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The Christology of the Apocalypse

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This spirit may be further analyzed as a *spirit of humility*, of the knowledge of sin. Who can remain unmoved when the throbbing notes of "Out of the Depths I Cry to Thee" sound forth or of the hymn "O God, Thou Righteous, Faithful Lord, I have Not Kept Thy Holy Word"? To a Lutheran Christian, sin is not an empty sound, but a dreadful reality, and the hymns of our Church express this fact time and again.

But to this we add the spirit which holds to the *objective certainty of salvation*. It is this feature that characterized some of the very first hymns in the field of Lutheran hymnody, such as "Salvation unto Us has Come," by Speratus, and Luther's "Dear Christians, One and All Rejoice." Thousands of other Lutheran hymns have since sung of the vicarious redemption through the merits of Christ, but they have hardly risen above the fervor of these first psalms of salvation with which these leaders of the Reformation heralded the Gospel freedom.

Nor is the *meditation on the marvels of God's grace* absent from Lutheran hymnody. On the contrary, one of the earliest meditations of this kind was written by Gramann in 1525, namely, "My Soul, Now Bless Thy Maker." Then we have Schmolck's "Open Now Thy Gates of Beauty," with its prayerful application to the blessings of the Gospel, and in particular the many hymns for the great festivals, Christmas, Epiphany, Easter, Pentecost, and Trinity.

No wonder, then, that the spirit of the Lutheran *chorale* is also found in *praise and thanksgiving*. What was said by Luther in his translation of the *Te Deum Laudamus*, what was expressed by Decius in his popular version of the angelic hymn "All Glory Be to God on High" and by another pupil of Luther in his "All Glory Be to God Alone," that is the thought which dominates hundreds of Lutheran *chorales*, thereby affording a preparation for the glories of heaven, when we shall join in the chorus of the ransomed before the throne of the Lamb and bless our Redeemer forever and ever.

P. E. KRETZMANN.

The Christology of the Apocalypse.

More curious notions arise in the minds of many Bible students regarding St. John's Apocalypse than regarding any other book of the Bible. Usually Bible classes are found to be more eager to study this book than any other portion of the Holy Scriptures, and pastors are often asked bewildering and perplexing questions concerning it. Shall we hold ourselves aloof from this writing with an air of "touch not, taste not, handle not," or shall we diligently apply ourselves to laying hold of the divine truths here recorded in their richness and fulness?

The warning which Luther gave four centuries ago still needs to be heeded by us to-day: "*Es haben wohl viel sich daran versucht, aber bis auf den heutigen Tag nichts Gewisses aufgebracht, etliche viel ungeschicktes Dinges aus ihrem Kopf hineingebräuet.*"¹⁾ On account of its symbolisms, mysteries, and the many difficulties connected with the nature of any apocalyptic writing we cannot perfectly understand all things here revealed any more than we can understand how "God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son." "How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!" Yet this fact does not give us sufficient reason for closing our eyes to the simple and beautiful truths we can grasp through the Spirit; for "blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear, the words of this prophecy and keep those things which are written therein," 1, 3. On the other hand, the study of Revelation needs to be undertaken with special prayer and care, lest we either "add unto these things" or "take away from the words of the book of this prophecy," 22, 18, 19.

The question might be raised at the outset: Can this writing be used as an authoritative basis for theology? The Apocalypse of St. John has been used sparingly in the support of doctrinal teachings. While it was not intended to be a doctrinal treatise, it abounds in sound doctrine and is especially valuable to us in this age because of its unmistakable teaching concerning the person and work of Christ. The long-prevailing uncertainty as to its authorship and authenticity no doubt accounts for the reluctance with which it has been used. On this point we may say, however, that it has been shown with increasing clearness that our "brother and companion in tribulation," 1, 9, "who bore record of the Word of God and of the testimony of Jesus Christ and of all things that he saw," 1, 2, was none other than John, the "beloved disciple," from whose hand also came the fourth Gospel and the Johannine epistles.²⁾ An apostle of Jesus Christ being the inspired writer, its true value in doctrine ranks equally authoritative with the Gospels, the epistles, and the other books of the Bible.

Further objection is made to the use of the Apocalypse as a basis of Christian theology on the ground that it is distinctly an apocalyptic writing. This kind of work, most certainly, must be interpreted in accordance with its nature, its purpose, and the circumstances under which it is written; but its apocalyptic nature does not in itself make it worthless in the teaching of Christian fundamentals. If this were true, important portions of the Old Testament would have to be ruled out for the same reason; for the works of Daniel and of

1) Vol. XIV, 130, St. Louis Ed.

2) Cf. Zahn, Th., *Einleitung in das Neue Testament*, pp. 624 ff.

Ezekiel are chiefly apocalyptic. Though primarily in the form of visions and of symbols, these spiritual truths were none the less "the revelation of Jesus Christ," 1, 1, "sent and signified by his angel unto his servant John," and they properly serve their purpose also in a doctrinal treatise.

