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EARS TO HEAR:
REENGAGING JOHN'S APOCALYPSE IN 21st CENTURY DOXOLOGICAL
COMMUNITIES

presented by

Chad Brooks

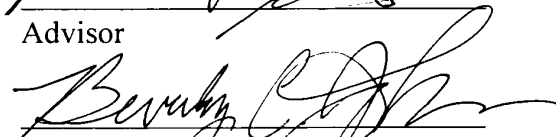
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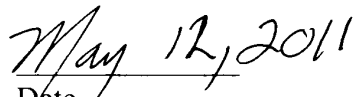
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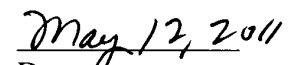
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Ears to Hear:Re-engaging John's Apocalypse
In 21st Century Doxological Communities

by
Chad Brooks

A Thesis
submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
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To say interpreting Revelation is difficult would be an understatement. Complicated does not fit either. A learned hand, accompanied with prayer and a spirit of worship, are the basic tools needed to crack the shell of the apocalyptic vision. With this in mind, the theological meanderings of homespun exegetes throughout the centuries have wrought destruction, which have kept the book from its proper place in the canon of the Christian Church. The glorious apocalypse of St. John is the lost child of the church. Without a proper reading, we only have a glimpse of proper Christian eschatology, not unlike the forensic image of a lost child years in the future. A liturgical reading of Revelation, rejoined with the proper hypothesis of scripture, will begin to form apocalyptic and apostolic Christian communities in 21st century post-Christian environments.

We must read Revelation liturgically because it is a book directed at a specific people; the Church of Jesus Christ existing in this world today. Revelation must be engaged within the local congregations. It cannot be blindly read. These are words that dwell in the human soul, causing us to question our allegiances. In worship (Rev 1:4) John is placed in a liminal environment. In *Desiring the Kingdom*, James K. A. Smith writes “liturgies visibly narrate a story about what really matters.”¹ John is given a vision to narrate liturgical resistance.

¹ Smith, James K.A. *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation*. Baker Academic, 2009. pg. 109

The work of the people informs their allegiance and citizenship to New Jerusalem.

Revelation sculpts a masterpiece of scriptural history from the whole canon. During the formative years of the Church, Christian teachers utilized tools to comprehend orthodox Christian readings and interpretations. Scripture was seen as a part of tradition that should be guarded. A proper “hypothesis of scripture” entails the necessary interpretive strategies of orthodox faith. The reading would never call into question what has been believed. The Church Fathers expressed this in order to combat heretical readings of scripture.²

Using this strategy to read Revelation causes us to look seriously at many things. How do we understand the biblical genre of apocalyptic literature in the 21st century? Does the evangelical and mainline church have a good understanding of the prophetic voice? Are contemporary fantastical renderings of Revelation truly Christian? How might we allow Revelation to inform a non-escapist eschaton focused view of the End? These questions are raised after reading Revelation in light of the mission of God. Revelation has to make sense within the same canon that contains the Song of Solomon, Ruth, and Romans. We no longer need to seal it off in a place by itself.

² Frances M. Young discusses this wonderfully in the first chapter of Frances M. Young, *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture* (Baker Academic, 2002).

The final portion of my Thesis statement revolves around our current world. In his article *How the World Lost It's Story*³, Robert Jenson describes many of the situations compounded in the western postmodern landscape. Jenson's answer lies within the realm of a distinct eschatological character acted out in worship. These *doxological communities* (as I call them), understand the key component in worship is models the character of God. A communally held eschatology couched in fear and escapism does not accurately describe the creator of the universe. The predominant view of evangelical eschatology forgets the seven course dinner and busies itself with appetizers and drinks. A new eschatology encapsulates a proleptic view of Eschaton. The doxological character focuses on the glory of God, and the supreme revelation of Jesus Christ. These are people that read the bible as *their* book, not a source to be mined. They specialize in traversing the thin line between apostolic mission and sacred definition.

Form and Structure

Presuppositions

Early in my academic career I learned the importance of sharing presuppositions. The environment we are formed within sculpts the worldview we

³ Jenson, Robert W. 2010. "How the world lost its story: as our changing culture struggled to define itself, the theologian Robert W. Jenson mourned the missing narrative of a universe gone postmodern and mad." *First Things* no. 201: 31-37. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost (accessed December 6, 2010).

will carry for the rest of life. Growing up in the deep south as a Southern Baptist preacher's kid, I was raised within a certain set of eschatological expectations. I served in churches that typified the fire breathed promise of destruction, but never mentioned a vision of New Jerusalem. I initially saw Revelation as a book to avoid. Through parish ministry I realized that many had never read the book, had never been taught the book and had no desire to interact with it. People functionally remove Revelation from the canon due to the lack of strong teaching and defense against some of the more fanatical readings.⁴ My call to reading and teaching Revelation comes from the conviction that Christianity must have a robust eschatological vision or fails to truly be Christianity. This question drives my reading of Revelation.

Form and Text

Many suggestions can be offered towards a new congregational reading of Revelation. This paper will follow a proven group of texts that have been utilized in corporate worship for years. The Revised Common Lectionary gives six readings in Revelation during EasterTide in Year C. These readings are Revelation 1:4-8, 5:11-14, 7:9-17, 21:1-6, 21:10 with 22-22:5 and 22:12-14,16-17 and 20-2. I picked these readings because I feel they serve as a wonderful primer to the

⁴ The "Left Behind" series by LaHaye and Jenkins are foundational to this narrative. While they may not be the most historical or theological, they have entered into mainstream America. While there are more generous and more fanatical readings of premillennial dispensationalism, this series is the plumline for the eschatology of mainstream America's idea of a Christian vision of the End.

apocalypse, but do not delve into more controversial elements.⁵ These passages follow several key themes in the book that relate to the larger task of reinvigorating a congregational reading, or as I like to call it “taking the book back.” These texts will provide the best doxological strata for the endeavor.

The passages will be examined in three movements; exegetical, theological and doxological. In this thesis, I offer my own working definitions of these three terms and how I will delineate them as well as use them in concert with each other. While I understand how the three terms relate as far as process, I do not rank one of them higher than the other. The interpretative movements at the beginning are necessary for the end, and the end would not be possible without the beginning.⁶ In building my bibliography, I consciously choose resources that would allow those preaching and teaching in the local church to easily read and integrate. Some of the resources are academic, but integrate well in the pastor’s study. Others are extremely appropriate to point interested congregants towards in personal study of Revelation. This decision was made considering a hermeneutic of involvement with Revelation. Articles, Books and Monographs were selected in with the goals of the thesis in mind.

⁵ I do not feel that the more difficult interpretations should be avoided, but only put to task once a better congregational understanding of Revelation is present. Often, we might assume that this type of entry might draw people into the series, but without a strong background I feel it is difficult to truly place these apocalyptic figures in proper perspective.

⁶ This itself is a key piece of Eschatology. To properly understand the end of times, we must be faithful to see its relationship to both the beginning and middle.

Exegesis

Exegesis concerns itself with the physical matter of the biblical text. As the first part of the interpretive process, it provides the basic structure and boundary for interpretation. The form of the text grounds us in historical accuracy, social milieu, narrative, grammatical engagement and how our pericope situates itself in the overall context of the canon of scripture. Exegesis revolves around the primacy of the text.

For the sake of brevity, for this paper I will concentrate on specific matters that serve the greater purpose of my thesis; introducing and developing Revelation in worshipping congregations. Exegesis is the necessary connection point between a historical document and a contemporary (modern) community.

Theological

If exegesis is the connection point, then the theological reading serves to wed the two processes inside the role of divine inspiration. Theological reading places the exegeted text within the greater redemptive narrative tradition of the Church. No longer a static document, the text becomes part of the worshipping community. Ownership of scripture comes through theological reading.

Theological interpretation as a discipline focuses not just on the text but on the formation of Christian community culturally.⁷ The larger postliberal project

⁷ This theme, generally understood to be pioneered by George Linbeck is discussed on page 81 of Treier, Daniel J. *Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Recovering a Christian Practice*. Baker Academic, 2008.

directs itself to interpret scripture with the assumption that scripture theologically forms Christian communities. This presupposition directs my reading of Revelation. While a postliberal reading might not be attractive for some, I find it the perfect beginning point for Revelation. Postliberalism engages postmodernity. Revelation can currently be interpreted by anyone and owned by anyone. In the quest to distance ourselves from the various fear tactics espoused by fundamentalists, we neglect the preaching and teaching of Revelation and the wider category of Eschatology. By allowing the individual to form their own individual opinions, we birth Revelation as the most thoroughly postmodern book in the canon. If we consider this reading appropriate and allowable for this book to be ripe for individual interpretation,⁸ we must be prepared for a Church which has forgotten the destination and will slowly forget why it is traveling.

⁸ Not traditionally found in Academic works, a few comments in this blog post are a good example of this thought. These comments show the extremely fluid nature of contemporary thought of eschatological thought.
<http://ow.ly/4c2pV>

a.) Bob

I always thought “What if God made it so that what ever your eschatology was, that how it happened for you. Pre mid or post-toastie. Live and work today, the end will work its way out.

b.) Brian. L

I honestly don’t care.

When the disciples and others got obsessed with end-times stuff, Jesus said, “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

In other words, “Let the Father deal with this. You’ve got a job to do. Worry about that and let the Father do His thing.”

This is what I point out to people who get all bent out of shape about Jesus coming back soon. Yes, He may come back soon. Maybe by the time we wake up tomorrow. But that is up to God, not us, and no amount of trying to figure out God’s timetable will change (or determine) that.

Revelation, when thought of theologically, can only be read in community and with the distinct goal of Eschaton in mind. Interpretation must be faithful to the larger hypothesis of scripture as well as the contextual location of the interpreting community.

Doxological

The end vision of our interpretive path of Revelation develops a *doxological* reading. The final behavior of the created world exists as doxology. In Revelation, the supreme and final narration triumphs over a song lost in competition with the world. Instead of individual lament we have communal rejoicing. In doxological action, the created responds to God.

The state of humanity at the end of times will be wrapped in the full recognition of who God is. Viewed from two distinct sides; New Jerusalem as well as fallen Babylon. Just knowing does not provide the fullest picture. The eternal vocation of the church will be worship. Our current church engages in worship as a rehearsal of the eternal event.

Developing this reading will involve learning what questions to ask about Revelation. These will be questions that do not satisfy vague speculation, but speak of the nature of how God has revealed Himself inside the Triune nature and how He is involved in our world. No longer can we allow Revelation to be a passive book. To glorify something, we must truly know it.

It takes both the exegetical and theological readings to properly inhabit a doxological reading of Revelation. Using this tryptic procession, a complete

picture develops. By properly understanding the patterns in Revelation that tell us who God is, we more appropriately worship the revealed character of Father, Son and Spirit.

The World and the Apocalypse

Apocalypse fascinates our world. Not THE apocalypse, but A apocalypse. Anyone seeking to argue against me should just turn to the box office to see the numbers of disaster, zombie and other post-apocalyptic tales. Mel Gibson, one of the most prominent male actors in the last thirty years had a humble beginning with a small independent movie named *Mad Max*⁹. The Max franchise ended with a major Hollywood budget major titled *Beyond The Thunderdome*,¹⁰ costarring Tina Turner.¹¹ These movies gained cult status and served as a creation story for large budget Post-Apocalyptic movies.

Three wider families can be found inside cultural eschatology. Below are three broad categories are influential through entertainment.

Zombies:

To write off the influence found inside of zombie fiction would be a disastrous mistake. From their beginning in the 1960s, zombie films have served

⁹ Miller, George. *Mad Max*. MGM (Video & DVD), 2002.
Estimated budget was \$ 300,000 US.
Source <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0079501/>

¹⁰ Ogilvie, George Miller. *Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome*. Warner Home Video, 1997.

¹¹ *Mad Max Beyond the Thunderdome* grossed \$36,200,000 US.
Source <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0089530/>

as a social critique.¹² Categorically, zombie fiction best inhabits a true secular eschatology in how it analyzes destruction and the human nature. In many zombie movies and stories, there is a recognition of a disease/virus resulting from divine judgement. Inside of this judgement, humans are allowed to completely consume themselves. It is as though God has stepped away, reversed the incarnation and taken away prevenient grace. The desires of materialism, lust, power, food, and other flaws disintegrate society and turn us into monsters reaching the ultimate of sins of literal self-consumption. In our final gasp, we begin to literally feed on each other, as the remaining few metaphorically understand the ills of society and run from being fed upon.¹³ Most zombie movies do not end well, as surviving society disappears.

