition was carried into the 1559 edition (see Balke, *Calvin and the Anabaptist Radicals*, 98-115, 299). On Calvin's sense of eschatology and history, see Heinrich Berger, *Calvins Geschictsauffassung* (Zürich: Zwingli, 1955), 153-54; David E. Holwerda, "Eschatology and History: A Look at Calvin's Eschatological Vision," in *Exploring the Heritage of John Calvin: Essays in Honor of John Bratt*, ed. D. E. Holwerda (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1976), 111-13, 125-27.

[129]CO 9:238. I owe this reference to Brian A. Gerrish, *The Old Protestantism and the New* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 45, 289.

[130]*Institutes* 4.1.5-6, sections on education in the church and the meaning and limits of ministry.

Like Luther, then, Calvin saw the radicals as theologically and pastorally problematic. His interactions with them and their followers may even have led to what Heinrich Quistorp calls his "aversion to the Apocalypse."[131] Also like Luther, Revelation stayed in Calvin's canon. He occasionally cited it, saying in the *Institutes*, "Those for whom prophetic doctrine is tasteless ought to be thought of as lacking taste buds."[132] But Calvin also tended toward a typological approach to his exegetical work, especially seeking images and symbols in the Hebrew Scriptures by which to understand the prophetic passages in Revelation. Luther's approach was more Christocentric and literalistic. For example, rather than finding prophetic figures such as Enoch and Elijah, whose return was to be expected at the end of history, Calvin understands them to be models of the meaning and limits of the ministry of the church. Writing of a second Elijah, Calvin notes, "The task of the second Elijah was, according to Malachi, to enlighten the minds and 'to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the unbelievers to the wisdom of the just.'"[133] After this remark he continues to discuss the work of the minister and the nature of the church, issues that were vital to him in the fight against the spirit of antichrist in Rome and the excesses of the Anabaptists.[134] Arguing, as Thomas Aquinas had done in the thirteenth century, against the Joachites, Calvin posited no new age of the Spirit. Rather than looking for new prophets who were to come heralding new eras and prophesying future events, Calvin writes, "But for my part, as doctrine is the present subject, I would rather explain it [prophecy], as in I Cor. 14, to mean outstanding interpreters of prophecies, who, by a unique gift of revelation, applied them to the subjects on hand; but I do not exclude the gift of foretelling, so far as it was connected with teaching."[135]

Teaching became the accepted form of prophecy at the Academy of Geneva and in weekly meetings of pastors and laity for prayer and Scripture study.[136] Charismatic foretelling was rare, generally seen as having been limited to the apostolic age. The church in Calvin's time had Christ; its prophets were forth-tellers of this highest gift. Special prophets and latter-day prophecies were not needed.[137]

Without denying God's direction in final temporal events, Calvin's references to last things emphasized God's judgments in time. But in reading prophetic texts Calvin developed an

[131]Heinrich Quistorp, *Die letzten Dinge im Zeugnis Calvins* (Güttersloh: Bertelsmann, 1941), 116. In addition to an Erasmian doubt, Calvin's aversion to Revelation was occasioned by what he felt was its misuse by the radicals of the Reformation. See Otto Weber, "Calvins Lehre von der Kirche," in *Die Treue Gottes in der Geschichte der Kirche*, vol. 2, *Gesammelte Aufsätze* (Neukirchen: Neukirchen Verlag des Erziehungsvereigns, 1968), 103.

[132]*Institutes* 1.7.2 (Battles-McNeill ed., 83).

[133]*Institutes* 4.6.1 (Battles-McNeill ed., 35).

[134]*Institutes* 4.2.12.–4.3.1; see T. H. L. Parker, *John Calvin: A Biography* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975), 35.

[135]Calvin's discussion of the development of the spirit of antichrist is located in *Institutes* 4.7.4-25.

[136]Denis notes that, for the sake of purity and agreement in doctrine, Calvin organized weekly "Conferences de l'Ecriture" (also called *Congrégation*) as part of his *Ecclesiastical Ordinances*. Through such meetings, it was hoped that all the prophets of the city would speak with one voice in order to expose error and seek agreement around the proper interpretation of Scripture (Philippe Denis, "La Prophétie dans las églises de la Réforme au XVIe siècle," RHE, 72 [1977]: 289-316 [299]).

