
A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

the Hindu, freed from the depressing weight of social disabilities, more gentle, religious, subtle of brain and deft of finger, and more faithful to the obligations of his family and his clan; the Moslem, freed from the debased and debasing theories that made him a coward and a tyrant at home, more valiant and loyal abroad than ever. Not to subvert, but to restore, and to build anew on immovable foundations of Christian principle the ideals which are truly ideals in every nation, the Gospel works, having indeed the promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come.

The Apocalypse: Authorship, Date, Purpose.

By the Rev. MARCUS JOHNSON, A.K.C.

THE writer of the Apocalypse thrice names himself "John" (i. 4, 9; xxii. 8). Early Christian tradition regarded this John as the Apostle. This is the testimony of Justin Martyr, himself an Ephesian citizen before he went to Rome; of Hippolytus and Tertullian; possibly of Irenæus, who calls the writer of the Apocalypse ὁ μαθητὴς κυρίου (which may include ἀπόστολος); and of Origen, who attributes both Gospel and Apocalypse to the son of Zebedee. The first to question the authorship of the latter book appears to have been Dionysius of Alexandria (A.D. 247–265). This he does on the ground of alleged differences in the characters of the authors of Gospel and Apocalypse, and also in their language, thought, and style. Both he and Papias think it likely that the Revelation was written by John the Presbyter, who divides with John, the son of Zebedee, the reputation of having lived at Ephesus and been exiled to Patmos. Certainly, if the De Boor fragment and Papias in his lost second book (*circa* A.D. 100) are right as to "John the Divine and James his brother" both being "killed by the Jews," then, even accepting the early date of the Apocalypse, and supposing John the Apostle to have lived to A.D. 69, the year

before the destruction of Jerusalem, he can hardly have written this book. B. Weiss, however, has pointed out that the tradition that the Apostle lived to Trajan's time "is in itself thoroughly trustworthy, and, at any rate, has not been shaken by the latest attempts to imagine for him an early death" ("Einleitung," p. 364, and note).

The objections of Dionysius to the traditional authorship have been greatly revived of late years, notably by Bousset, who assigns both Gospel and Apocalypse to the Presbyter John. Among American and English scholars, Dr. F. C. Porter, in Hastings' "Dictionary of the Bible," says, "That Revelation is not by the author of the Gospel and the First Epistle of St. John appears to the present writer little less than a certainty," while Dr. Swete in his recent Commentary goes so far as to say, "It is incredible that the writer of the Gospel could have written the Apocalypse without a conscious effort savouring of literary artifice," and he considers Dr. Westcott's arguments ("St. John," p. lxxxvi) in favour of the change in the style of the same writer unconvincing. But it is surely not abnormally strange that the same author should employ at different periods of his life, and on different subjects, an entirely distinct style and widely differing language. Examples might be quoted of modern writers who, from the evidence afforded by some of their literary productions, would never be judged to have written other books which, nevertheless, have proceeded from their pen. To give one illustration only: a friend of the present writer's, not unknown as a commentator on the Scriptures, has written at least one novel. Judging from this last, who, not knowing the facts, in years to come, would believe on grounds of internal evidence that novel and commentary were by the same hand? Yet, taking into account the very different character of the Fourth Gospel and the Revelation as literary structures, there is between them a sufficient resemblance in language on which to found the assertion of at least some relationship. This Dr. Swete himself admits. While, too, the style of each is, generally speaking, different, especially