Zombies dehumanize society and serve as a regression from progress and are an example of a secular view of sin. Judgement is directly related to what humans are capable of. Inside of this secular view of divine judgement, we do not see evil being released as much as we see the divine exiting.

Disaster Movies

Moving to another genre, Hollywood receives market appeal from stories surrounding natural disasters. Situated inside an apocalyptic framework,

¹² Lauro, S. J., and K. Embry. "A Zombie Manifesto: The Nonhuman Condition in the Era of Advanced Capitalism." *boundary 2* 35, no. 1 (3, 2008): 85-108.

¹³ This view could be considered congruent with the biblical idea of wrath being attached to the sins of humanity. See Eph 2:3, Col 3:4-6 and developed more fully in Romans 1.

examples include *Armageddon*, *2012*, and *The Day After Tomorrow*. Usually predictable, these movies make use of a surprise natural disaster that causes the possible destruction of life we know it. Identification of humanities' ill use of the natural world is a common theme, with Western consumption being tied to a climactic apocalypse.

Using a different antagonist, alien apocalypse movies make use of the same cues; such as a rabid event that is only contained within a select group of people. I lump these two seemingly unrelated genres together by the way they "solve" the apocalyptic event. In most cases, a single person (usually a male), is able to avert disaster by sheer determination, ingenuity, strength and bravery. Risk-taking ultimately triumphs over all.

This hyper-American value set belongs in the national DNA of American storytelling, traveling from the Leather Stocking tales of James Fenimore Cooper to Jack Ryan in the television series *24*. Modernities alternate narrative to God finds itself in the individualism that built a nation. We have entertained ourselves with this narrative since colonial times. We want to be strong enough to make creation in all forms submit to us.

Ravaged Earth

More bleak than zombie fiction, the tales of a ravaged earth do not need the undead to weave tales of the capabilities of people in a postapocalyptic environment. In these films, society hobbles together various states of civilization. People have redefine values and vocational abilities descend into

medieval levels of importance. Life revolves around obtaining specific things, and the defense of these consumables usually serves as the key plot.

The narrative of resilience dominates. “Good” usually links itself to a remembrance of a moral framework predating whatever disaster brought the inhabitants to their current state. The story sculpts certain people as containing the necessary values to help return civilization to its pre-apocalypse state. The descent into postmodernism in film rejects modernity's hope in progress. Progress provided the mess.

A Renarrating World

If the Church contributed to the apocalyptic framework of secular eschatology, how are we to contribute to a better vision of the end? For the sake of the gospel and the eschatological message of fulfillment, we must engage. To learn from the lesson of the past, I feel the most important element disengages with a false narrative revolving around destruction, death and the abandonment of humanity.

Worship needs to be violently eschatological. Not in the sense of an uplifted story of death, but violent in the way it assaults the things of this world and allegiance that leads only to death. Optimism becomes the key process to re-narrating the story of God in the midst of a postmodern culture.

Vocalizing Revelation

St. John wrote as a pastor. For apocalyptic vision and eschatological worship to happen, modern pastors and preachers must appropriate John's mantle. Preaching Revelation embodies eschatological poetic practice. Blindly leaping into the book with no prior context can injure the most well behaved congregation. Congregational entrance requires a patient enterprise.

Those in the company of preachers must learn to call the church to its eschatological dwelling place. In the enterprise of the earthly church taking Revelation back, local pastors serve both as truck drivers and road crew. We direct the energy as well as take care of the movement so that the laity can travel alongside. Intentionally preaching eschatologically means a deliberate admonition of the end that comes across as assured as the deliberate notions of beginning. Our role is to theologically play the childhood game of "connect the dots." We are storytellers, not date-setters.

As pastors we must tell people about the other world, lamenting in the subversive act of preached hope. Instead of romantic historical meanderings that lament morals gone amuck, we focus on preached time. Preached time creates the path to New Jerusalem. This alternate narrative answers the question of who really is in charge.

To avoid the complicated dissection of pre-millennial dispensationalism, many scholars look at Revelation as rhetoric against Rome. The preterist position does a great job linking images in the Apocalypse to the sociological move of the 1st and 2nd century church. Teaching this stance provides a way out of fundamentalist interpretations. This takes the easy way out. The interpretation might not be wrong, but it certainly is not the whole picture. This is just a way point in the journey towards a doxological expression of God. Craig Koester works well with this issue in his article *Revelation's Visionary Challenge to Ordinary Empire*.¹⁴ Koester's key thesis is Revelation challenges the secular world the first readers lived in. This challenge is the timeless message of the book. Working from this model, we can begin to sculpt eschatological vision interacting within the wider realm of biblical instruction. Revelation suddenly has a place within the Sermon on the Mount! This is not an irresponsible reading, but a historically mature reading. This follows the larger trajectory of scripture; God desires a people and a place tightly woven to resemble His character. The hermeneutical process for those who accept Jesus as the Christ allow the larger world of the bible to give meaning to our world, as the utmost authority.¹⁵

Preachers must not only tell of the other world, but we should lead the way in acting out this belief. We must develop ears that hear. The deep

¹⁴ Koester, C. R. 2009. "Revelation's Visionary Challenge to Ordinary Empire." *Interpretation* 63, no. 1: 5-18. *New Testament Abstracts*, EBSCOhost (accessed May 2, 2011).

¹⁵ The patristic tradition of inter-textuality serves as the basic witness to this. For a text to truly be authoritative it isn't just correct in the historical/critical matrix, but is embodied by the community to the point that it is accepted as truth at face value. For more information see chapter 6 in Young.

theological praxis necessary for faithful discipleship happens in extended sessions. This point requires pastoral preachers. The juncture is the prophetic place of the alternate word. Eschatological preaching is subversive. We must understand the role of Long Tail¹⁶ when developing eschatological communities. Long Tail defines information access over a long amount of time, focusing on long term influence. Instead of one or two tremendous sermons on Revelation, the continued practice of eschatology as a core to Christianity will allow communities to adopt the vision as their own and develop the understanding necessary for the local church to read and worship with Revelation. These enduring stories gradually stretch the boundary of Christian language and thought.

One of the key movements in this new engine of proclamation is the identity of hope. Hope morphs into a gentle optimism of predictability or perseverance. We hold onto life because we have hope. This is not true Christian hope. Providing fuel for this thought has theologically hamstrung the church. Having hope does not take us away from reality, but gives us a true picture of the world. Michael Kelly refers to this as “hope...lives with a passionate sense of

¹⁶ Primarily used in marketing concepts, Long Tail has become an influential idea with the rise of social media and new business models that thrive on the internet. For an introduction see: Anderson, Chris. *The Long Tail: How Endless Choice Is Creating Unlimited Demand*. Random House Business Books, 2007.

reality.”¹⁷ A life without an eschatological sense of hope functions as a contrary narrative to the gospel. We must have hope.

Those in pulpits need to understand a Christian expression of hope. Much of our eschatologizing in the last few decades has been the opposite of this. Yes, we might say pithy statements regarding heaven, but we must embody them as well. How do we lead services that speak to the hope given by Jesus Christ? We paint pictures of heaven not as the individual escape from hell, but the “home of the totally human”¹⁸

The pulpit lead us to where we are now and the pulpit should be the place where change starts.

Why the Church Needs Revelation

The Church needs Revelation. Moreover, the world needs Revelation as expressed by the Church. The Church needs to understand Revelation amidst years of neglect and misuse. We have dismantled our story. The hope of modernity was progress, and any sort of eschatological vision and future hope was co-opted. The Church retreated to a tale designed to bolster their loss of voice.¹⁹ We have a song to sing; the Church sits, tapping out the rhythm to the ageless song of redemption. In our song, we point towards promise. This

¹⁷ Kelly, Anthony. *Eschatology And Hope*. Orbis Books, 2006.
pg. 82

¹⁸ *ibid* pg 174

¹⁹ Left Behind and the Liberal Project's views.

promise is fulfilling, it is eschaton. This story has been narrated for our people for thousands of years. In many ways we have failed. Our tapping lost its rhythm. We exchanged our songs of joy for the dooming drumbeats of Moria.²⁰ Our song now has been deconstructed into a dreadful tune, absent of beauty. We have lost our way.

Revelation grounds us in who we are historically

As Christians, we are part of a progressive relationship between the creator of this world and who He calls His children. This progression has an end. An individual acceptance of God serves as merely a juncture and insertion along the path, because the story is much bigger than a single person. Since Abraham, the battle has been about assimilation. This thread runs throughout the Exodus, conquest, unified and divided kingdom and into exile. The song is taken back up inside the language of the sojourner in the New Testament. Barry Harvey describes this as an apostolic understanding of “belonging to another commonwealth.”²¹ As Christians, Revelation describes how our historical alternative life ends. Revelation does not function just as a distinct mark on the

²⁰ Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Fellowship of the Ring*. Movie Tie-In. Random House, 2001.

²¹ Harvey, Barry. *Can These Bones Live?: A Catholic Baptist Engagement with Ecclesiology, Hermeneutics, and Social Theory*. Brazos Press, 2008.
pg. 101

timeline, but a theology of resistance.²² We are defined historically by the apocalyptic incursions of the incarnation.

We engage in a battle for our desires. Carl Braaten notes “we have lost the ability to discern the spiritual dimensions of the warfare in which we are engaged.”²³ We need apocalyptic vision so we can properly think about salvation. Even in situations of power and affluence we believe in the eschatological to not align ourselves with this world. Our worship embodies the life that we believe instead of this consumptive world.

If our formal actions (IE worship) are not eschatological, are they really part of our belief system? Do we truly believe in what we say we do? In his article *Eschatology and Epistemology*,²⁴ William J. Abraham asks questions about belief. He narrows in by asking about our epistemic fit.²⁵ Our eschatological claims about the future matter because they are part of the fittingness of the gospel. The divine promise and action of Jesus Christ makes necessary

²² Stanley P. Saunders *Revelation and Resistance* in Green, Joel B., and Michael Pasquarello III. *Narrative Reading, Narrative Preaching: Reuniting New Testament Interpretation and Proclamation*. Baker Academic, 2003.

²³ Carl E. Braaten *The Recovery of Apocalyptic Imagination* in Braaten, Mr. Carl E., and Mr. Robert W. Jenson. *The Last Things: Biblical and Theological Perspectives on Eschatology*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2002. pg. 15

²⁴ Eschatology and Epistemology in Walls, Jerry. *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology*. Oxford University Press, USA, 2010.

²⁵ *ibid* 586

apocalyptic vision. If we as the church do not live like what we believe, not only does it fail to guide us, but we epistemically are denying its existence.²⁶

Worship and Eschatology

In the last few pages I have outlined how I see the world involved in Revelation and how various strains of Christianity need to be engaged in eschatological discourse. I finish up this “front matter” with a plea to not think of this primarily as an academic topic.

Worship defines the communal action of local assemblies. Many contemporary definitions of worship revolve around worship as a “lifestyle.” This view of worship finds itself in the Protestant explication of the Westminster Catechism’s question 1. While this definition is not wrong, current usage²⁷ encourages the very sort of individual centered worship that is contrary to the view of worship that exists in Revelation.

Seeing worship from the doxological perspective makes individual, pragmatic, visionless and missionless worship impossible. Worship stories the Church. From the earliest times, to accurately understand the theology of the local

²⁶ This is larger than a philosophical argument, but spans into the realm of Biblical Theology. How do we inform our patterns of belief in terms of acts of devotion? If *lex orandi, lex credendi* is our creed, public devotion will truly be a theological enterprise.

²⁷ John Piper highly influences many sections of young Christians, and is generally seen as the head theologian for younger neo-calvinist Christians. He modified question 1 in his book *Desiring God* to this statement, “The Chief end of man is enjoy God *by* glorifying him forever. He uses this idea as the key thesis in his book Piper, John. *Desiring God, Revised Edition: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist*. Rev Exp. Multnomah Books, 2011.

church, one looks no further than their worship.²⁸ Worship informs the praxis and the praxis makes up the content of worship. Eugene Peterson writes

Maturity develops in worship as we develop in friendship with the friends of God, not just *our* preferred friends. Worship shapes us not only individually but as a community, a church, If we are going to grow up into Christ we have to do it in the company of everyone who is responding to the call of God.²⁹

An eschatological view must be part of Christian worship. Worship creates a proper order by simply existing. We cannot praise God without deeply involving ourselves in eschatological hope. “The assembly of believers must therefore itself be the event in which we may behold what is to come.”³⁰ It might sound like a high order, but social communities that behold have the ability to truly become. S. Steve Kang interacts with Paulo Friere in *A Many Colored Kingdom*.³¹ Friere’s work on oppressed cultures focused on the ability for communities with similar ideal sets to transform situations despite being marginalized.³² Kang further

²⁸ Hurtado, Larry W. *At the Origins of Christian Worship: The Context and Character of Earliest Christian Devotion*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000. pg. 101

²⁹ Peterson, Eugene H. *Practice Resurrection: A Conversation on Growing Up in Christ*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010. pg. 26 (authors emphasis)

³⁰ Jenson *How the World Lost It's Story* pg. 36

³¹ Conde-Frazier, Elizabeth, Gary A. Parrett, and S Steve Kang. *Many Colored Kingdom, A: Multicultural Dynamics for Spiritual Formation*. Baker Academic, 2004. pg. 96

³² Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. 30th ed. Continuum, 2000.

develops this further by urging pedagogical communities to reconstruct the social framework they live in.³³ Our worship services must speak to the gospel story that we believe in. Revelation and its doxological passages shock us out of the supposed reality of the world we currently live in, and a part of the practiced lifestyle of the Church.

