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### The Doctrine of Christ in the Apocalypse

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T H E D O C T R I N E O F C H R I S T  
I N T H E A P O C A L Y P S E .

A Thesis Presented for the  
Degree of Bachelor of Divinity.

B y

Hatter Ellwanger A.B., LL.B.

Concordia Seminary.

1928

# THE DOCTRINE OF CHRIST IN THE APOCALYPSE.

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## THE DOCTRINE OF CHRIST IN THE APOCALYPSE.

More have been led astray by vagaries and false notions received from the Apocalypse of Saint John than from any other book of the Bible. Luther wrote four centuries ago: "Es haben wohl viel sich daran versucht, aber bis auf den heutigen Tag nichts Gewisses aufbracht, etliche viel ungeschicktes Dinges aus ihren Kopf hineingebraeuet." (Vol. XIV, 130.) This warning applies today, and most certainly all who attempt to write anything on such a marvellous book as this have in common the feeling of trepidation and incapacity for such a task. It is evident that mysteries, problems, and difficulties will always exist (Rom. 11,33) no matter how far man has advanced in his learning and achievement; but this gives us no reason for closing our eyes to the simple truths within our grasp. "Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep the things which are written therein" (1,3). Without "adding to" or "taking away from the words of the prophecy of this book" 'it is hoped that its simple and beautiful truths, particularly those which pertain to the person and work of Christ, can be brought forth in this paper.

The question might be raised at the outset: Can an apocalyptic writing be used as a basis for doctrine<sup>2</sup>. It is true the Apocalypse has been used sparingly in support of doctrinal teaching. This cannot be due to absence of doctrine in this book, for it abounds in sound doctrine, though

<sup>2</sup> Revelation 22,18-19.

it was not meant to be a theology. The long prevailing uncertainty as to its authorship and authenticity no doubt account for the reluctancy with which it has been used. This objection, however, no longer holds; for it is conceded even by modernistic writers that it has a place in the Canon.<sup>2</sup> It has now been quite firmly established that the author is Saint John the apostle,<sup>3</sup> who is also the author of the Fourth Gospel and of the Johannine Epistles. Once established that an apostle of Jesus Christ is the writer, its true value as an inspired writing ranks equally authoritative with the Gospels and epistles and the other books of the Bible.

Objection to the use of the Apocalypse as a basis of theology on the ground that it is distinctly an apocalyptic writing is taken by some scholars. An apocalyptic writing, most certainly, must be interpreted in accordance with its nature, its purpose, and the circumstances under which it was written; but its apocalyptic nature does not in itself make it a worthless writing. If this were true important portions of the O.T. would have to be ruled out for the same reason; for the works of Daniel and Ezekiel are chiefly apocalyptic. The apostle recorded what he saw "in the Spirit" (1,10). He received messages and saw visions which were the "Revelation of Jesus Christ" (1,1). Though primarily in the form of symbols of spiritual realities, they are none the less revelations of truth. Symbolism is not used to make

<sup>2</sup>Hastings. Bible Dictionary, p.798.

<sup>3</sup>Zahn, Th. Einleitung in das Neue Testament. p. 624 ff.

this book mystical and more difficult for the reader, and thus lead him into bewilderments and doubts; but the purpose was to make spiritual truths intelligible to the mind. This is after the fashion of parables in the life of Christ. The spiritual truths expressed in the figurative and symbolic language of this book could not have been revealed in a more forceful, comprehensible, nor beautiful way. Just because truths are found expressed in symbolic language, or because they are found in a book which is chiefly apocalyptic, is not reason enough in itself to throw up our hands in alarm and say, "This book is very good reading for comfort and consolation in the time of trouble and for hope and assurance of the final victory of Christ; but as to basis for doctrine, it is no good". God's Word is truth "from the beginning" (Ps.119,160), and no distinction can be made as to the degree of truth in any of the books of the Bible. (This applies also to truth not revealed in the Bible.) Therefore the truths revealed in the Apocalypse are equally true with those of the Gospels, the epistles, and the other portions of the Bible; and the doctrinal truths <sup>of this book</sup> must serve as a basis of theology.