The symbolism of this book is not used in order to make it mystical and more difficult for the reader, thus leading him into many bewilderments and doubts, but it is meant to enlarge the mental conception of that which is spiritual, just as an increased vocabulary enables us to express a greater number of ideas with a finer sense of distinction and shade of meaning. The fact that our Lord so often resorted to the use of parables demonstrates man's great difficulty in grasping heavenly truths. "God's Word is truth from the beginning," Ps. 119, 160, whether we receive it in visions, in parables, or in simple, expository discourse. The method of the revelation does not determine the degree of the truth revealed. Let us therefore more studiously and diligently apply ourselves to the Apocalypse of St. John that here also the Word of Christ may dwell in us richly in all wisdom.

In this treatise we confine ourselves to the "Doctrine of Christ"; 1) His person, 2) His work.

I. The Person of Christ.

In his gospel, St. John writes: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and *the Word was God*. . . . And *the Word was made flesh* and dwelt among us; and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the Only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." This cardinal truth of the deity of Christ has always been confessed by true Christians, and we Lutherans are singularly thankful that our forefathers confessed it so plainly and so assuredly four hundred years ago at Augsburg, declaring that "the Word, that is, the Son of God, did assume the human nature in the womb of the blessed Virgin Mary, so that there are two natures, the divine and the human, inseparably conjoined in one Person, one Christ, *true God* and true man." (Art. III, Augsb. Conf.) This will always be the confession of the true Christian Church, and it is also the teaching of the Apocalypse of St. John. This thesis, that Jesus Christ of the Apocalypse is true God, is maintained because He A) receives the titles of God, B) possesses the attributes of God, C) has the prerogatives of God, D) receives the honor and worship due only to God, E) is associated with the person of God the Father upon the footing of equality.

A) It is often alleged that Jesus is not called God outright anywhere in Scripture, but that such titles as admit a position of subordination are predicated of Him. This cannot be said of 21, 7, where the heavenly Jerusalem is described, and the "Alpha and

Omega," who sits on the throne, says: "I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely. He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be His God (*ἔσομαι αὐτῷ θεός*), and he shall be My son." Who is the antecedent of the pronoun I in this statement? It is the "Alpha and Omega," "the Son of Man," identified in 1, 11 ff. It is "I, Jesus," who gives of the water of life freely, 22, 16. 17; cf. John 4, 14. There can be no dissension concerning the word used for God in this passage; it is the Greek *θεός*, which means a deity. Here Jesus is indisputably called God.

The deity of Jesus is furthermore substantiated in the use of the title Lord for him. Sometimes this word is used in the New Testament in the sense of a master, a ruler, or one who has power and authority, Matt. 25, 14—30. It is also the New Testament translation of the Hebrew *יהוה* and in that sense is used interchangeably with *אלהים*. The Lord is the one, true God, who alone is to be served, Matt. 4, 10. This is the intended meaning of this word in the Apocalypse wherever used, without exception: 1, 8; 4, 8. 11; 11, 8. 15. 17; 14, 13; 15, 3. 4; 16, 5. 7; 17, 14; 18, 8; 19, 1. 6. 16; 21, 22; 22, 5. 6. 20. 21. It is the "Lord God Omnipotent" who reigns, 19, 6, and the "Lord God Almighty, which was and is and is to come," who is worshiped, 4, 8; and His person is not to be confused with that of the Lamb; for "the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of the New Jerusalem," 21, 22; but He, Jesus, is also "Lord" and "God," "Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the Ending, . . . which is and which was and which is to come, the Almighty," 1, 8. 11. It is "the Lord Jesus Christ," 22, 21, who comes as Judge of the world, 22, 20. He is "Lord of lords and King of kings," 17, 14; 19, 16 (for the Scriptural meaning of this phrase see Deut. 10, 17). His identity cannot be mistaken; for He is the "Crucified" One, 11, 8; 17, 14. The study of the above passages shows that the title "Lord" is used both of God the Father and of Jesus Christ, and always in the sense of Deity.

B) Another proof, so familiar to the catechist, that Jesus is true God is the fact that attributes are ascribed to Him that can be ascribed only to God. In this respect we have a preponderance of evidence in the Apocalypse.

Jesus is called the *Almighty* (*παντοκράτωρ*), 1, 8. With the exception of this passage this epithet occurs only with the word "God": 4, 8; 11, 17; 15, 3; 16, 7. 14; 19, 6. 15; 21, 22. It is the "Lord God Omnipotent" who reigns, 19, 6. "The Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple" of the New Jerusalem, 21, 22. It is the "Lord God Almighty, which art and wast and art to come," who "destroys them which destroy the earth," 11, 17. 18. If it is remembered that Jesus Christ is the Revealer, 1, 1, in this prophecy, there should be no difficulty in identifying Him to be the One who says, "I am Alpha

and Omega, the Beginning and the Ending, . . . the *Almighty*," 1, 8. The description of 1, 11 removes all doubt. Jesus therefore is also called the *Almighty*. Furthermore, the promise "I will give" at the close of each letter discloses One who has all power and who is omnipotent, the *Almighty*. He is honored as such a One in the exalted language of 5, 11 ff.: "And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing. And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and such as are in the sea and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne *and unto the Lamb forever and ever.*" "I am Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last, . . . saith the Lord, the *Almighty*," 1, 8. 11.