Worship exists as a subversive activity. It goes against the narratives of this world. To simply involve ourselves in worship because we think it will get us somewhere is a baptized version of the prophets of Baal in 1 Kings 18. Marva Dawn describes the location of the church in worship as alternative, but parallel.³⁴ This dual location keeps us balanced. Not an escape with travel alongside with a separate destination, but a journey with stops along the way for people to transition.

Eschatological worship abides inside the local church as spirited journey. Without a distinct interaction with Revelation as the poetic story of finality with God, are we truly engaging in Christian worship? This question drives us deeper into God and farther away from the things of this world. We are becoming what we are worshipping.

³³ Kang, *A Many Colored Kingdom* pgs. 97-104

³⁴ Dawn, Marva J. *A Royal Waste of Time*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999. pg 334

Revelation 1:4-8

The beginning of Revelation sets the tone for the entire book, introducing themes of gradual expansion. Our segment should be thought of using literary stylings as well as an intentional placement. These four verses introduce necessary presuppositions to accurately read Revelation. Without this, the deep mystical and metaphorical sense of the Apocalypse will be missed and the book will resemble myth. This introduction should not be glossed over. The exegetical examination will focus on the use of the Old Testament. Allegiance and who we give power to theologically makes us aware of what we give our devotion too. Doxologically, we focus on what it means to be a community facing the Eschaton.

Exegetical

This first section is a wonderful example of the deep inner-textual reading Revelation. To read John's Apocalypse without reading the Old Testament would be a mistake. There are three distinct ideas in 1:4-8 that depend on the Old Testament:

The first idea takes place in the numerology of seven in verse 4. An entire thesis could be written on the numerology of seven in Revelation. A brief

engagement will suffice. The idea of seven³⁵ denotes a Levitical sense of fullness/completeness found in Leviticus 4-16, and 26. Seven churches are the designed audience for John, the world wide meaning of this universal design continues throughout the rest of the book. While seven specific churches are mentioned, G.K. Beale notes that Revelation is a book for the entire world.³⁶ The sevenfold spirit of God in the first testament symbolizes the entire workings of the spirit of God and carries the influence of Zechariah 4:2-7. The universality of Revelation must be stressed. Grant Osborne explains that this basic greeting extends to the universal church as an eschatological spiritual promise of God.³⁷

The second concern is structure and meaning. Our pericope is bracketed by the statement “ἀπὸ τοῦ ὄντος καὶ τοῦ ἦν καὶ τοῦ ἐρχόμενου” in vs.4 and 8.³⁸ The greater textually of scripture again plays an important role. The Jewish usage of the name YHWH carries a distinct tradition of finding ways to name God (especially in theological entirety) without speaking the sacred name. Exodus 18 and its various canonical kin³⁹ work around a similar descriptor. The *Targum*

³⁵ The only argument I have ever found to the theological implications of seven is in Lupieri pg. 101. I feel that his argument is ill-founded, based on the drastic amount of data inside of Biblical scholarship stating otherwise.

Lupieri, Edmondo F. *A Commentary on the Apocalypse of John*. Tra. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006.

³⁶ Beale, G. K. *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text (New International Greek Testament Commentary)*. Eerdmans Pub Co, 1998. pg. 186

³⁷ Osborne, Grant R. *Revelation*. Baker Academic, 2002. pg. 60

³⁸ who is and who was and who is to come

³⁹ Isaiah 41:4;43:10;44:6 and 48:12

tradition of Judaism interacts in the same way.⁴⁰ This phrase reverses the attribution to Zeus of “who was and who is and who will be”, giving God divine action in the present. More than a trite rip-off, this subversive declaration sets the tone for the rest of the book. Three others verses in Revelation (4:8, 11:17, 16:5) give a variation of the phrase. Mitchell Reddish explains the in this motive God proclaims His involvement himself in our world now, and we should live with immanent eschatological expectation.⁴¹

One of the deeper concerns is the grammatical use of ἄπιο in the divine phrase. Recognizing the ill-fitting relationship between ἄπιο and usage strategies concerning the genitive and nominative cases. Robert Mulholland points that John shows his knowledge of proper grammar in the next two phrases⁴², so the critique of a “backcountry” use of Greek is rendered moot.⁴³

The construction gives the respect the name of God deserves. Intentionally disobeying the rules of grammar stresses the eschatological nature of God. The comforting stress of the Almighty relieves those that are embattled with the world. Most interpretive strategies explain this mishap as a blinking notifier to pay attention to the upcoming statements. Ben Witherington notes this as “bad

⁴⁰ Beale pgs.187 and 1089 explains this well.

⁴¹ Reddish, Mitchell G. *Revelation: Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary*. Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2001. pg. 34

⁴² “from the seven spirits” and “from Jesus Christ”

⁴³ Mulholland, M. Robert, Jr. *Revelation: Holy Living in an Unholy World*. Zondervan, 1990. pgs. 70-71

grammar and good theology.”⁴⁴ Setting up the eschatological nature of God prepares the reader for the rest of this message. To think of this as just a theological point would be dangerous. This use of hairsplitting grammar points out the theological complexities in exegesis. This usage of exodus language is not just a referral to, but part of the foreclosure of the revelation of God’s final activities in this world.

The final piece to be considered are the references to Daniel and Zechariah in verse 7. Craig Koester brings to light the references between 1:7 and John’s use of Daniel 7:13, Zechariah 12:10 and 12:12.⁴⁵ This is a warning, a call to preparation. While this passage might appear to be the first foreboding part of Revelation, it contrasts with the praises in verses 5-6 to form a point. Mulholland notes this as the final triptic in the pericope expanding a theme of Christ’s control.⁴⁶ In Revelation, the Old Testament is rarely quoted, but instead is alluded to. John focuses on expansion upon previous revelations. The promised fulfillment of Israel highly amplifies to the world.

John’s use of Zechariah 12:10 and the grammatical rendering of ἔρχεται in 1:7 can change the exegetical thrust of the book. Some assign the futuristic presence, enabling 1:7 to allude to a singular event or rapture.⁴⁷ What is at stake in

⁴⁴ III, Ben Witherington. *Revelation*. Cambridge University Press, 2003. pg. 75

⁴⁵ Koester, Craig R. *Revelation and the End of All Things*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001. pg. 51

⁴⁶ Mulholland 74

⁴⁷ See the footnote material in Beale pgs. 198-199 for the best explanation of the specific interpretive process.

this conversation concerns the greater theme of immanence and the prepared state of the Church for the coming fulfillment. Interpreters can make the decision to let sections of Revelation either have bearing for a single moment in time or to function as inspired scripture to countless generations. It is at places like 1:7 and *ἔρχεται* that careful decisions must be made.

Theological

If forced to theologically describe Revelation 1:4-8 in one word, the word would be *power*. Who holds the ultimate power and who is given power? Revelation causes us to ask tough questions. It confronts our weak answers, especially when we are willing to give power to something other than God. John's version of the customary epistolary opening is a rich theological treatise about power. Thinking of Revelation only in terms of a single apocalyptic scenario divorces the rich message of the book for the historical living church existing against the world in every age.

Revelation confronts how the church situates itself in the midst of power. Do we allow God to reign in our hearts and exercise the embodiment of divine power? Instead we find ways to promote mild allegiance while existing in a dance with the world?

Radical Christology developed within these four verses dismiss any notions of Jesus not being the son of God and worthy of the title and position. His actions on earth are decidedly related to the things of heaven. Revelation

schooled us in the dramatic upheaval of death and evil, and begins from the assumed eternal reign of Jesus Christ.

To understand the greater theme of power in verses 4-8, I note two major movements; the dominating place of Christ and radical allegiance to Him. The relationship between the two helps us understand the soteriological notions for those eternally bound. The triumph over evil affects both the universal and the individual. The marriage between the two has been lost within much contemporary popular eschatological work and better understanding of power will serve to bring them back together.

Christ clearly dominates in Revelation. In chapter 5, Christ takes the levitical posture of the slain lamb to show the true nature of sacrifice, victor and resurrection. Christ is not only the example, but the image to be followed. Jesus is the *firstborn of the dead* (1:5), and those who seek to follow him will be part of this pattern of witness (Rev 2:10).

The relationship between *one who is, who was and is to come* in 1:4 and the use of παντοκράτωρ in verse 8 allows us to investigate the radical power of Christ more. παντοκράτωρ is usually translated as *almighty*, with a deeper glossing of “the one who commands all things and all people.”⁴⁸ This descriptor almost equates the nature of God with the work of God. Often repeated in

⁴⁸ παντοκράτωρ in Louw, J. P., and Eugene Albert Nida. *Lexical Semantics of the Greek New Testament*. Society of Biblical Literature, 1992.

Revelation, this title for God shows the concern for the whole world.⁴⁹ Part of the wider eschatological vocabulary of the new testament, it focuses on the supreme rule of God over creation. God holds a power incomparable to anything else, and Jesus Christ as the son of God holds this power. The one “who is, who was and is to come” functions across the temporal boundaries and claims all time as His own.

The early church exercised complex theological movement quickly. To overcome Christ fitting into a monotheistic framework, a binitarian framework developed. Our passage here is one of the few in which the Trinitarian God is expressed. Using binitarian language does not dismiss the Trinity, but enters into a conversation of the interaction of the divine place between the Son and the Father.⁵⁰

The power that God holds is possessed by Jesus Christ. The two are the same in authority, although reciprocity exists.

Doxological

Church Father Tertullian exegetes this section best with a simple statement; “The whole man is called once more to paradise.”⁵¹ Responding to

⁴⁹ Fiorenza, Elisabeth. *Revelation: Vision of a Just World*. Rev Sub. Fortress Press, 1998. pg.45

⁵⁰ The work of Larry Hurtado is extremely important in this discussion. His work *Lord Jesus Christ* is a foundational treatise about the strong Christology of proto-orthodoxy and the quick developments of a uniquely Christian theological thought.

⁵¹ Weinrich, William C. *Revelation*. 1st ed. IVP Academic, 2005. pg. 6

Revelation 1:4-8 in a community of worship approaches the reality of heaven.

Jesus Christ brings everything at the end back to the beginning. To truly worship with this understanding, our own tradition of a highly individualized eschatology must be broken.

Our theology of the End no longer is a weapon that we point against those we disagree with. Eschatology cannot be a card thrown on the table when we need a convenient exit strategy. Instead of eternal life resembling a child on the lap of Santa Claus, Revelation tells us of a communal life of service alongside God. Bringing Revelation into sanctuaries in our time requires intentional movements in this direction.

This will not be a simple return to paradise. Imagine your favorite childhood activity that required dexterity or agility. Going back to it as an adult will remind us of the simple pleasures, but we are much more efficient because of skills we have learned in life. Eternity with God will be much like this. The redeemed humanity passing through fallen life and judgement in an eternally sanctified state will be much more than a reborn Edenic relationship.

Radical allegiance to Christ alone will be the constant rhythm of eternity. This exercise of allegiance works itself out in the future as well as the present. The doxological activity of proleptic vision matters to worshipping congregations today. Christ is not withdrawn from the world today,⁵² and recognizing his Lordship is a key component in corporate worship.

⁵² Reddish 112

Crossing the boundaries of interpretive time, Christian communities must embody their devotion to Jesus Christ. The Lordship of Jesus Christ eliminates neutrality. The measuring stick of true prophetic word lies not in the futuristic veracity, but in how prophecy draws the hearer closer to God. John understands that Revelation is much more about the entirety of the Church in a resistive battle against evil.⁵³

A proper doxological response to Revelation involves the worshipping community keeping true to its words.⁵⁴ Belief is not found in rational exposition, but in the enacted behavior of Christian community. Serious discussions on an eschatological ethic happen, because our hospitality lives in direct connection to the greater hospitality of God offered to us in the Son. Living this life means recognizing the systems of power that go against the power of God. Revelation causes worship to be an act of subversive defiance, calling out wrong while lifting up the correct.