Since a correct understanding and interpretation of the symbolism of this book is very important in this treatise, let us consider briefly one example, the use of the number 'seven'. This number occurs fifty-four times in the Apocalypse. 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. The division of the entire book is sevenfold.<sup>4</sup> There are seven divisions in the introduction, seven descriptive statements concerning the Christophany (clothing, girdle, head, hair, eyes, feet, and voice), seven different sayings of the Living One, and seven beatitudes (1,3;14,13;19,9;20,6;22,7 & 14).

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. It signifies completion and perfection. Its sacredness had already been established in the Old Testament.<sup>5</sup> The seven churches, for example, to which the seven letters are addressed are realities, each having its distinct geographical location; yet these seven churches are representative of the one, true, invisible Church. Seven, a material reality, symbolizes a spiritual reality, unity and completeness.

He who can apprehend spiritual truths in the symbols, visions, imagery, prophetic utterances, and figurative language of this book has the key for its correct interpretation.

<sup>4</sup> Hayes, John and His Writings. p.297.

<sup>5</sup> I Sam.2,5. Lev.4,6-17; 8,33. Num.19,12. Lev.26,21-28. Josh.6,3. Gen.4,15. 2 Kings 5,10. The Sabbath, system of feasts, etc.

## I. THE PERSON OF CHRIST.

Jesus Christ is true God. This truth is fundamentally expressed by Saint John in his gospel: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God (John 1,1) ----- 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" (v.14). This is <sup>also</sup> fundamentally the conception of Christ according to the Apocalypse. He is true God 1) because He receives the titles of God; 2) because He possesses the attributes of God; 3) because He has the prerogatives of God; 4) because He receives honor and worship due only to God.

A. Jesus Christ is true God because He receives the titles of God. It is often alleged that Jesus is not called "God" outright anywhere in Scripture, but that such titles are predicated of Him that admit a position of subordination. 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, and he shall be my son." (ἑσθλας αὐτῷ θεός) There can be no quibble concerning the word used for "God" in this case. It is the Greek θεός, which means 'a god, deity'. Bengel writes:<sup>6</sup> "Diess ist eine kurz gefasste Rede, und bedeutet so viel: Er wird mich zu

<sup>6</sup>Bengel, J.A. Offenbarung Johannes. p.606.

seinem Vater und Gott und ich ihn zu einem Puerger und Sohn haben." This is a beautiful exegesis of this verse, and it needs no further interpretation. It is a simple statement and easily understood, namely, that Jesus will be our God and we shall be His sons.

Jesus is not only called God, but He is designated by the title "Lord". The term  $\text{יהוה}$  in the Old Testament is the proper name for the one, true God. It is used interchangeably with  $\text{יהו}$ . The New Testament translation for this term is "Lord". Therefore all that  $\text{יהוה}$  signified for the Hebrews of the O.T. is included in the use of the term "Lord" in the N.T. This title applied to Christ gives him the divine title, and without hesitation it is applied to Christ throughout the Apocalypse; 1,8; 11,18; 11,17; 14,13; 17,14; 19,16; 22,20-21. To further substantiate this use of the term "Lord", O.T. passages which relate alone to  $\text{יהוה}$  are applied to Christ: Deut. 10,17. "For the Lord your God is God of gods, and Lord of lords, a great God,---" (Cf. Rev. 17,14). Dan. 7,9:" And the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool: his throne was like the fiery flame,---" (Cf. Rev. 1,14.)

A most fitting close to the Bible is the doxology: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all." In these few words, "our Lord Jesus Christ", we have the unity expressed which exists between the Old and the New Testaments. Jesus is our Lord and God.

"He is the Lord of Lords and King of kings" (17,14)

"And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written,

ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΝ ΚΑΙ ΚΥΡΙΟΣ ΚΥΡΙΩΝ.

No higher title than this is conceivable. Christ is King of <sup>(19,16)</sup> kings for He has dominion over all things. He is Lord of lords, for He is God. He is "the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords." I Tim.6,15.

"Thus saith the Lord----- I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God."<sup>7</sup> Isa.44,6. In the Apocalypse, Jesus says: "I am the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty." 1,8 ; 1,11; 1,17; 2,8; 22,13. In these words Christ is either coordinated or identified with God; <sup>but</sup> there is no consciousness of ditheism in the book, for it is rigidly monotheistic; nor on the other hand is there a confusion of two persons.<sup>5</sup> There is one essence, God; but two Persons, Father and Son.