as regards that open defiance of the rules of syntax, so often to be seen in the Apocalypse,[1] yet there are many resemblances —*e.g.*, in parallelisms, the antithetic presentation of first the positive and then the negative side of a statement, the repetition of the article for emphasis, the parenthetical explanation of circumstances, and the use of similar phrases. In spite of dissimilarity in the purpose and scope of Revelation and Fourth Gospel respectively, there is sufficient evidence of the character of the writer of the fulminating Apocalypse to show that the work might have been written by one who was a "son of thunder," for the last book of the Bible is a revelation of the wrath of God rather than of His love. While the fact that the writer, John, nowhere claims the authority of an Apostle may be urged as in harmony with the custom of the writer of the Fourth Gospel to conceal even his name, that this Christian Apocalypse is not pseudonymous, as the Jewish apocalypses, seems evident from the absence of all references to the Apostle's experiences. The early tradition of the apostolic authorship cannot but carry great weight. Reference to a statement in a lost book is but a slender foundation on which to build or support a theory opposed to such clear and early testimony. The most that can be said with safety is that, perhaps, judgment on this point should be suspended for the present; it is possible that more certain knowledge may be forthcoming. For example, Eusebius tells us (IV., xxvi. 2) that Melito, Bishop of Sardis in A.D. 170, wrote a book on the Revelation of John. This is lost, but its recovery is not impossible, and might even happen during the excavations which are in process in Asia Minor, since Sardis was one of the Churches specially addressed.

The problem of the date of the Apocalypse is at least as difficult of solution as that of the book's authorship. The time of writing has been fixed as early as the reign of Nero by such

[1] The disregard of ordinary rules of language was, perhaps, rather to be expected from one writing under the influence of a highly ecstatic condition, and striving to put down ἄρρητα ῥήματα.

scholars as Lightfoot and Westcott (whose verdicts, however, were somewhat of the nature of *obiter dicta*), or in the time of Vespasian by Weiss and Düsterdieck. But there is a pretty general consensus of opinion among scholars of the twentieth century that the much later date assigned by "constant and unswerving" tradition—the end of the reign of Domitian—is to be preferred on grounds of internal evidence. For it is by no means clear, though Dr. Milligan claims it in the "Expositor's Bible," that the temple to be measured by the Seer in xi. 1 was the actual material Temple still standing at Jerusalem, any more than it is necessary to assume that the sealing of the 144,000 in vii. 4 indicates that the Jewish tribes were still in existence.

As against an early date, it may be noted that when the Revelation was written a great change evidently had taken place in Ephesus since St. Paul ministered there. The Apocalyptic epistle to that Church affords evidence of much deterioration since the Apostle's time. Nor is there any trace in the Pauline epistles of the existence of the Nicolaitan party, which by the time of the Apocalypse has become so strong. At Sardis, and at Laodicea also, faith can be described only as "dying, if not dead." The lapse of a considerable time is demanded by these changes. Another ground strongly suggestive of a late date is the fairly distinct evidence afforded by the Revelation of the prevalence of Emperor-worship, and that the special trial to which the Asian Christians were exposed was temptation to sacrifice to the genius of the Emperor, considered as the spiritual energy directing the whole empire. Now, although this is not inconsistent with the time of Vespasian, the total impression made is that of a later date. This is particularly supported, in the opinion of most scholars of to-day, by what is believed to be a reference in chaps. xiii. 3, 12, 14, xvii. 8, in the healing of the death-stroke of "the beast from the sea," the beast that "was and is not; and is about to come," to the legend of *Nero redivivus*.

The Emperor Nero died by his own hand, in concealment,

four miles from Rome, in the year 68. A story which was at first circulated, that he was in hiding and would reappear, had, towards the end of the century, assumed the form that he was dead, and would return from the world of spirits. It is not necessary to think with Archbishop Benson in his "Study" that the writer of the Revelation could not have made symbolical reference to this return without believing it historically. Without question, Nero did return symbolically in Domitian. To this theory the now most generally accepted meaning of the number of the beast, 666, lends its aid—viz., that here we have a Hebrew cryptogram for the name and title of the Emperor, *Neron Kaisar*. This interpretation is strongly supported by the various reading, 616, to which Irenæus bears witness, which would give the same result by adopting the more usual spelling and dropping the final "n" of Neron.