Jesus Christ of the Apocalypse is *omniscient*. This follows from 1, 1; for only He who is infinite in knowledge and in wisdom could set himself forth as the Revealer of this prophecy. It is "the Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God *gave* unto him [John]," 1, 1. God reveals Himself in and through the Son, John 1, 18. In each of His messages to the churches the formula appears: "I know thy works." This statement is not made by one who purports to have only human knowledge of the works of the churches, but by Him who is the "Beginning and the Ending" of knowledge, "who holds the seven stars in His right hand," "whose countenance was as the sun that shineth in his strength," 1, 16, "who searches the reins and hearts," 2, 24, "who knows the thoughts," and "whom nothing escapes." He is *omniscient*.

He is the *Eternal One*. "I am Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last, the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright and Morning Star," 1, 8. 17; 2, 8; 22, 13. 16. He is the "Beginning of the creation of God," 3, 14; He "was dead," but now lives and "is alive forevermore," 1, 18. Only the "Lord God *Almighty*, which art and wast and art to come," 11, 17, is eternal, Is. 41, 4; 43, 10; 44, 6; 48, 12. Jesus therefore, the *Eternal One*, is God.

Man changes. "All flesh is as grass"; but God is "the same yesterday and to-day and forever," Heb. 13, 8. "With Him there is no variableness neither shadow of turning," Jas. 1, 17. He is God and "changes not," Mal. 3, 6. The Unchangeable and Invariable One of the Apocalypse is He "which is and which was and which is to come," 1, 4. 8; 4, 8; 11, 17; 16, 5. This description denotes the *Absolute One*, who resists all change, and does not appear with the name of Christ anywhere in the Apocalypse, but occurs several times, yet with

the title "Lord God Almighty," and is always used as a distinctive attribute of God. Is this attribute of immutability, then, also meant to be ascribed to Christ? The answer in the affirmative is given 1, 8. 11 ff., where He "which is and which was and which is to come" is the "Alpha and Omega," the "Son of Man." There is no trace of ditheism in this writing. Jesus Christ and the Father are one in essence, John 10, 30.

He is the *Holy One*, 3, 7, the One in whom the eternal sanctities reside, in whom there is absolute purity, and who alone is to be worshiped. "He, then, that claims to be 'the Holy One,'—a name which Jehovah in the Old Testament continually claims for His own, Is. 6, 3; 40, 25; 53, 15,—implicitly claims to be God, 15, 4, takes to Himself a title which is God's alone, which it would be blasphemy for any other to appropriate, and, unless we are prepared for the alternative that He is guilty of this, can only be accepted as Himself God."³)

He is the *Living One*, 1, 18; 2, 8, in the sense that He is the Source of life itself. He "will give unto Him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely," 21, 6. They alone "who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life shall enter into the New Jerusalem," 21, 27. In this city there is a "pure river of the water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb," 22, 1.

This list of inherent characteristics which can be ascribed alone to God could be increased from the Apocalypse to include quite a number of others, such as *truth*, 3, 7. 14; 19, 11; 21, 5; *righteousness and justice*, 19, 11; 22, 12; 2, 5. 12. 22; 3, 3; *faithfulness*, 3, 14; 19, 11; 21, 5; *love, grace, and mercy*, 1, 5; 3, 20; 5, 9; 7, 14; 22, 17.

The One who possesses these attributes described in the Apocalypse is truly God.

C) In the industrial, political, educational, and corresponding activities of life we rank men according to their rights, authority, duties, etc., and similarly, on the basis of certain preeminent rights or prerogatives, we also distinguish between God and man. Throughout the Apocalypse, Jesus is given the preeminent right of the Deity. The prerogatives of a Creator, of Judge and Supreme Ruler of the universe, and of a Redeemer are ascribed to Him.

He is "the Beginning of the creation of God," 3, 14. Creation is usually considered as the act of God the Father, and this seems to be the intended meaning of 4, 11, where the Lord God Almighty is worshiped as the One who has "created all things." For this reason the Arians explained 3, 14 in the passive sense, saying that Christ was the first and most excellent creature of God's hands. According to the context, however, in which we know Christ to be the "Alpha and

3) Trench, *Commentary on the Epistles to the Seven Churches*, p. 176.

Omega," the Omniscient One, the Omnipotent and Infinite One, this passage must be interpreted in the active sense, that is, He is the *Principium principians*, the Fountain-source of all the creation of God. This is in perfect accord with 19, 11—13, where He that is called Faithful and True (the epithet which occurs with the above descriptive title in 3, 14) is named "The Word of God." Concerning the Word we read in John's gospel: "In the beginning was the Word," and that "all things were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made," John 1, 3. This is also the meaning of 3, 14. Jesus is the "Amen, the faithful and true Witness [the Word], the Beginning of the creation of God." He is Alpha and Omega, the Author of creation.