B. Jesus Christ is true God because He possesses the attributes of God.

Jesus is omnipotent (almighty, παντοκράτωρ). 1,8 expressly states that He is almighty. παντοκράτωρ occurs in three other verses in this book.(4,8; 11,17; 21,22), and elsewhere only once in the New Testament(2Cor.6,18). The title which is claimed here is 'dominion over all, and the rule and government of all'. παντοκράτωρ is used of God

<sup>5</sup>Swete, H.B. The Apocalypse of St. John. p. 155 ff.  
<sup>7</sup>Exod. 3,14. Deut. 4,35. Mark 12,29.32. John 17,3. Isa. 42,8.  
 Isa. 48,12.13.16.

in 4,8; 11,17; and 21,22. Christ, therefore, who is the Almighty according to 1,8, has the omnipotence of God.

He is truly presented to us as having all power and dominion in 5,11ff: "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 honour, 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 honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever."

Jesus, by whom the revelation is given to Saint John, is omniscient. This follows from 1,1, for only He who knows all things, He who is "the beginning and the ending" in knowledge, could set Himself forth as the Revealer of the things of this book. Furthermore, the Revealer announces Himself as omniscient in each of the letters, where the formula, 'I know thy works' is common to all. This statement is not made by one who purports to have only human knowledge of the 'works' of these various churches; but it is made by Him who walks up and down the candlesticks of gold, whom nothing escapes, who searches into the heart, and who knows the thoughts. All is naked and manifest before Him, and this is what the words 'I know thy works' declare.

The Christ of the Apocalypse is eternal. "I am the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last." (22,13. See also 1,8; 1,17 and 2,8.) In these words Jesus reveals that He is eternal. He was the beginning, for He created all things (4,11)<sup>3,14</sup>, and before Him there was no other. He is the end, for He "lives forevermore" (1,18). "And He shall reign for ever and ever." (11,15)<sup>7</sup> He is the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the infinite One. This leaves no room for any other; He is indeed the only I AM; and beside Him there is no God (Isa. 41,4; 43,10; 44,6; 48,12).

The words, <sup>(1,8)</sup>  $\delta \omega \nu \kappa \alpha \iota \delta \acute{\eta} \nu \kappa \alpha \iota \delta \epsilon \rho \chi \acute{o} \mu \epsilon \nu \circ \varsigma$ , express the immutability of Him who reveals Himself. He who "is and was and is to come" is absolute, and resists all change and modification. This phrase expresses the immutability of God, who is "the same yesterday, and today, and for ever". (Heb.8,8.) "I am the Lord", Jesus<sup>here</sup> declares, "I change not"; (Mal.3,6.) "with whom there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning". (Jam.1,17.) In 4,8 we read: it is the "Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come". No distinction is made between Jesus Christ and the Lord God Almighty as to immutability.

He is the "Living One" (1,18.)  $\delta \{ \omega \nu$  expresses that He is the fountain and source of life to others. He is the Holy One  $\delta \acute{\alpha} \gamma \iota \circ \varsigma$  (3,7.), the One in whom the eternal sanctities reside, who is Himself the root and ground of them all. "He then that claims to be 'The Holy

<sup>7</sup> Rev. 1,6; 4,9; 5,13; 22,5.

One'- a name which Jehovah in the Old Testament continually claims for his own (Isa.6,3; 40,25; 53,15),- implicitly claims to be God; 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." Trench.<sup>10</sup>

He who possesses these attributes, named and described above, can be none other than God Himself.

C. Jesus Christ of the Apocalypse is true God because he has prerogatives of God.

He is "the beginning of the creation of God" (3,14). Creation is usually ascribed to God the Father, and for this reason the Arians explained this passage in the passive sense, that is, Christ was the first and most excellent creature of God's hands. According to the context, however, in which Christ is set forth as almighty, omniscient, and infinite, this must be taken in the active sense: He is the principium principians, He who was the fountain-source of all the creation of God, by whom God created all things. (Trench.p.199.) He appears as the Author of creation in 5,13. In his Gospel, St. John wrote: "All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made." (John 1,3.) According to Col.1,15ff., all things were created by Jesus Christ. This is also the teaching of

<sup>10</sup>Trench. Commentary on the Epistles to the Seven Churches. p.176.

the Apocalypse. He is the "Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the ending, the first and the last," the Author of creation.