Reading Revelation from a doxological standpoint causes us to confront a style of reading that often is used in mainline settings. The hymnic passages of Revelation, of which most of the lectionary readings are part of, allow a passive interpretation that is “safe.”⁵⁵ These traditions answer the fatalist interpretation found in fundamentalism by regarding these passages as hymnic fragments

⁵³ Koester *Revelation and the End of All Things* pg. 45

⁵⁴ Koester pg. 46

⁵⁵ This list is comprised of 1:4, 5,8b; 4:8b; 7:12, 15-17; 11:15, 17-18; 17:5, 6b-8

borrowed from early Christian worship. While this might be a valid interpretation,⁵⁶ in the safety danger is found. This liturgical language might be correct, but we cannot allow it to mask the reality of necessary devotion.

The question to be asked in worshipping communities is this; “How do we live in theological expectation and immanence?” The symbolic language gives way to Christians who truly believe in Jesus’ triumph and reign over evil. While life on the earth exists, lives are lived in the awareness of the return of Christ and the ultimate reversal of evil. John’s language is shocking at times. It is designed to throw us off balance. Revelation 1:7 announces this return and the judgment that will follow, but soon follows up with the complete control that God has.

In our worship, we give God control. We secede to this heavenly power and prayerfully submit. We celebrate what we will be to him, a people identified by their service to God. Jesus Christ alone lives as the focus of worship, and our measuring stick to this reality are the warnings given in Revelation. Worship places us in a timeline unknown to the world and its fallen narrative. Revelation 1:4-8 quickly establishes the supremacy of Christ over creation, and the churches role in both allegiance and praise.

Revelation 5:9-14

For this section I am enlarging the traditional reading to include verse 9 and 10. They give us greater insight to the behavior of worship in the pericope. In

⁵⁶ Scholars do go against this, Osbourne provides a brief response on pg. 60. Harrington gives a liturgical response translation on pgs.48-49 from the opposite side of the argument.

many ways this reading can be viewed as a circular amplification of the themes of 1:4-8. Revelation patterns through arcs of worship, underpinning the idea that no matter the worlds troubles, the sovereign actions of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are in total control.⁵⁷ In this specific vision sequence in Revelation, John is taken to the throne room of God. John meets the heavenly creatures, elders and countless others who inhabit the space of holiness around the Father and the Lamb. Our Exegetical focus looks at the idea of time in Revelation as well as Christ's portrayal of a slain Lamb. Theologically, Revelation 5 upholds the timeless reality of the Triune God's sovereignty over all creation. In our Doxological examination I look at the identity of the Church as the timeless kingdom of priests.

⁵⁷ Koester gives a good visual description of Revelation's structural format on pg. 39

Exegetical

Beginning our section, the heavenly beings⁵⁸ rejoice at the ability of Christ (appearing as the slain lamb in 5:6) to open the sealed scroll. This action, only possible by actions of pure sacrifice, results in the hymn of verses 9 and 10. The metaphor resembles Old Testament worship. The described inner textuality ὥδῃν καινῇν (new song) comes from Psalms 33:3; 40:3; 96:1; 98:1; 144:9 as well as Isaiah 42:10. The Old Testament use expresses praise for victory, as well has messianic use in Jewish mid-rash.⁵⁹ The “newness” of this song identifies not temporal realities but a different content. For the first time this song can be sung. The accomplishment of the cross and resurrection causes a decidedly different reality. The song is “qualitatively different.”⁶⁰ An apocalyptic song, it marks an event changing the course of time. The time of humans forever bears the mark of the cross. καινῇν receives frequent use in Revelation because the character and quality of the redeemed world differs that much from the previous.⁶¹ This new age

⁵⁸ The 24 elders and living creatures are part of a large exegetical tradition of interpretation. These two groups serve as co-stars within John’s Apocalypse. Pages have been devoted to the specific identity and role of these beings. For the sake of brevity, for the rest of the paper we will operate under the following interpretation.

The 4 living creatures serve as a representation of creation, while simultaneously protecting the holiness of God the Father. They are part of the greater apocalyptic image bank of scripture, appearing in Ezekiel and Isaiah.

The 24 elders represent the totality of the people of God. The interpretation is based on the numerology of 12 and 12 (the tribes of Israel and the disciples).

⁵⁹ Beale 358

⁶⁰ Reddish 111

⁶¹ Harrington pg. 85

dominates from that point onwards. The old no longer exists because of the radical addition of Jesus as victor.

Introduced in chapter 5, the image of Christ as the slain Lamb predominates for the rest of Revelation. Far beyond sentimental or pastoral imagery, the slain lamb resonates with cultic imagery from Israel. The lamb presents another contrast with what was expected of the Messiah. The throne of God emphasizes the power of the Father, but the slain lamb shows that God exercises His grace and power.⁶² St. Augustine offers this extended treatise;

"Like a sheep he was led to be slaughtered, and like a lamb in the presence of the shearer he was without voice, thus he did not open his mouth." Who is this? Obviously the one about whom he goes on to say, "In humility his judgement was taken away. His generation, who shall relate?" I can see this model of humility in a king of such power and authority. Because this one, who is like a lamb not opening its mouth in the presence of the shearer, is himself "the lion from the tribe of Judah."

Who is this, both lion and lamb? He endured death as a lamb; he devoured it as a lion. Who is this, both lion and lamb? Gentle and strong, lovable and terrifying, innocent and mighty, silent when he was being judged, roaring when he comes to judge. Or perhaps both in his passion lamb and lion, and also in his resurrection lion and lamb. Let us see him as a lamb in his passion. It was stated a moment ago: "Like a lamb in the midst of his shearer he was without voice, thus he did not open his mouth." Let us see him as a lion in his passion: Jacob said, "You have gone up, lying down you have slept like a lion." Let us see him as a lamb in his resurrection.

The book of Revelation, when it was talking about the eternal glory of virgins, "They follow the lamb, it is said, wherever he goes." The same book of Revelation says, what I mentioned just now, "The lion from the tribe of Judah has conquered, to open the book."

Why a lamb in his passion? Because he underwent death without being guilty of any iniquity. Why a lion in his passion? Because in being slain he slew death. Why a lamb in his

⁶² Craddock, Fred. B "Preaching the Book of Revelation," *Interpretation* 40/3 (July 1986): 276.

resurrection? Because his innocence is everlasting. Why a lion in his resurrection? Because everlasting also in his might"
Sermon 375 A.I."⁶³

John's vision and use of the lamb inverts death. Instead of a defeat, John plays with paradox and turns defeat on its head. Christ, through his sacrificial death triumphs not over just evil, but the most endearing characteristic of the fall; the undebatable fact that humans must eventually die.⁶⁴ It is this Lamb that the countless masses, another recurring character in Revelation, drastically praise in verse 12 and all of creation agrees and amplifies the prayer in verse 13. The Lamb has made life on, in and a part of Earth very different. While a highly theological move, textually it is part of the imaginative exegetical core of Revelation.

Theological

Two distinct ideas in our section have a bearing on a deeper understanding of Revelation. These are the themes that help develop a drastically different hermeneutic. Instead of reading the book as bearing on a specific event in time, we instead read with the lens that Revelation has a timeless message to all those who follow Christ.

Getting past a fatalistic reading in Revelation normally should be the first major move in a fresh reading. One of the biggest identifiers of modernist eschatological thought involves individualism. Humans are preoccupied with their

⁶³ Augustine via Weinrich pg. 73

⁶⁴ John R. Miles *The Lamb of God in Early Christianity*, Freedman, David Noel, ed. The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary. Accordance electronic ed., version 2.1. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008.

standing in eternity. Individualism has fueled the majority of evangelical bursts in the last several hundred years. On its own, this is not problematic. When individualism is the primary thought of the afterlife, it fractures with the larger tradition and becomes thinly Christian.


God concerns Himself with His creation. If we easily proclaim the sovereignty of God, we must likewise affirm his caring control over all creation. Revelation ties itself to the rest of the Biblical canon through multiple allusions, but also functions as a magnificent climax interacting with the beginning of time. God exercises complete control over creation, allowing it to function perfectly. The cosmological concern of God in Genesis is reduplicated in Revelation. Creation is not cast aside, and the totality of voices in 5:13 respond to the actions of Jesus Christ. This three-tiered description comes from the Jewish understanding of the world. In Revelation, along with other ancient cosmologies, the sea symbolizes chaos and a more specific Hebraic thought identifies it with evil. Clearly, all in the created realm expresses praise towards the slain Lamb.

The four fold praise expressed in 5:14 separates each acclamation with the article. These are directed specifically at God and the Lamb. A deliberate grammatical movement, which is not present in v. 13 stresses each singular piece. Both God and the Lamb are worthy of these things, showing the development of a radical Christology. If creation recognizes Christ, what then must humanity do?

In 5:14, our section concludes with ἀμήν (amen). In our culture, we throw amen around. We might hear it in a sermon, at the end of a prayer or as a simple colloquialism to show strong agreement. Ἀμήν occurs eight times in Revelation (out of a total 129 in the New Testament). When we look at the placement of the occurrences of ἀμήν in Revelation, an important theological position emerges. Ἀμήν, used is found in 1:6;1:7; 3:14; 5:14; 7:12; 19:4; 22:20 and 22:21. Three of these locations⁶⁵ are outside the bounds of this thesis, but belong to the theological family of verses we are focusing on. Amen, as a proclamation, as a bearing on what happens in Revelation. It serves to end major sections of praise.

Contemporary use of amen as a figural ending or agreement does not speak of the theological significance of the idea. Using amen to agree implies a commitment to live to the degree expressed in the statement.⁶⁶ The BDAG glosses ἀμήν as “let it be so”, but gives a different definition as point 2, with the usage of ἀμήν in Revelation as “Christ as the ultimate affirmation” (Rev 3:14).⁶⁷

⁶⁵ 3:14; 7:12 and 19:4

⁶⁶  VanGemeren, Willem A., ed. *The New International Dictionary Of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*. Accordance electronic ed., version 1.1. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997.

⁶⁷ Bauer, W., F. W. Danker, F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich, eds. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*. 3d, Accordance electronic ed., version 1.5. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.

In Revelation, Amen is a weighty theological word. To use it means to both agree and promise to see the vision become reality. By agreeing with the praise of God and the Lamb, the speaker commits to the mission of the Lamb.

Doxological

Participating in the proclamations of universal reign allows us to be liturgical participants and transcend the past, present and future through the power of the Holy Spirit. We cannot exist, and claim Christ as Lord, but not be engaged in His work. Revelation calls the readers to corporate action on behalf of God.

For Protestants, priestly language seems odd. We must remember the metaphor from the Old Testament and the promised fulfillment of those who align with God. We will be a kingdom of priests, without distinction or contrast. All of us, together in service, are linked to the future hope of this mission while remaining in the present. We have been made, situated in the present to an action in the future.⁶⁸ The Christian church must reject the fatalism on the last few centuries of Western eschatology. M. Eugene Boring calls this prophetic role as “present binding instead of present fleeing.”⁶⁹ The Church represents the

⁶⁸ The grammatical construction of ἡγόρασας (ransomed) in v. 9 and ἐποίησας (have made them) in v.10 is the aorist active indicative. This is held in tension by the future active indicative of βασιλεύσουσιν (they will reign) in v.10

⁶⁹ Boring, M. E. "The Theology of Revelation : 'The Lord Our God the Almighty Reigns','" *Interpretation* 40, no. 3 (1986): 257-269. *New Testament Abstracts*, EBSCOhost (accessed April 14, 2011).

continuance of the kingdom amidst the here and now. John does not assume Christ has left, so we shouldn't focus on escape either.⁷⁰

The Christian Church lives as an Exodus community. In the midst of our time in the desert, the promised kingdom floats in front of us. Some treat this as a horse being lead by a carrot just out of reach; but Revelation tells us that we are part of that great gathered body because of Christ. We are liberated into service. The eternal vocation of the Church will be a recurrent theme in Revelation.

We are a doxological people because we are focused on the true worth of Christ, set in contrast to the false worth of fallen Babylon. We are liberated to mission (Rev 5:10). We must confront the God and history issue as an apocalyptic people. When justice is desperately needed, we know that history is not over yet.

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Part of corporate practice means developing doxological and eschatological time. The idea of *prolepsis* carries great significance. In worship, the future is not just talked about, but instead is treated as established fact. Our predetermined agenda does not surround each individual, but has the hope of the world in hand. Singing a few songs about human oriented action directed at God and hearing a sermon about our finances will not promote the true doxological/eschatological purpose of the people of God. Our services need to serve as the

⁷⁰ Caird, G. B. *A commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine*. Hendrickson Publishers, 1987. pg. 77

⁷¹ Boring 260

boundaries to this new world. This new narrated world will be full of “dramatic density, sensual actuality and brutal realism.”⁷² You can consider this to be the opposite of seeker sensitive! But because the embodied grouping called Christian truly believes it, the evangelical force of the meeting will be an actualized reality and not a battle with rationalism. We are a kingdom of priests in service to God.