The late Dr. Hort, in the Introduction to his recently published "Notes on Apocalypse: i.–iii.," with Preface by Professor Sanday, favours an early date, A.D. 68–69. Dr. Hort considered that the "wild commotion" ensuing throughout the empire upon Nero's death furnished a state of things which would account for the tone of the Apocalypse better than anything known to have occurred under Domitian. But too little is known as to any extent beyond Rome itself of either the Neronian or Domitian persecution to found on either alone a theory as to the date of the Revelation. The apparently insuperable difficulty of accepting an early date lies in Irenæus's testimony, as Professor Sanday points out in his Preface. As a hearer of Polycarp (himself a disciple of St. John), and also a user of the treatise of Papias—another of the Apostle's personal disciples—Irenæus's distinct statement that the Apocalypse "was seen[1] almost in our own generation, at the end of Domitian's reign," is most weighty.

A review of the evidence, therefore, leads to the belief that the most probable date of writing is to be found in the closing

[1] J. Bovon's suggestion that the suppressed subject to ἑωράθη here is ὁ Ἰωάννης and not ἡ Ἀποκάλυψις does not convince one.

years of the reign of Domitian. That Emperor was assassinated on September 18, 96, and came to the throne on September 13, 81. Somewhere between the years 90 and 96, then, would appear likely to have been the actual time of the writing of the Apocalypse.[1]

In seeking to discover the purpose and therefore the proper method of interpreting this wonderful book, it may well be thought that too often the prominence, importance, and connection of the first three chapters with all that follows have been too much overlooked. Why should we believe that, the epistles to the Asian Churches concluded, the rest of the book is for a separate purpose, and meant for a different set of readers? The Apocalypse, when studied, presents itself as an organic whole. Was it not, then, *all* intended for its original readers first, and *all* for all other readers afterwards? The purpose of the whole book must have been, in the first place, to support the Christians of Asia under trial, to encourage patience, to inflame hope, to emphasize the certainty of future deliverance and reward. The precise position of these Churches is in reality the key to the *motif* of the whole book. Its two keynotes are "endure" and "come," the first addressed to believers, the last to the Son of man. Primarily, it is, as Dr. Swete says, "the answer of the Spirit to the fears and perils of the Asian Christians towards the end of the first century." It is delightful to note that the book evidently accomplished its immediate purpose, for the Ignatian epistles represent these Churches as flourishing. Nor was the effect of the Revelation during the first ages of the Church limited to the seven Churches, for the epistle of the Churches of Vienne (in 177) to the Christians of Asia and Phrygia makes clear reference to the language of the Apocalypse. How, then, will its evident purpose affect the interpretation of the book? Does that purpose lead us to accept now the futurist, the historical, or the preterist line of interpretation?

[1] Professor Zahn, in his "Introduction to the New Testament," maintains the late date, and names the year 95.

The primitive Church could hardly adopt any other than a futurist view. But the difficulties of considering that all is predictive of events immediately preceding, accompanying, or following upon the Second Advent are easily seen. For how can we reconcile with this view the declaration at the outset that we have in the book which follows a "Revelation of the things which must shortly come to pass," that "the time is at hand" (i. 1, 3), and the promise which concludes the whole Revelation, "Yea: I come quickly" (xxii. 20), with the writer's throwing himself forward hundreds of years, and with the absolute literalism involved in the periods of $3\frac{1}{2}$ years, 42 months, or 1,260 days? Again, by this system, the First Seal must be interpreted of the Second Advent. Then all the remaining Seals, the Trumpets, and the Bowls, must follow Christ's return. How could this help the Christians of Asia Minor?

According to the preterist method of interpretation, the whole Apocalypse relates to events happening during or immediately after the Seer's own time. Although this would satisfy the requirements of the primary purpose of the book as we have conceived that purpose—viz., to strengthen the early Church in its struggle with the Jews and the Roman State—yet this view would leave all succeeding ages without benefit. What is demanded is a system of interpretation which will comply with both these conditions.