[137]Peter Martyr Vermigli, a Florentine reformer at Zurich, Basel, and then Strasbourg, cited in evidence the growing numbers of books and numerous teachers of his time. He noted that there was no need for special prophets since books and teachers were by then so numerous (*Loci communes* 1.19). See Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communication and Cultural Transformations in Early-Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

exegetical methodology relating biblical promises to patterns of fulfillment. In Calvin's technical interpretation, the Hebrew Scriptures' promises found fulfillment in the Christian New Testament and the establishment of Christ's dominion, beginning with the first advent. Since then a tension intensified in God's dominion between promise and fulfillment. Richard Müller, using the term *kerygmatic analogy*, illustrates the way in which Calvin developed the idea of an extended meaning of the text, permitting its literal reading while finding—often through preaching—a contemporary application or meaning of the text. The logic or dynamism of the text might thus carry the gathered assembly into an unanticipated future meaning.[138]

By applying the logic of this exegetical method with what many view as optimism about the prospects for human betterment or analogy with the growth of Christ's kingdom, many see Calvin as contributing to the idea of progress in human history, a kind of historical meliorism wherever the gospel is heard and appropriated.[139] This exegetical integrity gave an inner logic to the idea of the kingdom of God in Martin Bucer's theology, an idea that impressed Calvin during his sojourn in Strasbourg.[140] Calvin's meliorism contributed to an enduring, if less apocalyptic, interest in the nature of Christ's kingdom among the Reformed. A proleptic sharing in Christ's resurrection and session in glory might be seen to work its way backwards to present times insofar as one believed that the present times stood in the shadow of the end of history.

Like Calvin, other later Reformed theologians located special prophets and prophecy in Christ alone as the last prophet. His ministers were to herald Christ's name against the antichrist. Thus, the vexed question between those who believed the gift of the charismata for prophecy was given to the whole congregation of believers (1 Cor 14:26-32) or alone to those duly trained and approved (1 Tim 2:2) was demonstrably one of Christ-centered piety and not Spirit-led ecstasy. As the apocalyptic texts were reading this context, a number of implications became clear that ensured their longevity and contributed to a new form of chiliasm that looked not to a new age following the second advent of Christ but rather to an age of increasing spiritual—and, often derivatively, material—improvement prior to Christ's return for his bride, the church, which has made itself ready for his return (Rev 19:7).

[138]Jaroslav Pelikan notes a parenetical and polemical use of Revelation in Luther and Calvin. In terms of the former, he sketches the importance of Rev 14:13. For views on the death and afterlife of the individual believer and on Rev 1:6 on the social life of the Christian, see Pelikan, "Some Uses of Apocalypse in the Magisterial Reformers," in *The Apocalypse in English Renaissance Thought and Literature, ed.* C. A. Patrides and Joseph Wittreich (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984), 74-92.

[139]Richard A. Müller, "The Hermeneutic of Promise and Fulfillment in Calvin's Exegesis of the Old Testament Prophecies of the Kingdom," in *The Bible in the Sixteenth Century*, ed. David Steinmetz (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990), 68-82, esp. 71-76.

[140]Quistorp, *Die letzten Dinge*, 113.

COMMENTARY ON REVELATION

1:1-3 THE TITLE

1 The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants[a] the things that must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, 2 who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. 3 Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.

a For the contextual rendering of the Greek word *doulos*, see Preface; likewise for *servant* later in this verse

Overview: Reading the book of Revelation in the sixteenth century begins with awareness of two matters. First is what Renaissance historian Paul Oskar Kristeller refers to as "sacred philology," a common effort on the part of the Renaissance and Reformation to find the scholarly renovation or grounding for "the Reformation of the Bible," which reveals "the Bible of the Reformation."[1] Second is the text's proclamation of a clear Christology. This appears in the growing clarity on the part of the four primary parties to the Reformation—Lutherans, Reformed, radicals, and Anglicans (and reform-minded Catholics)—that the text of the Apocalypse was all about Jesus Christ. Particular ways of reading the Bible enabled the Reformers to draw out Christ from the text and gain an understanding of its overlapping visions.[2]