The loss of our story in the previous centuries meant we assumed those outside of the people of God already knew who we were and who God is. This assumption must be changed, and the answer must not be thought of as growth strategy but as reality. We become what we worship and we worship the God Man who bought us with a price to serve in an everlasting kingdom; dwelling with the Father and communing through the power of the Holy Spirit.

⁷² Jenson, *How the World Lost It's Story* pg. 34

Revelation 7:9-17

Revelation chapter 7 serves as a key point for the whole book. For any group of Christians attempting to reevaluate the place of Revelation as a corporate book, chapter 7 would be an excellent first read. In it, whomever is preaching can focus on larger scriptural theological ideas, such as salvation, hope and grace or they can use it to begin building a new hermenutic of reading Revelation.

Focusing on the timeless (while still in bounds of time), instead of an escapist supplies an easy exercise. Exegetically, structure gives a new way to read the chained visions in Revelation helping the reader better understand complicated portions like tribulation. The wide biblical view of salvation as fulfillment is the center of the theological focus. In the doxological section, eschatological leadership and allegiance round the segment.

Exegetical

Structure forms Revelation. The book cycles through vision after vision. Various textual markers clue the reader into the structure. Two of these markers are prevalent in chapter seven and distinguish our pericope as a separate section from the song of the 144,000 in the first part of the chapter.

Μετὰ ταῦτα appears nine times in Revelation.⁷³ This cycle of vision is commonly translated as “after this.” Beale argues against the use of Μετὰ ταῦτα as only structural note (focusing on the use in Rev 1:19), and applies the larger eschatological idea of Daniel 2:28-29. The relationship with Daniel’s phrase ἐπ’ ἐσχάτων τῶν ἡμερῶν (LXX), and the relationship signifies a future oriented state in both eschatological visions.⁷⁴ While strong, I think a deeper theological shape exists in the structural use of Μετὰ ταῦτα.⁷⁵ Other commentators note how the wide use of the phrase both begins and closes visionary experiences in Revelation. Robert G. Bratcher and Howard A. Hatton in the UBS *A Handbook On The Revelation To John* note that the phrase serves as a link between two distinct narratives.⁷⁶ Reddish adds to this idea, but cautions the reader from taking a too literal vision.⁷⁷ I would disagree with him, not because of use of apocalyptic literary form, but because discouraging the visionary sense of Revelation is a classic move by those who are still distancing themselves from the book.

What if the cyclorama of visions in Revelation uses Μετὰ ταῦτα as a written way of catching your breath, and instead attempts (while still theological)

⁷³ 1:19, 4:1, 7:1, 7:9, 9:12, 15:5, 18:1, 19:1, 20:3

⁷⁴ Beale 152-164

⁷⁵ Mulholland offers a different grammatical argument on pgs. 35 and 89

⁷⁶ Bratcher, Robert G., and Howard A. Hatton. *A Handbook on the Revelation to John*. American Bible Society, 1993. pg. 86

⁷⁷ Reddish pg. 94

to theologically describe an encounter with God outside of the grasp of traditional language? The similarities of the events stacked in Revelation leads to an unorthodox description. The sheer amount of occurrences of the phrase leads us to view it structurally, canonically and theologically.

Another structural pattern in Revelation plays on the senses of seeing and hearing. In 7:9 John sees the multitude and they interpret their purpose in verse 10. This sensory exegesis also occurs in 5:7-14 and 21:1-6 of our survey.⁷⁸ Instead of face value, the twist of consumption between seeing and hearing forces us to take time and realize that our first impressions might not be the most accurate.

In chapter 7, one particular group of people fascinates readers. In 7:1-8 the 144,000 are sealed as the servants of God. Using the language of Jewish tribal affiliation, 12,000 from each tribe are numbered. In 7:9 John begins this new pericope by seeing an untold number of people. The multitude (ὄχλος) joins the living creatures and elders in the cast of primary actors in Revelation. There are two schools of interpretation. Some argue for two differing groups of people; such as Reddish who sees the 144,000 representing the martyrs with the multitude being the entirety of the faithful.⁷⁹ His suggestion offers hope to the martyrs and looks at the special focus John might have on those facing the ultimate test. Osborne also agrees with this reading.⁸⁰ A literal reading would assume two

⁷⁸ As well as 14:1 and 14:2-5; 15:2 with 15:3-4; 17:1-6 and 17:7-18

⁷⁹ Reddish Pg. 152

⁸⁰ Osborne 318

different groups.⁸¹ Another option takes the numberless crowd as a replication of the 144,000. Just as in the literary style of seeing/hearing, the crowd is universally drawn from throughout the world and time marks the true reality. Such a large number would be a sight indeed.

We have one last piece to exegete. In direct connection with the discussion of martyrs, an angel tells John that the multitude are those who have come through the θλίψεως (tribulation/ordeal). For those exegeting Revelation in community, this is a very important verse. Forming a sense of the prophetic future will be a necessary intentional move. Care must be given when explaining the meaning of θλίψεως. The focus of a hermeneutic of involvement surrounds a better definition of Tribulation. BDAG glosses θλίψεως in two movements; trouble that inflicts distress/oppression or an inward experience of distress. A words study of θλίψεως turns up nine occurrences in the New Testament, this being the single incident in Revelation. New Testament usage never relates any idea of a period of disastrous time. Placing tribulation in the present forces the reader to realize ways they might have been overcome or tempted. The untold crowd will be made up of those who did not bend or conform to worldly living. Tribulation becomes a matter of holiness, having nothing to do with an escape or weaponized judgement. Tribulation began with the suffering of Christ and continues until Eschaton.⁸² This ordeal exists in the present.

⁸¹ see Beale 424

⁸² Resseguie, James L. *Revelation of John, The: A Narrative Commentary*. Baker Academic, 2009. pg.139

A critical examination of situations like this need to be done considering how the local community will function around the decisions. We need to study and express Revelation in a manner that does not allow passivity.

Theological

Separating the theological from the exegetical often walks a thin line. When passages are full of grammatical ambiguity, the more precise and in-depth mind of the exegete thrives. When scripture encourages careful integration of life, inspiration and the wisdom of the Church the theologian thrives. Revelation 7 provides a homely dwelling for both.

By now, we have built up a small company of images and thematic destinations such as the universality of Gods people, the radical person of Jesus Christ, and the care that God has for those who assign themselves to Him. Part of the theological task of interpreting Revelation lies in the method of explanation and how the Apocalypse fits into the greater narrative of scripture. Revelation belongs both at the End of the canon while occupying the middle in the life of the current church.

The greater Old Testament story of fulfillment culminates with Revelation. Instead of grace being a passive topic for Sunday School, Revelation gives us the radical and subversive meaning. *Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb! 7:10.* What a dramatic statement to make. Salvation

defined here means victory;⁸³ others forgo lexical decisions and instead define it with a canonical lens. Fiorenza relates salvation to the well being of the empire of God.⁸⁴ Salvation focuses on creations well being. Understanding salvation in Revelation means moving past the idea that salvation exists as an action of God. Instead, salvation belongs to the inherent attribute of who the Triune God is. Throughout history, God has proved salvation as a defining characteristic.⁸⁵ Our salvation comes from the realization of who God is, and the actions of undeserved grace. The crowd in 7:10 does not echo a foreign abstraction. Standing as the redeemed they have personal and corporate knowledge of grace. The subversiveness of grace happens when we realize that out of all the heavenly beings, we have an interior knowledge of God they do not. While they never experienced the fall intimately, grace allows us to know God in a sense they can only imagine.

Victory reconfigures the world and time. Faith practiced means Christians simultaneously dwelling in the present as well as the future. This proleptic life hurtles us towards the future. We participate with Christ by being washed in His blood. By not compromising, we are rewarded with the full sense of provision promised by God throughout the scriptures.

⁸³ Caird 100

⁸⁴ Fiorenza pg. 68

⁸⁵ Wright, Christopher J. H. *Salvation Belongs to Our God: Celebrating the Bible's Central Story*. IVP Academic, 2008. pg.45

The utmost provision is promised to us in Revelation 21:4, and is alluded to in verse 7:15-17. To interpret this sequence as an eternal worship service would both disservice the eternal hospitality of God, but also narrowly focus the text into late 19th century Revivalism. Much of the dwelling and temple language in chapter 7 comes from Ezekiel 37:26-28:

I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; and I will bless them and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary among them forevermore. My dwelling place shall be with them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Then the nations shall know that I the LORD sanctify Israel, when my sanctuary is among them forevermore NRSV

Cemented in the Old Testaments promised fulfillment are images like these. The idea of “in the midst” destroys the notion of a journey for humanity, but evolves even more in 21:1-6. God promises His habitation in Leviticus 26:11, by promising to “place his dwelling” among his people.⁸⁶ Hebrew has two words to describe God place of dwelling, שָׁכַן and יָשַׁב. When the textual tradition of God’s dwelling, יָשַׁב belongs to the idea of God in heaven (such as Psalms 2:4). Formal use highlights the otherness of God. שָׁכַן carries a different meaning. For God to dwell in this manner, humanity has an intimate relationship with the creator in the future. While the Old Testament renderings appear to be liturgical, the focus on glory must be part of the theological reality of John.

⁸⁶ Koester, Craig R. *Dwelling of God: The Tabernacle in the Old Testament, Intertestamental Jewish Literature, and the New Testament*. Catholic Biblical Assn of Amer, 1989. pg. 124

In Revelation, the idea of God dwelling with man fleshes out the true idea of salvation. Perfect heaven exists because with God comes ultimate peace. Those who have weathered the storm are now protected by the type of world that God will inhabit. God's glory means that the totality of the divine creator takes up all space, and nothing not holy can be part of this space. Salvation enters us as a people and individuals into the space of salvation. By ascribing this power to the Lamb, the gracious conquering nature of Jesus secured this future world.

Doxological

Revelation 7:9-17 calls those in pastoral leadership to new places. Reading this passage forces us to realize the future. Christian churches need a prophetically eschatological leadership. Eugene Peterson notes the quality of apocalyptic as the responsibility of the pastor; with the major movements being worship, addressing evil and leading a faithful congregation.⁸⁷ Leading “apocalyptically” requires a sense of deep time as well as intentional moves to embody the narrative story of God in worship. John consistently grapples with alternative empires in Revelation, but his attack focuses not on rhetoric or ethics, but the centrality of worship. If the promised future eschatological dwelling of man focuses on the affects of the holy descent of God, then our worship should be a visioned activity. Worship re-stories us as a people. By properly defining the

⁸⁷ Peterson, Eugene H. *The Contemplative Pastor: Returning to the Art of Spiritual Direction*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993. pg.149

prophetic as that which draws us closer to God, instead of futuristic telling, those in Pastoral leadership lead their communities into this new reality. The oral engagement with Revelation tunes the congregations ears to “imaginative participation” and reconfigures their awareness of social space.⁸⁸

We create actual spaces of hope in expectation of the final hope. People can only dwell in the place that they see, so our proclaimed word must be responded to out of this hope.⁸⁹ If we see God in the present and the future, it will certainly change the way we live in our world now.

To do this, worshipping communities need to understand and own their transformation into being a “kingdom of priests.” Beyond mere lip service, John fully integrates this into the fabric of Revelation. Introduced in 1:6 and 5:10 it matures in 7:15, the redeemed are eternally consecrated by the washing of sins (in 1:6) and being purchased by Christ (5:9-10). Instead of the idea of heaven being an eternal time of leisure, the church participates entirely within the make up of God. This does not mean heaven exists as a non stop worship service, but because of the awareness of the divine men and women are able to exercise their humanity to the utmost capability.

The life of perseverance and purity marks them as a special group. The universality of the church, composed of different races, locations, time periods

⁸⁸ Stanley P. Saunders pgs. 122-125

⁸⁹ Charles L. Campbell in Green, Joel B., and Michael Pasquarello III. *Narrative Reading, Narrative Preaching: Reuniting New Testament Interpretation and Proclamation*. Baker Academic, 2003.

and allegiances makes this kingdom especially aware of injustice. The total allegiance to the Lamb causes this group to have a different ethic. Revelation only talks about salvation in these passages of worship. This group finds their salvation, their total well being, not in human systems, but in the divine. Everything they do contrasts the empire!