He is the Supreme Ruler of the universe. He is "the Prince of the kings of the earth," 1, 5, and "hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father." His dominion is universal; He is "Lord of lords and King of kings," 7, 14; 19, 16. He shall overcome "Babylon the Great, the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth," 17, 5—14. He "has the sharp, two-edged sword," 1, 16; 2, 12. "He holds the seven stars in His right hand; He walks in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks," 2, 1. "His eyes are as a flame of fire, and on his head are many crowns; . . . He is clothed with a vesture dipped in blood; . . . the armies which are in heaven follow Him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean; out of His mouth goes a sharp word, that with it He shall smite the nations; and He shall rule them with a rod of iron; He treadeth the wine-press of the fierceness and the wrath of Almighty God; and He hath on his vesture and on His thigh a name written KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS," 19, 12—16. His kingdom is eternal, 1, 6; 5, 12, 13. They who have "part in the first resurrection . . . shall be priests of God and of Christ and shall reign with Him a thousand years," 20, 6 (the millennium here spoken of is a multiple of ten, the symbol for completion and perfection, and is not to be taken literally). He is "the Root and Offspring of David, the bright and Morning Star," 22, 16; 5, 5. He "hath the key of David; He openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth," 3, 7.

He is the Supreme Judge and judges all kindreds, peoples, tongues, and nations. "Behold, He cometh with clouds. Every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him; and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him," 1, 7. He comes "as a thief." "Thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee," 3, 3. "He cometh quickly," 2, 5, 16; 3, 11; 22, 7, 12, 20. He "searches the reins and hearts," 2, 23, and "has the keys of hell and of death," 1, 18. The sea, death, and the grave will deliver up their dead to be judged by Him, 20, 12, 13. Only they "which are written in the Lamb's Book

of Life" shall enter into the New Jerusalem, 21, 27; and "whosoever is not found in the Book of Life is to be cast into the lake of fire," 20, 15. "To him that overcometh," He has said, "will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God," 2, 7; "he shall be clothed in white raiment, . . . and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels," 3, 5; and "to him I will grant to sit with Me in My throne," 3, 20. "Behold, I come quickly, and My reward is with Me," 22, 12. He is the Supreme Judge.

Furthermore, He is the Redeemer of fallen man. He is the sacrificial Lamb. By the shedding of His blood He has atoned for the sins of the world, 1, 5; 7, 14; 21, 27. To this, the central teaching of Christianity, the second division of this study will be given.

Such prerogatives as these, namely, the creation, supreme sovereignty, and redemption, belong to God alone.

D) The act of worshiping is given prominent place in this book. God alone is to be worshiped, 19, 10; 14, 7; 22, 9. They that worship the beast "shall go into captivity with him," 13, 10. "They shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God . . . and shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the Lamb; and the smoke of their torment ascendeth up forever and ever; and they have no rest day nor night who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name," 14, 10 ff. This most striking judgment is in accord with Matt. 4, 10, where Jesus said: "It is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord, thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve."

The worship, therefore, which the Lamb receives is accorded to Him as true God. A distinction is made in persons worshiped, but not in degree of worship or rank of persons. In 5, 11 ff. the heavenly hosts are described in the act of worship, saying: "Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne and unto the Lamb forever and ever." Again, in 7, 9 ff., "a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes and palms in their hands, and cried with a loud voice, saying, 'Salvation unto our God, which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb.'" Truly, all those who are members of that "vast, unnumbered throng" worship the Lamb as well as the Father.

In 7, 11, where we read: "All angels stood round about the throne . . . and fell before the throne on their faces and *worshiped God*," no mention is made of the Lamb, nor in the following verse, where the act of worshiping is described, nor in 5, 14; and on the basis of this discrimination it is maintained by some that the Lamb is accorded an inferior position in being worshiped. All possibility

of contention on this question should be removed, however, when we read further in 7, 17: "The Lamb which is *in the midst of the throne* shall feed them and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters." When "all the angels fell before the throne on their faces and worshiped God," they also worshiped Him who is *in the midst of the throne*. Again we have a striking resemblance to St. John's gospel, where we read of the Lamb as "the only-begotten Son, which is *in the bosom of the Father*."

When the redeemed "serve Him day and night in His temple," no distinction will be made in the degree of worship accorded the Father and the Lamb.

E) Jesus Christ is true God in unity with the Father and according to His person is associated with the Father on the basis of equality.