Revelation begins with the acknowledgment that it is a revelation God gave to Jesus Christ to be given by his angel by way of John to his servants. Christ is the author of the revelation given by God, while John is merely the recipient. Lack of clarity as to the identity of this John, whether he was also the author of the Gospel and Johannine Epistles, was one reason for hesitancy on the part of the early church to adopt Revelation into the canon. Certain doubts about the book's authenticity were shared by conservative Roman theologians. Textual issues, such as the nature of the Trinity or the identities of the key figures of the text, creating ambiguities requiring insight from the Old Testament, led Martin Luther to allow each to make up their own mind, while he himself chose to avoid the book.

The appeal of Revelation for the Reformers was the clarity it was thought to bring to the identity of the antichrist. While this was generally true among all Reformers, it was particularly the case among the French Reformed, such as Antoine Du Pinet, who ventured where John Calvin was reluctant to go. Yet, clear in their affirmation of the book's Christology, they were fearful of the radical social unrest it seemed to elicit.

[1] Paul Oskar Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought: The Classic, Scholastic, and Humanist Strains* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1961), 79; cited by Jaroslav Pelikan in *The Reformation of the Bible: The Bible of the Reformation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996), 3.
[2] Jean-Pierre Prévost, *How to Read the Apocalypse* (New York: Crossroad, 1993).

1:1 *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*

The Title of the Book. Giovanni Diodati: This book has the title *Apocalypse*, a Greek word that means "Revelation," because the whole subject of it is of prophetic revelations, by which to St. John, and by him to all the church, have been revealed the chief events after Christ's first coming in the flesh to his last coming to judgment. . . . Now, as among these prophecies there are some so clear by the event that one cannot be doubtful or ignorant of them except through a willful blindness, so there are others that are yet under God's secret seal, the explication of which is as uncertain as the undertaking to give it, that is, it is rash. Therefore, adoring what as yet lies hidden and meditating on what is manifest, the church has a great deal of instruction and comfort in this book, looking for the full accomplishing that shall bring to light all the obscurities. Pious Annotations upon the Holy Bible.[3]

Interpreting Prophecy. Martin Luther: So long as this kind of prophecy remains without explanation . . . since it is intended as a revelation of things that are to happen in the future, and especially of tribulations and disasters that were to come upon Christendom, we consider that the first and surest step toward finding its interpretation is to take from history the events and disasters that have come upon Christendom till now, and hold them up alongside one of these images, and so compare them very carefully. If, then, the two were perfectly coincided and squared with one another, we could build on that as a sure, or at least an unobjectionable, interpretation. Preface to the Revelation of Saint John.[4]

Which John? Desiderius Erasmus: But in these so mysterious conversations with the angels, as many places as I can inculcate, "I John" was not the title of John the Evangelist but of John's theology in the Greek manuscripts which I saw, so as not to mention a style that is not a little different from the one in the Gospel and the Epistle. For it is not of great business to refute the arguments concerning the places which some are falsely accused, as smelling of the dogmas of some heretics. These things, however, made me somewhat less inclined to believe that it was the evangelist of John unless the consent of the world would call me elsewhere, and the principal authority of the church, if, however, the church approves of this work with the intention that it may wish to be regarded as John the Evangelist and be of equal weight with other canonical books. Annotations on the New Testament.[5]

A Highly Necessary Book. John Bale: So highly necessary (good Christian reader) is the knowledge of St. John's Apocalypse or Revelation . . . to one who is a true member of Christ's church, as much as of any other book of the sacred Bible. For in none of them all are the faithful diligent hearers and readers more blessed or livelier . . . observing its contents than in this one book. Nowhere is it more clearly specified the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit to be one everlasting God, and Jesus Christ to be the eternal son of the Father (which are the first and chief grounds of our Christian faith), than here. Nowhere is the durable kingdom and priesthood of Jesus Christ more plenteously spread, more plainly proved and more largely uttered than in this holy oracle. Nowhere is the doctrine of health more purely taught, faith more thoroughly commended, nor yet righteousness more highly rewarded than here. Nowhere are heresies more earnestly condemned, blasphemous vices more vehemently rebuked, nor yet their just plagues more fiercely threatened than in this compendious work. The Image of Both Churches.[6]