Those in the kingdom of priests share in the victory by not worshipping the beast; the representation of all the unholy things of this world. They have witnessed the effects of a life not following the world. Citizenship means something different, because ultimately we belong to a different place. In verses 15-17, two different grammatical tenses are present. Verse 15 places these activities in the present, while 16-17 uses the future. Faithfulness to the activities of our priesthood matter now and have a direct correlation to the future. Having a passive view of fulfillment can only lead us to a passive faith!

Worship built strongly in the future while existing in the present will create communities of alternate allegiance.

Revelation 21:1-6

The three previous sections look to hope in the future. Starting in chapter 21, we enter into a different visionary state. The victorious tone of the previous chapters now lives in a fully inaugurated reality. Evil and all of the things that comprise it has been destroyed. Revelation 21 and 22 can be seen as the full sense of everything written in scripture before. The physical promised land in the Old Testament prefigures the entire fulfillment of the Eschaton. Rich in theological content, these sections point the community towards the particular Christian vision bounded in the alternative city of New Jerusalem. The reality and tradition of New Jerusalem is focused on exegetically. The theological cosmology of Revelation encourages those locked in the present. In worship, doxological hope stands over the problems in the current world.

Exegetical

One of the fascinating structural patterns in Revelation occurs in verse 5. Only twice in Revelation do we hear the audible voice of the Father. Verse 1:8 God declares “I am the Alpha and the Omega”, the most cumulative of statements in the Apocalypse. We know who controls the beginning, end and everything in

between. In verses 21:5-6 we hear from the Father “I am making all things new.”

This is a repetition of the statement of universal control from 1:8. Beale argues that these two verses hem in the entire book, and the Father states his complete sovereignty over everything in creation.⁹⁰ We understand that the circumstances between beginning and end also mirror the repetition of verses 1:5 and 21:6.

Divine sovereignty underscores the events of Revelation, from the scenes of the Holy throne room to the degradation of life on earth. While some might ask in the here and now for divine response, the words of 21:5 give us an answer to how God answers evil. It is only fitting for the one reigning over creation to have the power to remake it. Complete cleansing and renewal gives the best response to justice ever. God is in the business of doing new things (Is 43:19)

To really understand the involvement of new creation, we come back to the discussion of “new.” Previously we looked at *καινός* and the idea of a “new song” in 5:9. *καινός* marks a reality that has not existed before, existing in contrast to what once was. Just as God remakes the individual believers through the process of prevenient grace, justification and sanctification, the world goes through this process and the end result gives us a better earth than we can imagine. *καινός* is “qualitative newness.”⁹¹

New truly defines the cosmological reality comprised in New Jerusalem. Beale notes that we should see this vision as a figural description instead of the

⁹⁰ Beale 1055

⁹¹ Osborne 729

literal new creation,⁹² and I agree with him. This does not discount the scriptural reality, but encourages us to see the totality of the new creation. Such a vivid scene shocks us and reminds us of the sovereignty of God. The new creation will be easily discerned in its newness by how it differs from the old. Formally, the earth was known for a different allegiance and the place where evil dwelt.⁹³ The simple grammatical marker γὰρ in 21:1 shows the qualitative reason why this world can be described as new. Everything that made up the former life is gone. The description that the former world has ἀπέρχονται (gone away) expresses how the old ways have discontinued. The things of the old world no longer remain more in either movement, idea or geographic existence. The world truly will be remade.

A creation like this can only bear witness to holiness if contained of holy beings. We already know that God, as Father, Son and Spirit hold complete authority over the world. The others that fill creation must also be holy. While the metaphor of the redeemed as a kingdom of priests has been present throughout Revelation, at this point we see the consummation. The actions of God in permanent dwelling and relationship with those who have endured cause the state where the kingdom of priests can exist.

This movement symbolizes something much more real than a pure ethical state. To be in constant communion with God, while in the perfected earth,

⁹² Beale 1040

⁹³ Resseguie 252

requires us to rethink our ideas of heaven and the purpose of the afterlife. God gifts a world free from the events that threaten life.⁹⁴ In an involved crescendo, the telling of this insured future life finds its basis from the writings of the prophets. Instead of merely alluding to, Revelation 21:1-6 takes up the call of Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel and Zechariah. The desires for the place of God in Psalms now happen eternally. Exegetically Revelation is not a foreign document outside of the canon, nor does it represent ill-formed theological meanderings, but the vision of promise. Because of this, the Church will embody the promises of God given to the prophets. Scripture has been pointing directly to this time,⁹⁵ and the things that Israel could only hope for. God has now made a reality.⁹⁶

Theological

Even while looking ahead to future glory, those walking through Revelation must deal with evil. Even while presenting a positivist view of the End, evil should be handled and discussed. To fail to do so would just be a pendulum swing in the opposite direction to the interpretations we fear most. The call to faithful endurance in Revelation only matters if this world now gets accurate representation. The use of Revelation by those that live in the margins

⁹⁴ Beale 1041

⁹⁵ Osborne 726

⁹⁶ Reddish 402

echo this strategy. Even in the safest situations, evil exists and must be named.

Those who give their allegiance to the Lamb will always be persecuted.

The beginning of chapter 21 makes several cosmological statements about the world. John mentions the sea being part of the passing of the former world. To our ears now, this would appear to be another material addition to emphasize “the world”. In Ancient Near East cosmology, the sea plays a fundamentally different role. In one way, the sea symbolizes incompleteness.⁹⁷ Without shape or void (Gen 1:2) the sea gives the full sense of rebellion. The creation myths of the ANE gave rise to tales of sea monsters and the gods battling against the power of an uncontrollable mass.⁹⁸ The image of the dragon in Revelation 12 and 20 brings this narrating ideology into our study. Evil exists and desires to consume everything God has made. It wants command and reign. The sea symbolizes these previous world’s desires for control. The absence of the sea tells us that we will not have to battle evil; but that evil will no longer be a present reality. It will not have a life, spiritual or physical, in the new creation.

It is easy to list the things that give and bear pain. Teaching Revelation requires that we talk about such issues. Revelation 21:4 (and its similar reading in 7:16,17) name the destroying actions which will be wiped away. We also have a parallel use of tears. Not only will the evil things that cause us anguish cease to

⁹⁷ Caird 262

⁹⁸ *Monsters: The Historicization of the Sea Monster* in Ryken, Leland, Jim Wilhoit, and Tremper Longman, eds. *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*. Accordance electronic ed., version 1.1. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1998.

exist, but God will recognize our lamenting and confession. Tears symbolize a unique character of heart through scripture. Tears signify the inward orientation towards God (Psalms 51:17). The vail of tears will be lifted, as our exodus to the promised land is recognized in Isaiah 25:8, because God will swallow up death and all that it brings with it. This direct influence on Revelation 7:16 and 21:4 sums up all the Old Testament tradition of repentance. Tears physically manifest sorrow. Just as we have to discuss the presence of evil, in the End we must also confess where we have allowed evil to reign in place of God.

Doxological

Orienting corporate worship around the future realities in Revelation 21 forces communities to decide their allegiance. While the ultimate defeat and destruction of evil sits in the future, worshipping communities exercising holy time live as if consummation has happened. The tension of prolepsis and anamnesis weaves itself through the worship of the Church. Subtle drumbeats are now full fledged songs. This practice happens alongside current tear-shedding and prayers for justice. Christian worship happens in a cosmic time space manifold.

The strong feature to be lifted up considering Revelation 21 should be eschatological hope. Hope is absent from our current culture. Instead, we rely on the weak substitutes of endurance and optimism. As Anthony Kelly puts it “Hope refuses to see the ultimate meaning of life as more of the same.”⁹⁹ Hope happens

⁹⁹ Kelly pg 5

when the church invites itself into the future, because the church already belongs there.

Local congregations must envision radical justice, harmony and the livelihood of all. Eschatological hope such as this gets people persecuted! When Jesus Christ came proclaiming the kingdom of God on earth, he invited every one of us to understand it as truth. Once again the church has a narrative of resistance, and in current Western culture we are fighting against the injustices caused by individualism, greed, manipulation, and consumption. The gospel root of loving the neighbor and loving God exists only inside a hospitable people who choose to make inclusion their ethic because they recognize that God was first hospitable to them.

In heaven, the church has a relational home. The dwelling of God descends into the place created for humans to thrive. How often in our worship do we treat God as though He is far away, or beg for the Holy Spirit to come in our midst? Worship leaders often describe their task as “leading people to the throne.” The heartfelt hymnody of revivalism often sings of “homes on the other shore” or other sentiments that reference heaven being at another place,¹⁰⁰ In the new creation, the physicality of earth is cleansed, and the dwelling place of God has

¹⁰⁰ For a good reading of the power of revivalism hymnody see both Veith, Gene Edward, and Thomas L. Wilmeth. *Honky-Tonk Gospel: The Story of Sin and Salvation in Country Music*. First Edition. Baker Book House, 2001.

Marini, Stephen. “Hymnody as History: Early Evangelical Hymns and the Recovery of American Popular Religion.” *Church History* 71, no. 2 (June 1, 2002): 273-306.

come to humans. Worship should use the language of God with us instead of us with God. While the reciprocal relationality of the former might be true, it has become theologically problematic. Worship should passionately embed the framework of New Jerusalem to the core. Why worship in a way that is not true?

Worship rehearses Christian time. Jenson urges us towards worship that is “unabashedly events of shared apocalyptic vision”, because worship shows us what we will become.¹⁰¹ The world is an illusion, but heaven is the reality.

¹⁰¹ Jenson *How The World Lost It's Story* 36

Revelation 21:1-22:5

As we transition into the final movement of Revelation, a more complicated reading emerges. Every other one of our six focus passages lends itself to congregational reading. Parts of 21:10-22:5 are good for this, but structurally the section resembles more of the logistical data found in the Old Testament building instructions such as the Arc, the tabernacle, the Temple and the items of worship to be included. Where a casual reader might quickly read over this passage, this literary style occurs in specific places in the scriptures for a reason. By carefully reading 21:10-21, we are participating in another key form of scripture. Our exegetical reading will look at this idea, while the theological reading will consider theological universalism as well as a specific reading strategy of Revelation. Our doxological reading will examine what it means to relationally engage with God.

Exegetical

Our reading opens to John being carried away by the spirit (καὶ ἄπῃ νεγκέν με ἐν πνεύματι), signaling a new portion to John's greater vision. Textually, this section compares linguistically with 17:1-3 in use of language. In chapter 17, the representative city of Evil (Babylon) is described, in contrast with the holy city Jerusalem which chapter 21 introduces.

In chapter 17, the spirit carries John off into the wilderness. In 21:10 the Spirit carries John to a high mountain top. The symbolic focus attests to the wilderness and mountain not being geographic, but symbolic ideas attached to wilderness and mountains. Mountains categorically are the places where Gods people will dwell in abundance, where they have liminal experiences in the presence of God.¹⁰² In Apocalyptic literature, mountains appear with such frequency they should be viewed as characters. They stand in opposition to the evil that exists below.

In comparison, the wilderness symbolizes a barren wasteland, for people with no home. Disobedience reigns as the qualifier of the wilderness. The ritual of the scapegoat in Leviticus 16 ritualizes wilderness as the place for evil spirits.¹⁰³ In the scriptures, God protects those both journeying through and living in the wilderness. It would be safe to say that wilderness and mountains oppose each other.

The mountain language in chapter 21 most likely draws from Exekiel 40:2, which happens to be one of the locations of textual borrowing that influences this segment.¹⁰⁴ This segment in 21:10-21 uses many influential places of scripture, building a holy cataclysmic vision of end. This futuristic vision

¹⁰² *Mountains* by Ryken, Leland, Jim Wilhoit, and Tremper Longman, eds. Dictionary of Biblical Imagery. Accordance electronic ed., version 1.1. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1998.

¹⁰³ *Wilderness* in Ryken, Leland, Jim Wilhoit, and Tremper Longman, eds. Dictionary of Biblical Imagery. Accordance electronic ed., version 1.1. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1998.

¹⁰⁴ Reddish pgs. 405-406

concentrates on one specific idea; the permanent establishment of God's presence with His people.

The detail in the measurement and composition of the city involves two different traditions. The first resembles the cultic construction language of Eden, The Arc, The Tabernacle and Solomon's Temple. The Second composition uses the amplification of prophetic visions of the eternal place of God. Both combined give us the full metaphorical sense of the meaning of being God's people in eternity.¹⁰⁵

The creation story (Genesis 1-3), Noah and his arc (Genesis 6-9), Moses making the Tabernacle (Exodus 25-31,33,35-40) and Solomon's Temple (1 Kings 6-8) describe the detailed make up of the physical places. Also, Ezekiel's visionary temple in Ezekiel 47 shares many literary similarities. In all of these passages, God either constructs (as in Genesis 1-3) or instructs a representative of the faithful to carefully build a place of salvation and dwelling with God. Scripture tells us that God cares about the places He meets with His people. In many accounts, the instructions given represent examples of images seen in Revelation. Yet again, Revelation lives not as an exiled book in the canon, but as the fulfillment of the scriptures.