The doctrine of the Trinity is offensive to many who make a superficial study of the Scriptures. As we speak of this conception of the Godhead according to the Apocalypse, let us not think in terms of the mathematical absurdity that three is one, but in terms of the Scriptural revelation of the unity in essence of the three persons of the Godhead, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

The conception of the Son as a distinct person of the Godhead, coequal with the Father and one with Him and the Holy Ghost, is borne out by the Father-Sonship relation clearly in evidence in the Apocalypse. Twice the appellation "Son of Man" appears in this work, 1, 13; 14, 14. This is the title which rings true to the Master's own designation of Himself. It is used more than fifty times in the New Testament, and always by Jesus Himself, with three exceptions. When two of these occur in this book, we are immediately impressed with the striking identification of the Jesus of the Apocalypse with the Jesus of the gospels. Jesus Christ of 1, 1 is the same as He who dwelt among us in the flesh and who said: "I and My Father are one," John 10, 30, and that "all men should honor the Son even as they honor the Father," John 5, 23. (For uses of the name Father in the Apocalypse see 1, 6; 2, 27; 3, 5. 21; 14, 1.)

That this relationship of the Father and Son is one of equality is borne out by such passages as these: "They who have part in the first resurrection . . . shall be priests of God *and* of Christ," 20, 6. The virgins who are redeemed from among men are "the first-fruits unto God *and* to the Lamb," 14, 4. The New Jerusalem has no temple in it; "for the Lord God Almighty *and* the Lamb are the temple of it," 21, 22; "the glory of God lightens it, *and* the Lamb is the light thereof," 21, 23. "A pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeds out of the throne of God *and* of the Lamb," 22, 1. "He that sitteth on the throne" *and* the Lamb are equally worshiped, as previously proved.

Father and Son are coequal in power, in majesty, and in glory.

It has been shown that Jesus Christ according to the Apocalypse is called God, that He has the attributes and prerogatives of God, that He is worshiped as God, and that His person is held in the same honor as that of the Father. A single one of these contentions proves His deity. All of them make the evidence more conclusive and persuasive. There are Bible students, however, who reject our conclusion in regard to the deity of Christ. Bousset writes:⁴⁾ "We have in it [the Apocalypse] the faith of a layman unaffected by any theological reflection, which with heedless *naïveté* simply identifies Christ in His predicates and attributes with God." If the "beloved disciple" was a naive "layman, unaffected by any theological reflection," we also despair of all the theology and of all the wisdom that twenty centuries have brought us. Neither is Frank C. Porter⁵⁾ ready to admit that absolute identification of Christ as God exists, stating: "Close as the association is, closer and more abiding than in 1 Cor. 15, 20—28, subordination remains and is expressed in simple and unreserved fashion." This conclusion is based on such passages as 1, 1, where we read: "God gave unto him" the revelation; 2, 27, where "he that overcometh will be given power over the nations, . . . even as I received of My Father"; 3, 12, where the Revealer speaks of "My God"; and others: 2, 7; 3, 2. 14. 21; 11, 15; 22, 18. In the light of everything the Bible says about the person of Christ these passages present no difficulty. According to divine revelation, Jesus is not only God, but man as well, and as a true human being He is subordinate to God, received power from the Father, etc.

Let it here be remembered that the acceptance of Jesus Christ as our Lord and true God in unity with the Father and the Holy Ghost is of such supreme importance that the denial of this cardinal truth reduces the Christian religion to a system of ethics and leaves us without a Savior, without hope, and without salvation in His kingdom.

II. The Work of Christ.

In the ever-surging waves of humanity, tossed about on the time-beaten rocks of temptation and of sin's own deceptions, there is also always to be found one safe haven of peace, rest, and hope. Even though there be wars, plagues, woes, pestilences, pits of destruction, pains of distress, and powers of darkness, there is ever One who is victorious over this thralldom of Satan. Nowhere are the destructive forces of "the dragon, that old serpent, which is the devil, and Satan," 20, 2, so vividly and powerfully described as in the Apocalypse; and in contrast, how comforting it is to have the victory of the Redeemer

4) Meyer's Commentary, *Apocalypse*.

5) Hastings, *Bible Dictionary*, IV, p. 262.

again told in these closing messages of the Scripture! In this study of the work of Christ according to the Apocalypse let us hold fast to the time-honored division of His office, namely, the prophetic, the sacerdotal, and the royal.

A) The mission of Jesus to teach was not entirely fulfilled at the time of His ascension; for in His state of exaltation He appeared to John, His servant, and committed to Him the messages to the seven churches (chaps. 1—3) and the prophecy of the Church to the end of time (chaps. 4—22). This revelation comes direct from the Teacher of teachers and Prophet of prophets, who says: "I am Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the Ending, . . . He that liveth and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore," 1, 8. 18. The personal pronoun I is used fifty-three times in the letters to the churches alone; and as we read and study them, let it be with emphasis on the Person of these capital I's. Here, then, we find Him not only called a teacher, but actively engaged in the exercise of this function.