This is supplied by the historical, or continuous-historical, method, which, indeed, is most in favour with English expositors. By continuous-historical is meant that of all books in the Bible this, more than any other, has, in Sir Francis Bacon's words, "springing and germinant accomplishments." There were in it prophetic and pictorial, rather than limitedly predictive, representations of events for the early Church, of other events for the Church of later days, and of still other events to come for the Church to the end of time. Thus there is in the Apocalypse, strictly speaking, *no chronology*. Had it been possible (as attempts have so often been made) to declare from the Revelation the actual time of our Lord's return, this would

have been contrary to His own declarations, "Of that day or that hour knoweth no one, not even the angels in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father" (Mark xiii. 32); and, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father hath set within His own authority" (Acts i. 7). The Seals, the Trumpets, and the Bowls are not a continuous series of succeeding judgments following one another in direct sequence of time, but a number of panoramic views from a standpoint in each case nearer to the Pisgah-top of Christ's return. Mr. Anderson Scott, in the able Introduction to his volume in the "Century Bible" (pp. 69, 70), has put this most effectively. "The line of progression," he says, "is neither straight nor circular, but spiral. It is like upward progress round a circular mountain, in which each complete circle finds the traveller at a point above that from which he started, a point also from which he can behold the peak. Each series of judgments completes one circle, but also brings the Seer to a point from which he sees the end. But the end is not yet, and . . . another cycle commences; judgment, indeed, has fallen, but the final judgment is still to come—only it is nearer." Otherwise expressed, the method of presentation is kaleidoscopic, not telescopic.

Whatever the system of interpretation favoured, the centre of the book is, confessedly, the crucified Redeemer of men, Jesus of Nazareth, He who was "of the tribe of Judah" and the house of David, who was "crucified" at Jerusalem (xi. 8), raised from the dead (i. 5, 18), and exalted to His Father's throne (iii. 21), is become the "Lord of lords and King of kings" (xvii. 14, xix. 16). He is the absolutely Living One, the "first and the last" (i. 17, ii. 8). He "hath the seven spirits of God" (iii. 1). Yet it is His *death* which is in the Revelation of vital significance. Again and again, and yet again, reference is made to "the Lamb" and the Lamb "slain." No less than twenty-nine times is Christ called by that name, which most expresses what He is to the Christian. In the second part of the first consolatory vision (vii. 9-17), while "the blood of the Lamb" is made the instrument of the salvation of

the innumerable multitude, the Lamb Himself becomes their eternal Shepherd. Though the book is symbolical, yet practical religion is insisted on. Repentance, faith, and works have their clearly defined place (iii. 3, 19, vii. 14, xxii. 12, 14). But the human *dramatis personæ*, if we may so speak, have chosen their lot; there is no mention of conversion; judgment is according to works (xix. 8); and the Apocalypse, which, although in spirit and purpose a pastoral, reveals, as already said, the wrath rather than the love of God, closes with the eternal stereotyping of the lot and character which have been chosen, while the culminating promise is this: "He that overcometh shall inherit these things; and I will be his God, and he shall be My son" (xxi. 7).

This is the book of which Jerome said, "*Tot habet sacramenta quot verba.*" Its difficulties are indeed both very many and very great. But in spite of them, "the book," it has been truly said, "has its imperishable religious worth because of the energy of faith which finds expression in it, the splendid certainty of its conviction that God's cause remains always the best, and is one with the cause of Christ" (Julicher). The teaching which the Apocalypse contains can never lose its value and importance, for, to the end of time, it will remind the Christian that, however different his trials and difficulties may be from those of the early Asian Churches, a like unhesitating and unflinching fidelity is expected of him, and will be similarly rewarded. The tender pity and all-satisfying consolation of the God of whom it is twice said that He "shall wipe away every tear from their eyes" (vii. 17, xxi. 4), who abolishes death and every other cause of sorrow, who "shall spread His tabernacle over" His people and "dwell with them"; "Himself be with them and be their God"—this picture has ever proved, and must continue to be, a strong source of support, sustainer of resignation, and ground of delightful hope to those who, by way of the valley of the shadow, pass from this life to the next.