Concerning the Order and Connection of the Visions. Joseph Mede: The Apocalypse

[3]Diodati, *Pious Annotations**, 98-99.
[4]LW 35:399-401.
[5]Erasmus, *Annotations*, 782.
[6]Bale, *Image** (1570), preface.

considered only according to the naked letter, as if it were a history and not prophecy, has marks and signs sufficient inserted by the Holy Spirit, whereby the order, synchronism, and sequel of all the visions in it contained may be found out and demonstrated without supposal of any interpretation whatsoever. This order and synchronism thus found and demonstrated (as it were) by *argumenta intrinseca* is the first thing to be done and laid down as a foundation, ground, and only safe rule of interpretation. Interpretation is not to be made the ground and rule of it. If the order, method, and connection of the visions are framed and grounded on supposed interpretation, then all proofs out of that book must be founded on begged principles and human conjectures. But, on the contrary, if the order is first fixed and settled out of the unquestioned characters of the letter of the text, and afterward the interpretation guided, framed, and directed by that order—then will the variety of expositions be drawn into a very narrow compass, and proofs taken from this book be evident, infallible, and able to convince the gainsayers. Remains on Some Passages in the Apocalypse.[7]

Angels Refer to Bishops. Martin Luther: Accordingly, we hold—as indeed the text says—that the first three chapters, which speak of the seven congregations in Asia and their angels, have no other purpose than simply to show how these congregations stood at the time, and how they are exhorted to be steadfast and increase or reform. From these chapters we learn in addition that the word "angel" is to be understood later, in other images or visions, to mean bishops and teachers in Christendom—some good, such as the holy fathers and bishops, some bad, such as the heretics and false bishops. And in this book, there are more of the bad than of the good. Preface to the Revelation of Saint John.[8]

Sent by an Angel. Heinrich Bullinger: Moreover, the manner of revealing is also touched on. For Christ revealed those things sending by his angel, or his angel sent forth, to whom he gave in commandment what he should say and do. As a result, this angel is after also called Christ because he represented the person of Christ. Therefore, not the angel in this book but Christ must always be considered the true Author of all these things. And indeed, the divinity of Christ is here commended unto us, . . . that Christ is the Lord of angels. Hundred Sermons on the Apocalypse.[9]

1:2 *The Testimony of John*

Free to Believe What One Wills. Martin Luther: About this book of the Revelation of John, I leave everyone free to hold his own opinions. I would not have anyone bound to my opinion or judgment. I say what I feel. I miss more than one thing in this book, and it makes me consider it to be neither apostolic nor prophetic. First and foremost, the apostles do not deal with visions, but prophesy in clear and plain words, as do Peter and Paul, and Christ in the gospel. For it befits the apostolic office to speak clearly of Christ and his deeds, without images and visions. Moreover, there is no prophet in the Old Testament, to say nothing of the New, who deals so exclusively with visions and images. . . . But to teach Christ, this is the thing which an apostle is bound above all else to do; as Christ says in Acts 1, "You shall be my witnesses." Therefore, I stick to the books which present Christ to me clearly and purely. Preface to the Revelation of Saint John.[10]

John's Purpose. Ulrich Zwingli: This John sought to paint the salvation of Christ, his teaching, which God opened for us through him, the calling of all Jews and heathen, the glory and honor of Christ, the joy of all the saints, several punishments and signs which God is about to send us, in

[7]Mede, *Works** (1672), 581.
[8]LW 35:401.
[9]Bullinger, *Hundred Sermons** (1561), 15-16.
[10]LW 35:398-99; citing Acts 1:8.

obscure words. Defense of the Reformed Faith.[11]