In the seven letters to the churches "we behold the Church of Christ in her graces and failings, in her strength and weakness, in her joys and sorrows, in her falling under the influence of temptation and return to the path of duty" (Ylvisaker). Each letter begins with a striking description, in which the Speaker is identified by His attributes, set forth as the Ruler of His Church. Then comes without exception the statement of His omniscience, "I know thy works." Following this, come the special messages to each of the churches in particular, yet for His Church Universal. For two churches, Smyrna and Philadelphia, there are only words of praise; for one church, Laodicea, there is only reproof; and for the other churches both praise and rebuke are found in varying degree.

In the first group of three, love to the Redeemer is praised; yet this love is pointed out as beginning to grow cold; the followers of Christ must endure persecutions and trials; the Church is preserved by His grace. In the second group of four, yielding on the part of the majority to sins associated with unchristian doctrine is reproof; formalism in religion is condemned; warning is given against lukewarmness and weakness in the midst of trials. Thus the living Church in the midst of the vicissitudes of man is presented to us as the object of the Lord's care and watchfulness.

In 4, 1 we are introduced to "the things which shall be hereafter," 1, 19, with the words: "After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven." The visions of the remainder of the writing make it characteristically apocalyptic and eschatological. On account of its symbolic nature it is often misunderstood or, for fear of misinterpretation, is left untouched. While we need not expect to understand this symbolism perfectly any more than we expect to reach perfect sanctification in the flesh, yet there is no reason why we should

not strive in the Spirit to make these divine revelations more intelligible.

There are, for example, symbolic numbers, colors, creatures, acts, phenomena in nature, etc. The number seven occurs fifty-four times in Revelation. There are the seven churches, the seven seals, the seven trumpets, the seven vials, the seven spirits, the seven stars, the seven candlesticks, the seven lamps of fire, the seven horns, the seven eyes of the Lamb, the seven heads of the dragon, the seven heads of the beast, the seven diadems, the seven names of blasphemy, the seven plagues, the seven angels, the seven thunders, the seven hills of mystic Babylon, and the seven kings. There are seven descriptive statements of the Christophany (clothing, girdle, head, hair, eyes, feet, and voice), seven different sayings of the Living One, and seven beatitudes (1, 3; 14, 18; 16, 15; 19, 9; 20, 6; 22, 7, 14). There is a sevenfold division in the introduction; the inscription, 1—3; the address, 4—6; the parousia, 7; the attestor, 8; the conditions of composition, 9; the vision, 10—16; the voice and command, 17—20. Some authors find a sevenfold division of the entire book and seven distinct visions in the body of the book. (See Hayes, *John and His Writings*, p. 296 ff.)

This use of seven is not accidental. What is its significance? To the ordinary reader seven means a definite number of units, nothing more and nothing less. In the Apocalypse, however, seven is a sacred number. Its sacredness had already been established in the Old Testament (the Sabbath, system of feasts, Gen. 2, 2, 3; Lev. 4, 6—17; 8, 33; 26, 21—28; Num. 19, 12; Josh. 6, 3; 1 Sam. 2, 5; 2 Kings 5, 10). It signifies *completion* and *perfection*. The seven churches, for example, are realities, each having its distinct geographical location; yet they represent the one, true invisible Church. They are symbolic of the complete number of visible churches throughout history and also of the perfect unity of the Church invisible. Upon this basis, Milligan declares that "the seven Spirits of God are His one Spirit; the seven horns and the seven eyes of the Lamb are His one powerful might and His one penetrating glance; the seven seals, the seven trumpets, and the seven bowls embody the thought of many judgments, which are yet in reality one." (*Expositor's Bible*, p. 28.) This example of the use of the number seven as a symbol is given that the reader may understand better how the entire book is to be interpreted.

He who can apprehend spiritual truths in the symbols, visions, imagery, prophetic utterances, and figurative language of this book has the key to its correct interpretation. We have here revealed to us the Church Militant, a heart-stirring picture of the ceaseless conflict in this world between good and the forces of evil. The reader, thrust into the midst of this conflict, begins to realize as never before

the horrible, hideous, dreadful, and unfathomable nature of sin, that taxes the highest energies of the universe to bring it under control. There is no truce; for "there can be no peace nor compromise in earth or in heaven, in time or in eternity, between righteousness and unrighteousness, light and darkness, Christ and Belial." This "Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto Him to show unto His servants the things which must shortly come to pass," 1, 1, we receive in accordance with His prophetic office.

B) Who is the overcomer in this warfare with the foe and his allies, who bring the abominations upon the earth? "*The Lamb shall overcome them; for He is Lord of lords and King of kings; and they that are with Him are called and chosen and faithful,*" 17, 14. He is the triumphant Victor, whom the angels and saints worship, saying: "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing," 5, 12.

How is the victory won? This question is of supreme importance. It involves the central teaching of Christianity. Whether or not we are numbered with the "called and chosen and faithful" is determined by our answer to this question. What is the answer according to the Apocalypse?