The second tradition follows the theme of canonicity, but also builds a smattering of images from the various prophetic sources. The exegete peels back

¹⁰⁵ Just as in 21:1-6, the use of metaphorical or figurative language in Revelation doesn't challenge its faithfulness, but instead draws the reader into a world that can't be constructed without such dramatic imagery.

layers of the onion to find the embedded images that have been made true.

Ezekiel 40-48 gives us a textual foundation; Ezekiel saw a future temple and John does as well. They both prophecy the reality of a future with God. The measurements of the temple refer the reader to Zechariah 2:6, and the foundation of precious stones is found in Isaiah 54. The abundance of gold in the city can be found in the composition of Solomon's temple in 1 Kings 6-7. The precious stones can also be found on the breastplate of the high priest in Exodus 28:17-20 and 39:8-14.¹⁰⁶

A literalist would be tempted to make a list and check off various prophecies from the Old Testament about the permanence of God. This would satisfy desires of accuracy and a rational description of heaven. To take such measures would functionally kill the intended reason behind this passage. John creates a massive vision of the heavenly temple, to again emphasize the sovereignty and the future freedom as a kingdom of priests. Note that John never mentions a physical temple, but instead mentions God will be among His people (21:4). The description of construction in 21:10-21 multiplies what people once considered grand. Earthly temples were places of sacrifice and exclusion. Now, instead of the glory and presence of God existing in one place with limited access, it will be with all the people. In this way, a figurative reading builds up dreams of what is to come. The promised future has not changed throughout scripture. John simply adds a new verse to the ancient song of heaven.

¹⁰⁶ For an extended background on this, see Beale pgs. 1080-1088 *The Background of the Precious Stones*.

Theological

There are few theological conundrums that get the modern evangelical church going. While the masses might argue for or against theological universalism in Rob Bell's *Love Wins*,¹⁰⁷ a more historical take on the subject fills the scholastic world and finds theological footing in Revelation 21. The verse in question is 21:24 *The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it* (NRSV).

The major players in this verse are the nations and the kings of the earth. Because of previous connotations with the two terms, some read 21:24 as Heaven ultimately being a universalist state, in which all who eventually bow before God will gain entrance. The kings of the earth appear in 17:2. They are the wicked rulers cooperating with Babylon. The positive image used in favor of a universalist reading comes from Isaiah 60, with the kings mentioned in their submission and entrance into the city. The nations also appear in Isaiah 60, performing the same actions as in Revelation 21:25. The nations align with Babylon in chapter 17 and are mentioned as absent from the book of life.

The arguments for a universalist reading stem from applying various pieces from the canon to 21:25, focusing on the Psalms and non-canonical writings.¹⁰⁸ The lake of fire serves as the eternal judgement for those who align

¹⁰⁷ Bell, Rob. *Love Wins: A Book About Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived*. HarperOne, 2011.

¹⁰⁸ See Beale's notes on Rissi and Vogelgesang on pgs. 1097 and 1098

with evil. Some feel as though since the kings of earth and nations thematically are linked with evil in previous chapters, and such condemned to the lake of fire, their inclusion in verse 25 shows there is redemption out of the lake of fire.

The constant tension in reading Revelation involves the point between promise and warning.¹⁰⁹ More often than not, applying literalist thought to Revelation delineates from the greater purpose of the book. Revelation 19:10, 20:10,14-15 are the final words for evil and their permanent dwelling in anguish. Verse 21:27 even parallels 20:15, showing that purity and allegiance to the Lamb qualifies an entry into the Lambs book of life.

21:24-26 shows the future transition of power. Osborne notes how instead of wealth, the kings of the earth now bring glory into the city.¹¹⁰ Previously commerce and acquisition rule, the glory of God now abides as supreme importance to those who dwell in his presence. Glory radiates from the new city so powerfully lights are not needed (21:23), not celestial or mechanical. All glory is given to God, and those who recognize His glory willingly offer themselves as worshippers. The universal identity of God's people from Revelation 5:9 and 7:9 serves as the controlling image for the nations. God does offer a universal salvation; but the confines are defined by faith and not mere creation.

Revelation draws people to accept something. In the End, both fallen Babylon and New Jerusalem will be made up by people proclaiming allegiances.

¹⁰⁹ Reddish 411

¹¹⁰ Osborne 763

There will be no middle ground, no double agents or neutral countries. In the final judgement, God gives ample chances for people to declare the proper allegiance, but final justice will be exercised against those who do not turn from idolatry.¹¹¹ God calls us out of our lives enslaved to sin. In His ultimate hospitality, God will claim those from every nation, not just Israel.

In creating two different cities, Revelation forms what can be best described as an alternative worldview for those currently living amidst fallen Babylon. The careful step of reading figural literature, and then applying it to the current world develops the eschatological practice of the church. Eschatological vision keeps us engaged and removed from an escapist and fatalistic reading of Revelation. God promises the utmost level of security for His people; living in a city with open gates (21:25) and perfect purity (21:27). The great reversal of Eden will take place as God promises face to face relationships with His people (22:4).

Reading this list in our focused segment prepares the reader theologically, but also gives a comparative vision of what this world is not. The paradox of love and allegiance happens. God desires a people, but to gain entrance into the Eschaton reversal has to happen.

¹¹¹ Beale, G. K. *We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry*. IVP Academic, 2008. pg. 264

Doxological

Revelation 21:10-22:5 speaks of a future church fully engaged with God. This should dominate corporate worship. Revelation 22:4 promises the church the right to “see his face”, breaking the need for the Holy of Holies. In a world that struggles for any sense of belonging, the radical message of eternal relationship opposes an individualistic world.

John’s vision becomes possible because the sovereign presence of God and the Lamb are at the center of New Jerusalem. The final scene of John oscillates Ezekiel’s final vision of the future eschatological city’s name: “The Lord is There” (Ezekiel 48:35). The lack of a temple means the entire city will be a place of intimate communion. God’s provision destroys all other needs.

Contrasting the vision of fallen Babylon, John sees a symbolic vision the truth of the inhabitants. In 17:1, John witnesses the judgement of the great whore, the antichrist, responsible for bringing the nations to sin and judgement. In 21:9, John is shown the bride, the redeemed church.¹¹² The key feature of New Jerusalem is the relationship that exists between Christ and his Church.

Much modern worship is surrounded by the false theological idea that the Spirit of God gifts His presence when worship is emotional, honest, or broken enough. While a lengthy argument can be constructed against this idea, one of the strongest arguments can come from these final chapters of Revelation. If eternity means God dwelling amongst humans, instead of humans dwelling with God,

¹¹² Beale, *Revelation* 1064

shouldn't current worship reflect this idea? How has this milieu affected scores of worshippers who feel as though they are not in touch with God enough?

Revelation is not about the salvation of an individual, but about God bringing a people to Himself. Worship that reflects this idea will create communities that understand both the sovereignty of God and the love that Christ has for His church. Hope exists in the fact that the Creator desires to give this eternal life. Worship now tastes hope and expects it.

Revelation 22:12-14, 16-17, 20-21

We now come to the final section in our examination of Revelation. We end in many of the same ways as we began: with the supreme control and sovereignty of God as exercised because of the action of the cross by Jesus Christ. Revelation cycles through these patterns, always ending each section of woe and destruction with worship proclaiming the authority of God. Ripe with promise, this final section serves as a gigantic arc of life that began in Genesis. In both the beginning and the end, the tree of life lives within the midst of life. The exegetical section discusses how translation and definitions help us interpret Revelation. The theological portion addresses judgement in our current culture and how works play into salvation. Finally, we will look at how a doxological orientation exists within a liturgical reading of Revelation and the power of the new redemptive day.

Exegetical

When preparing a sermon, translation is sometimes passed over. With the amount of excellent modern English versions of the Bible, neglecting translation allows more time for different work. However, I have found that the theological task of translation often offers a reading that doesn't easily come across in most translations. Spending the time with in brief word study, or consulting a resource

that examines the theological content of the various glossings and occurrences can make a “boring” passage extremely life changing!

In Revelation, the complicated images and use of the *hapax legomenon*¹¹³ necessitate spending time with the vocabulary. These tiny details are fleshed out in the entire book. The visual nature of the book forces the interpreter to spend time accurately learning the meaning of both the original reader/hearer and the modern listener. In his book *Motel of the Mysteries*,¹¹⁴ David Macaulay tells a fictional story of an archeologist in the future excavating a late 20th century motel. With no idea what the property was originally used for, he assumes it is a burial complex. He catalogues and gives to every artifact a use within the paradigm. To think of a toilet being a sacred urn and the double beds serving as crypt is absurd! Since the archeologist is not aware of the true use, his dramatic interpretation is validated. If we are to ignoring the specific imagery and wording in Revelation, we would be committing a similar error.

An interesting illustrative example can be found in this last section. It occurs in verse 22:14. πλύνω (wash) describes the purification of the redeemed, a symbol of passing through trials. Found twice in Revelation,¹¹⁵ this textual

¹¹³ *Hapax Legomenon* are words that extremely infrequently in a text. The measurement and boundaries differ, but a healthy estimate is that the word occurs less than 10 times in the Bible. Witherington (on page 3) notes that 1 out of every 8 words in Revelation are *hapax*.

¹¹⁴ Macaulay, David. *Motel of the Mysteries*. Graphia, 1979.

¹¹⁵ 7:14.. they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb

variant places is also in verse 1:5.¹¹⁶ The three readings combined give us picture of the actions of Christians in the midst of persecution and in the final days. Jesus affirms those in Sardis that have not dirtied their clothing and are still dressed in white (3:14).

In the End purity matters. This differs from fundamentalist introspection as it lifts up acts of resistance. The “clean” are those who have refused to participate in allegiance to another. The reward for this purity is authority and a return to Edenic vocation.¹¹⁷ We find *πλύνω* in the present tense, translated as *washing*. Where many expect Revelation to only speak of the future. In present and ongoing actions such as this the church finds resistive ammunition. Revelation cannot be read or interpreted as a passive book.

Theological

Revelation causes a reader to examine their life. Far from unsettling, those who believe and conform to Jesus are among those who find hope in this book. For those who align with evil, and refuse to recognize Jesus, a different story unfolds. In contemporary culture, judgement does not find a place of popularity. Gaining a proper reading reckons judgement in the 21st century. Separating a

¹¹⁶ *λύω* (loosed) is noted in the NRSV as reading washed. While the critical examination might seem inconsequential, the bracketing of the idea should point the reader towards a closer examination.

¹¹⁷ Osborne 790

progressive (but ancient) theological view about Revelation and judgement certainly can be a monumental action.

What happens with the loss of judgement? Can the redeemed truly use Revelation as scripture if judgement does not have a place? These are the questions that must be asked when attempting a corporate view of judgement.¹¹⁸

In 2:12, Christ announces His coming and the reward to those who have remained faithful. The specific wording of μισθός is normally translated as “reward.” However, the main definition in BDAG is “remuneration for works done” and the secondary translation is “recognition for the moral quality of an action.”¹¹⁹ Christ comes to the world to make things right, to put them in the proper place. The image of Jesus sweeping across the world like the angel of death fits only half of a skewed version of divine judgement. In the end, our timecard will be turned in, and what we are owed will be paid to us.

The necessity of judgement weds itself to the necessity for the distinct community of the local church now and the future community of New Jerusalem. Where past generations corporate eschatology began and ended with singing “In the Sweet By and By.” In an increasingly secular and postmodern Western world the Christian church will have to embody a drastically different eschatology. Gone

¹¹⁸ Like many pieces in developing theology based off Revelation, one of the key movements in postmodernity situates itself in a corporate reading. Previous interpretations have focused on the individual, and promote what I call a *fantastical* reading. Steeped in escape and fatalism, they offer nothing for the church and instead promote the self.

¹¹⁹ BDAG entry for μισθός

are the passive songs of the past. Eschatological judgement links directly to ethical involvement.