John's Name Renowned. Antoine Du Pinet: To which all the doctors are so conformable [to the name of John] that all of them with one mouth attribute to it . And even the consent of the church, both Greek and Latin, is there: given that certain lessons of this book were ordinary in the service of the church, under the name of Saint John. . . . Wherefore it seems that the Holy Spirit, in order to give authority to this prophethood, willed that the apostle should take care oftentimes to be named in it. Exposition on the Apocalypse of Saint John [12]

1:3 *The Time Is Near*

Christ Is the Fulfillment of Time. Pilgram Marpeck: In him virtue, such as the power of love, is completed and revealed before time, in the time of his flesh, as well as after this time to eternity. As this is declared and witnessed to in that manner before the Father, so the Father will fully glorify the Son in the fulfillment of time in all of Christ's elect, and they will be as he is and he as his own in God and God in them eternally. It is not as though he had just become love, but this shows he is from eternity. Thus, the incarnate Word is God and man, man and God, two natures, one God, and also two natures, one man, the beginning of time, the center, and end of all things, A and O. For his sake are all things. He is the breaking in of time out of eternity and into eternity. Concerning the Love of God in Christ.[13]

The Nearness of the End. Thomas Müntzer: Now is the time of antichrist, as Matthew 24 most clearly manifests. When the Lord says that the gospel must be proclaimed in the whole world, then the abomination of desolation will be seen. But the reprobate are not going to believe just as they clung to a straw in the days of Noah. All those who say that the pope is the superior antichrist err. Indeed, he is his true herald. But the fourth beast will rule the whole world and its reign will be greater than all. Indeed, the persecution of Christians is already in the public places, and I don't know why you think it is the favor of your princes, for if you do you will behold your own destruction. Letter to Nikolaus Hausmann.[14]

Last Times Are Shortly Come to Pass. David Pareus: This notes the subject of the book, which does not contain a history of things already past but things to come afterward, both to the church and its enemies. They must come to pass not by a fatal or absolute necessity but hypothetically or supposedly. According to the apostle, scandals and heresies must come. . . . But how shortly? Seeing as, after so many ages, they are not as yet come to pass and are for the most part to be fully accomplished near the very last times, which is distant from the time this was revealed, more than fifteen hundred years, some extend this to the whole time of the New Testament, which, though it were to continue more than one thousand years yet is called short, both in regard to the age of the world then already past as also in regard to eternity, in which shall be neither shortness nor length of time. A Commentary upon the Divine Revelation.[15]

A Prophecy About Calamities in the Church. David Chytraeus: Finally, the whole book of the Apocalypse is such a prophecy about the confusion and corruption of doctrine and other calamities that will follow in the church of Christ. This did not happen by accident, by chance, but by God the Father and the Lamb and our Redeemer

[11]Zwingli, *Defense of the Reformed Faith*, 1:166.
[12]Du Pinet, *Exposition* (1545), aiv.
[13]Marpeck, *Writings*, 535.
[14]Müntzer, *Schriften und Briefe*, 381, lines 22-24. See Ozment, *Mysticism and Dissent*, 71.
[15]Pareus, *Revelation**, 4.

and our Lord Jesus Christ. By a most wise counsel and just judgment, he had sat down to rule and govern all that happens in the church, good and bad. Explication of the Apocalypse of Saint John.[16]

Testament Means Covenant. Heinrich Bullinger: For *Testament*, which also is the title for all of Scripture, surely stands for the content of all Scripture. This is not to be wondered at as something recent and devoid of meaning. For by the word *Testament*, we understand the covenant and the agreement by which God agreed with the entire human race to be himself our God, our sufficiency, source of good, and horn of plenty. And this he would abundantly prove by the gift of the fertile earth and the incarnation of his son. People, however, ought to pursue integrity, that they may stand before God with a perfect and upright mind, that they may walk in his ways and commit themselves totally to him as to the highest God and most loving Father. The Prophetic Office.[17]

[16]Chytraeus, *Explicatio Apocalypsis Johannis apostoli**, B5r-v.

[17]Bullinger, *De prophetae officio**, Aivv-Avr03.