As we are carried with these visions into the midst of wars, plagues, woes, pestilences, famines, earthquakes, fire, brimstone, dragons, whoredoms, pains, perils, sufferings, and almost every conceivable destructive force of the universe, it would be expected that in the end God would lead forth a mighty army of His hosts for a pitched battle of decisive importance with Satan and his allies, in which both sides would be arrayed in great battle glory and in all available strength and that in this final conflict, Satan and his forces would be conquered and "cast into the lake of fire and brimstone... and tormented day and night forever and ever," 20, 10. But this is not the case. The victory has already been won before this revelation takes place, 1, 5. It is sounded as the key-note of the conflict at the very beginning. *The victory has been won by the blood of the Lamb.*

He "loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood," 1, 5. The victory consists in the redemption of mankind by the blood of the atonement. They who "*serve Him day and night in His temple*" are they "who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb," 7, 14, 15. These statements and others of this writing quite clearly teach the vicarious atonement. To be *washed from our sins in His own blood* is to have forgiveness of our sins in the blood of the atonement. The original text comes to our assistance in establishing this fact of the substitutionary death of Christ as the propitiation for our sins. The best texts have the aorist active participle *λούσαντι*, for "wash." This form is from *λύω*,

which means to set free, loose, ransom, annul, release from bonds. A more exact translation would be: "He loves us and set us free from our sins in his own blood." We immediately connect this verse with Christ's own words (Matt. 20, 28): "Even as the Son of Man came . . . to give His life a ransom (*λύτρον*) for many"; and we note especially the use of the same Greek root. Again we have the same Greek root in an epistle of St. Paul (1 Tim. 2, 6): "He gave Himself a ransom for all." In the First Epistle of St. Peter the same root also appears (1, 18, 19): "You know you were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, . . . but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot." The same truth is also expressed in an epistle of St. John (1 John 1, 7): "The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth (*καθαρίζει*) us from all sin." This cardinal truth we also hear resounding again and again in the Apocalypse: "These are they which came out of great tribulation and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb," 7, 14. "Thou art worthy . . ., for Thou wast slain and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation," 5, 9. "And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb," 12, 11. "And there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defleth . . ., but they which are written in the Lamb's Book of Life," 21, 27.

It may be argued that we are "set free" from sin inasmuch as we are made pure and righteous in character as the result of being drawn to Jesus because of His sacrificial death. Let us consider this position in the light of 7, 13, 14, where we read of those who "are arrayed in white robes." The robes, we should note, are spotlessly clean and without blemish, or trace of defilement; for "there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defleth," 21, 27. How has this condition been attained? By an internal purging process or by means of an external source? "White robes have been given to every one of them," 6, 11. They stand before the throne of God declared righteous and just because their sins have been washed away. Only they are worthy who "are written in the Lamb's Book of Life," 21, 27.

How is this position of salvation by grace alone (*sola gratia*) to be reconciled with such statements as these: "Behold, I come quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give every man according as his work shall be," 22, 12? When the Book of Life was opened, 20, 12, 13, "the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works." "I will give to every one of you according to your works," is His declaration, 2, 23. (See also 2, 2. 5. 9. 13. 19. 26; 3, 1. 2. 8. 15; 14, 13; 18, 6.) A clear line of cleavage must be drawn between the act of God and the acts of man as the cause of our salvation. Good works are necessary as evidence that God's gift of life in His kingdom has been appropriated unto ourselves by living faith in

our Redeemer. Therefore the believer will abound in good works and will be judged according to his works; but these are not the cause of his salvation. That is the gift of God through Christ Jesus, our Lord; for in the end the Judge, who is just and righteous, must say even of the saint: "I have not found thy works *perfect* before God," 3, 2. This confusion of cause and effect of salvation has caused many to err. Let us ever be grateful to our fathers, who have spoken so clearly and so firmly in this matter. (Augsb. Conf., Art. XX; Luther, Catechism, Apostles' Creed, Sec. Art.; Formula of Concord, IV.)

Conclusive evidence that St. John writes of the vicarious atonement is the prominence which is given the word Lamb for Christ in this writing. This name is used as often as twenty-eight times, more than once for each chapter. It is the golden thread of the interpretation of the entire writing and the key-note of its understanding. Nowhere else in the New Testament is this title given to Christ except, singularly enough, in St. John's Gospel, where we have the record of the introduction of the "beloved disciple" to his Lord and Master. In the Apocalypse, also, St. John sees from the beginning of the revelation to the end only "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world."

This title is more than a symbol denoting the Suffering One. It is the Old Testament designation of the sacrificial Victim for the sins of man, of which the sacrificial offerings of the Levitical order were the type. "He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter," Is. 53, 7. He is "our Passover, sacrificed for us," 1 Cor. 5, 7. He is the Paschal Lamb, "the One who was slain," Rev. 5, 12, spotless and unblemished, "worthy to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing." In no wise shall any enter into the Holy City "but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life," 21, 27, "who have washed their robes and made them *white* in the blood of the *Lamb*," 7, 14. Let the name "Lamb" wherever it occurs of Christ in this writing mean to the reader the sacrificial blood which is the reconciliation (at-one-ment) of the sinner with God, the object of the saving faith in which the sinner is "set free" (*sola gratia*) from his sins.