Christ comes as the eschatological judge. Christ owns this right because through His actions the church enters into a deep and permanent relationship with God. Christ has defeated evil, and His sacrificial blood saturates the robes of the faithful. As the church, we are responsible for encouraging the link between our ethical responsibility and the future recompense through Jesus Christ.¹²⁰

At this point, some may balk and say it appears that John lifts up works righteousness. However, judgement according to works thematically stretches through Scripture and related (intertestamental) literature.¹²¹ Isaiah 40:10 and 62:11 underly the idea of μισθός in verse 12. In both passages, reward and salvation directly relate to each other.¹²² Revelation 22:14 blesses those with an active participation in resistance. This lifestyle shows a person has passed through completely in Christ. They have met the necessary causes of salvation and the redemption of justification from sin.¹²³

This view of works might seem odd to some in the Protestant tradition, but to Wesleyans it is part of our doctrinal canon. John Wesley notes that good works are only possible once a vibrant and intense relationship with Christ exists in the heart of the individual. His sermon *The Almost Christian* (#2) speaks about

¹²⁰ Osborne 788

¹²¹ *ibid* 788

¹²² Beale 1137

¹²³ Beale 1138

justice being evident to those who still haven't turned their hearts over to Christ.

Justification by Faith (#5) mentions that the things of love cannot truly be done in the name of Christ unless we have we have directed our own entire love to him.

Finally in sermon 7, *The Way to the Kingdom*, Wesley fully develops this idea by explaining how our good works are only truly righteous when they spring from the inward spirit that is truly only devoted to God.

Eschatological justice only happens with the immanence of Christs return. This brings the Christian out of time and into expectation. The nearness calls the believer to an ethical commitment.¹²⁴ The posture of the believer happens out of the desire to see the things of the kingdom in utter fulfillment.

Doxological

This final section of Revelation is seen by many as a liturgical or Eucharistic section, with the three part call to “come” that occurs in v.17. Harrington notes this as an allusion to the word *Maranatha*, used in ancient liturgical celebration. Osborne outlines the three views that can be taken regarding v.17; a) that this is a Eucharistic service b) referring to Jesus coming in the Eucharistic presence or c) or a simple desire looking forward to the final coming?¹²⁵

For a people focused on the return of Christ and the eschatological scope of Christianity, these readings might alleviate stress, but they do not place the

¹²⁴ Osborne 787

¹²⁵ *IBID* 797

congregation inside the apocalypse. Some Roman Catholic scholars see Revelation as a gigantic Eucharistic text.¹²⁶ They argue a very robust hermeneutic using the Eucharistic liturgy being read through Revelation. While the very deep strains of sacramentality play very well with eschatology, making this a primary reading loses so much of the intensity of the apocalyptic text.¹²⁷

Just as in the theological section we focused on a posture of nearness, worshipping communities must learn to see the sacrament in Revelation as part of the reading. A sacramental reading stays away from the dangers of more fundamentalist interpretation and swings wide to another spectrum. We find that when we put the Eschaton at a distance, it slowly creeps into obscurity.

Osborne agrees with the third reading, primarily because of the lack of Eucharistic language in the book. The church desires the coming of Christ. The business at hand is learning how to articulate the coming of Christ without driving people away.

In the end, John gives us a vision of a new redemptive day. Worship in the midst of a world torn apart by consumption, greed, wars, theft and trafficking is truly radical. The application of the Church as the bride in the present age speaks to our state with Christ. By following the Old Testament practices of betrothal and marriage, we already belong to Christ in the fullest sense. We are merely waiting

¹²⁶ Scott Hahn's work is a good example. See Hahn, Scott. *The Lamb's Supper: The Mass as Heaven on Earth*. First Edition. Doubleday Religion, 1999.

¹²⁷ In the conclusion I write about the place that sacramentality plays in corporate eschatology. I find it to be the vehicle that exercises us in Christian time, but as a reading I don't think it really weighs enough.

for the consummation.¹²⁸ To use modern imagery, we are at our wedding reception and are awaiting the end of the festivities.

Worship proclaims the world as stabilized. By worshiping as the church to be, we contrast the current world. Worship must reflect the stabilization while also pleading for the coming of Christ. Our call is answered by the promise of His coming. This prayer for the coming of Christ sums up Revelation, and how the eschatological shape of worship must reflect our need for fulfillment. To be alive in this world and in the midst of practices of justice, we recognize that the only way to see true healing is for Christ to come. Proper Christian worship should be one gigantic declarative COME!!!

The prophetic edge of Revelation needs to be proclaimed. True prophecy does not come from future telling, but by drawing others closer to God. The assimilated people of God are a timeless reality, existing in expectation or glory.

We are a pilgrim people. That classic Christian identity is worked out inside the city of man. In this posture, we are not vague wanderers or derelicts, but travelers. We are not headed with Cain to Nod, but we are journeying towards New Jerusalem. Revelation poetically calls us to cast off allegiance towards the things of this earth and harness ourselves to the reign of Christ. We dismiss the things that secularly bind us as people. Part of this new identification rests in the call of Peter to “abstain from the desires of the flesh that wage war against the soul” (2 Peter 2:11). Revelation teaches us about the apocalyptic vision necessary

¹²⁸ Beale 1148

to reset our story. We are hurtling towards a fulfillment that entails judgement,
but also to experience the furthest reaches of eternal redemption.

A New Reading

The reader of Revelation realizes it is unlike any book. While some portions of scripture lend to a linear and organized format, Revelation falls back upon himself. Instead of a careful outline, Revelation presents an ever expanding spiral. God, the supreme controller of the universe granted the ultimate power to judge this world to His Son. Christ, the slain lamb, brings the Church into the greatest relationship ever imagined. In the end, the qualifier for eternity is owned by a group of people who accurately resemble who they devote themselves too. Essential to this goal are doxological communities developing contextual new readings.

A new reading has no fear. How often have we secretly feared the eschaton because we felt like we still had life to live? This isn't just an issue for those outside the church, it is a reality in the church as well. Our future life, which we were waiting to fulfill, has been created (in our minds) as an alternative to the reign of God. Part of our answering secular culture and their eschatology is to understand, hope for and believe that the eternal reign of God will be the answer to this world and her woes. It won't answer them by fire and judgement, but by the holiness of God and the acts of Jesus Christ. In the encompassing act of "end", judgement will have its place, but the greater need is for a redeemed creation, made entirely whole in Jesus Christ. Mission and eschatology are intertwined in times like these.

The ill-fitting eschatology of the 20th century has gotten us in this situation. In this juncture in the history of Christian theology, our view of the end has allowed us to actually be scared of Jesus. Claiming a new reading of Revelation destroys fear.

A new reading is apocalyptic. The word is claimed again to speak of who God is. The finality attached to it is our adoption into the family of God, caused by the dramatic actions of Jesus Christ. A new reading is done by a people reading the bible as *their* book, and not a source to be minded. These people specialize in traversing the thin line between apostolic mission and sacred definition, Revelation is read because it speaks into part of their greater definition as a people.

John quickly titles his book an *apocalypse*, a revealing of things to come. Throughout this paper, one of the calls I have made is the development of a figurative reading of Revelation that allows the reader to be confronted. By reading in this manner, we are able to seriously examine our own motives of allegiance and devotion. Revelation becomes revealing. The larger witness of scripture, in its use of Αποκάλυψις confronts us with the true glory of God. As the people of the slain lamb we are part of this glorious fact. We have an apocalyptic heritage

A new reading engages the Christian in sacramental time. Earlier in the paper, I offered my critique of a liturgical hermeneutic of Revelation. In

interpretation, I think this reading should be at a supporting role. However, in doxological practice, a sacramental vision of end forms the believer. Through the sacraments engaging with eschatology we are thrust into a new imagination, our baptism is our entrance and our Eucharistic celebration is our expectation. We understand the foreign nature of our earthly citizenship, existing in St. Augustine's dual City of God and City of Man. We remember the kingdoms place in eschatology, and the fact that we live inside a timeline that ends is truly eternal. While there is a bracketing around human time, time doesn't exist within the divine and the framework after the bracket is directly governed by the eternality of God.

Salvation has an ultimate end of recovery and understanding the relational nature of the Father. An evangelical experience is not the final point of a journey towards God, and to think that our Enlightenment idea of "saving faith" is the preeminent explanation for the actions of Jesus Christ would be a grave mistake. Dons Scotus (via James Torrance) thought "even if the Fall had not happened, the incarnation still would have taken place."¹²⁹ For our eschatology, this has an extreme bearing. The Triune actions of grace through the sacrifice of the cross bring us to the fullest understanding of God that a created being (earthly or heavenly) can possess. Salvation is tied up in eschaton because of the proleptic vision that the church has towards Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Our worship

¹²⁹ Torrance, James B. *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace*. IVP Academic, 1997. pg.73

dually celebrates and is the fulfillment of Christ's coming. The definition of σωτηρία is linked with the idea of restoration. The church has an eschatological character, a participation in the admittance of both the reality of the kingdom now and the coming eschatological kingdom.

Integration With Secular Eschatology

Part of the secular movement was the idea that the world was created by chance...and we are not on a decided timeline, but one that is motivated and guided by situations that are perfectly unpredictable (such as evolution theory and the idea of a natural cataclysmic event). The evangelical movement took up a baptized version of this story, and clung to apocalyptic stories of escape and destruction.

When the world puts itself on a timeline, but has no shape or form to the story, we will end up making up our own stories regarding beginning and end. If the world started by chance, then it must end by chance. Apocalypticism, as presented by Hollywood, is our culture making its own timeline, reacting against the idea that humans could make everything perfect themselves. Our pendulum has swung to the opposite side of early 20th century liberalism, with the exact opposite of a positive outlook on the place God called "good". When a finality is created apart from the idea of salvation and worship, we have a pretty bad fracture. As Christians, especially those branded evangelicals, we offer a poor response to the false narrative of secularism. We care about escape and not renewal by the power of the cross.

This doesn't mean that we neglect the idea of judgment-we know it must happen, but we counter their story with one that does have a distinct beginning and end. Instead of making the chance apocalyptic event the "Rapture", we offer a message filled to the brim with the desire and necessity of a final event that places those in right relationship with the Father (through a recognition of the lordship of Christ and an identification within him) as inheritors of the promised blessing (Rev 21:6). We quit trying to escape this world (the whole idea of an "evil" world is very gnostic and not Christian at all), and instead realize that the promised idea of a New Earth is God fixing the unbalances that are the result of humans denial of Him in the garden. When we give the message of "bring it on", we are telling the world that we simply quit caring for them.

Often enough, the Kingdom that the church supposedly believes in does not offer a strong enough contrast to secular society (instead functions as "Christianism" within it). Our lives are filled with a hope for the future, and this hope should be drawing us to both care for others and live explicit gospel lives in our actions towards them. Jesus is our hope, and we should very direct with our intentions.

In a postmodern structure, the secular story is one of individualism and chance. The Body of Christ offers a true alternative communion through the Holy Spirit into the nature of Christ's offering to the Father on the Cross and the knowledge that God has a plan for this world...and it has been unfolding through the vehicle of grace since the beginning.

Eternal Not Final

Christian Eschatology resists the world. Actively resisting requires engagement. As the Church, we have shared guilt. As society plunged into war and destruction in the beginning of the 20th century, we moved from a positivist stance regarding eschatology and the theological perspective of premillennial dispensationalism took hold. As utopian vision slowly vanished, the churches own escapist story of apocalyptic woe influenced culture. Both views inhabit and influence culture, and drive it towards drastically different positions. The task in the 21st century will be to proclaim an eschatological vision founded in scripture and worship instead of either humanist success or escapist nihilism.

The heart of eschatological vision is memory, the anamnesis, the constant active memory of the Church. We use our memory to locate ourselves not in the plight of postmodernity, but in the story of God. It orients us towards a narrative that is built out of rescue, renaming, and bringing the lowly to places of Holy prestige. It gives us coherence, meaning and a frame of reference that is built in the creator of the world. Because of this we “are not trapped and confined in the present moment but can locate it as the invention of temporal processes and actions, which gives us the wherewithal to transcend the limitations to which the here and now restrict us.”¹³⁰ We do know what has happened before us and we know the design of the world. In participation with anamnesis is prolepsis. We know our world is on a timeline originating with the divine. Placing our worship

¹³⁰ Harvey pg. 47

in the language of eschaton allows us to recognize and stay away from the language of revenge and judgement. We know that these things will happen, but that more is written regarding how humanity will be eternally positioned in relation to God. The liturgical sanctus of the church recognizes how creation and end relate towards one another, and that end does not mean a final point, but a reconfiguration. Schmemmann says “This is the ultimate purpose of all that exists, the *end*, the goal and the fulfillment, because this is the *beginning*, the principle of Creation.”¹³¹

The Church’s mission as an eschatological oriented people is one that understands we do have a storyteller. We tell of what happens when we will all know more about the story than ever imagined. We are in between memory and hope, and we look forward to the time in which we will be able to do the things of heaven best; because we have a savior standing like a slain lamb that has brought us a redemption steeped with the grace that God gives his restored people.

¹³¹ Schmemmann, Alexander. *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy*. 2nd ed. St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997. pg.40

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