Was Christ's sacrifice accepted by God the Father? That Christ gave Himself a sacrificial victim of sin is universally admitted; but was His sacrifice accepted by God the Father as the atonement for our sins? Are not such statements as we have in the Apocalypse concerning the atonement merely the idle imagery of man deceiving himself, the result of abnormal conditions of the mind, caused by severe persecutions and afflictions which the early Christians experienced? Are not the clear statements of the gospels and of the epistles only examples of delusions of man in his eager effort to satisfy that keen desire in every soul for the assurance of eternal salvation?

Such questions as these are raised concerning the acceptance of the teaching of the Apocalypse on the atonement.

There is a positive guarantee to every Christian that the atonement by Christ has been accepted by the Father; for "the Lamb that was slain" "and was dead," 5, 12; 1, 18, "lives forevermore." Every word and vision which came to the servant John is evidence that the Redeemer lives; "these things saith the First and the Last, which was dead and is alive," 2, 8. In His state of exaltation He rules and reigns supreme in His kingdom: "To Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. Behold, He cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see Him and *they also which pierced Him*; and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him. Even so, Amen," 1, 6, 7. By faith the Christian clings to the resurrected Christ as his Savior. The living Redeemer is the positive guarantee to him that he is "set free" from his sins "in the blood of the Lamb."

What greater evidence than this can we ask for? The "Lamb which was slain," in whose "blood we are set free from our sins," in whom we are declared righteous and by whom we have been "arrayed in white robes," is "the First-born of the dead," 1, 5, and together with Him that sitteth on the throne He reigns in equal majesty and honor and glory and power forever and ever.

C) Let us see further how the resurrected Lord and Christ is described as the Ruler in God's Kingdom of Grace, Power, and Glory.

His kingdom is a Kingdom of Grace. All source of life is in Him and emanates from Him as a gift to whosoever will receive Him. "I am Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End," He has said. "I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely," 21, 6. "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear My voice and open the door, I will come in to him and will sup with him and he with Me," 3, 20. "Let him that heareth come. And let him that is athirst come, and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely," 22, 17.

His Kingdom of Grace includes the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, where "a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeds out of the throne of God and of the Lamb," 22, 1; and all the needs of those who reign with Him will be fully supplied. "They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun light on them nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters," 7, 16 ff. He "shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away," 21, 4.

He "has made us kings and priests unto God and His Father," 1, 6; 5, 10. He will grant that His own sit with Him on His throne, 3, 21. He will give them power over the nations, and they "shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they

be broken to shivers," 2, 26, 27. They will receive even as He has received of the Father, 2, 27. "Him that overcometh," He has said, "will I make a pillar in the temple of My God," 3, 12. "He shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be My son," 21, 7. "The same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the Book of Life, but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels," 3, 5. What more gracious assurance than this could His children want?

The power and glory in which our Lord reigns is described in the most magnificent and exultant language ever penned by an inspired writer. He who "was slain" and "was dead," who "set us free from our sins in His own blood," *lives*; and the "kingdoms of this world are become His; and He shall reign forever and ever," 11, 15. He is "the Prince of the kings of the earth," 1, 5, and shall overcome them that are at war with Him; "for He is Lord of lords and King of kings," 17, 14. "He has on His vesture and on His thigh a name written KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS," 19, 16. "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing. And every creature which is in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, praise Him, saying, 'Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne and unto the Lamb forever and ever,'" 5, 12 ff. "A great multitude, which no man can number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stand before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, . . . and cry with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God, which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb. . . . Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honor, and power, and might be unto our God forever and ever. Amen," 7, 9 ff.

At the conclusion of this glorious portrayal of Christ's kingship we cannot refrain from exclaiming in the words of Job, 19, 25: "I know that my Redeemer liveth and that He shall stand at the Latter Day upon the earth; and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God."⁶⁾

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6) It has been the aim of the writer to let the Apocalypse be its own interpreter; however, the following books and writings will be found helpful in making a further study: Stoeckhardt, G.: *Die sieben Sendschreiben der Offenbarung*. Iowa Dist. Synod. Report, 1894, pp. 42 ff. — Pardieck, E.: *Die sieben Gemeindebriefe. Lehre und Wehre*, Vol. 66, pp. 485 ff. — Ylvisaker, I. D.: *The Book of Revelation and Its Twentieth Chapter. Theologisk Tidsskrift*, October, 1928. — Hayes, D. A.: *John and His Writings*. Third edition. New York, 1923. — Trench, Archbishop: *Commentary on the Epistles to the Seven Churches*. — Ramsay, W. M.: *The Letters to the Seven Churches*. — Zahn, Th.: *Einleitung in das Neue Testament*. — Hengstenberg, E. W.: *Offenbarung Johannis*. — Bengel, J. A.: *Offenbarung Johannis*. — Zorn, C. M.: *Offenbarung St. Johannis*.