In the numerous passages that describe Jesus as Judge and as Ruler of the universe, we are again compelled to acknowledge His deity. He "is the ruler of the kings of the earth (1,5); He "has the sharp two-edged sword" (2,12) and His "eyes are like a flame of fire"(2,18). His dominion is universal; He is "Lord of lords and King of kings" (17,14; 19,16). He is "the Root and the Offspring of David, the bright and morning Star" (22,16). "He holds the seven stars in His right hand; He walks in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks" (2,1); "He has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars" (3,1). He searches "the reins and the hearts" of men (2,23), and has the power to take life and to give it (1,18 and 2,23). The key of the house of David, that is, of the kingdom of heaven, is His own (3,7). It depends upon Him who shall be admitted or who shall be shut out; for it is He "that openeth, and no man shutteth; that shutteth, and no man openeth".

"Behold, He cometh with the clouds" (1,7). This phrase occurs repeatedly as descriptive of the Lord's second coming (Dan.7,13; Matt.24,30; 26,64; Mark 14,62). Many speculations have been made in regard to Christ's second coming on the basis of chapter twenty. If it is remembered that St. John writes in terms of symbols, no difficulty results. The number 'ten' is a symbol for perfection and completion.

Hence the thousand year reign (a multiple of 'ten') of Christ is His complete reign, through the preaching of the Gospel, from the time He became flesh until His second coming, as described in 1,7 and in the Gospels. At this coming, He will come as Judge, in His dominion and glory. "Every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him." (1,7). The dead will be judged (20,12f), and "whosoever is not found in the book of life is to be cast into the lake of fire" (20,15). Only they "which are written in the Lamb's book of life" shall enter into the heavenly Jerusalem (21,27). To him that overcometh, He promises, "I will give to eat of the tree of life" (2,7), he "shall be clothed in white raiment" (3,5), and to him "I will grant to sit with me in my throne" (3,21).

He is supreme Sovereign and Judge, and He "cometh quickly". This warning is sounded three times in the letters and three times in the final chapter. "It is a word of fear to those who abuse the Master's absence, but a comfort for those who keep His word. It is a firm announcement by One who has dominion over all things. "Behold, I come quickly", he says (22,12), "and my reward is with me". "Surely I come quickly" (22,20).

These prerogatives belong to God alone.

//Rev. 2,5; 2,16; 3,11; 22,7; 22,12; 22,20.

D. Jesus Christ is true God because He receives honor and worship due only to God.

The act of worshipping is quite prominent in the Apocalypse. God alone is to be worshipped (19,10; 14,7). They who 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 holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb; and the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever; and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receive the mark of his name." (14,10ff.) 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." In order to be consistent, therefore, it is necessary to accept the Lamb as God; for both the Lamb and God are worshipped without distinction. This is clearly shown in 5,13 where the heavenly hosts and all creatures in heaven and on earth worship, saying: "Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever." The Lamb is expressly identified in 5,12 as the One "that was slain". A similar act of worship wherein "a great multitude--- of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues" take part is described in 7,9ff. Here again no distinction is made between God and the Lamb in being worshipped; for they "cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon

the throne, and unto the Lamb". It might be maintained that the position of the Lamb is subordinated, since it is God who is presented as the One who "sitteth upon the throne"; but 7,17 proves there is no such intention on the part of the author; this verse explains that the "Lamb is in the midst of the throne". He is "the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father". (John 1,18.)

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

E. Jesus Christ is designated as true God by titles and phrases.

In 2,18, He who addresses the churches calls Himself the "Son of God". In other passages God is called the Father.<sup>12</sup> Immediately we identify Him who speaks to us in the Apocalypse with the "Son of the living God" of the Gospels and the epistles. He is the Christ (Matt. 16,16), the only begotten Son of the Father, who dwelt among us in the flesh, and who redeemed mankind through His blood. It is He who said: "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John 14,9); "I and my Father are one" (John 10,30); "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (Jo.14,6). He is our Lord and God.

Christ is twice called the "Son of man" in this book. This is the title which the Master loved to apply to himself when he dwelt among men here on earth. It is significant that

<sup>12</sup>Rev. 1,6; 2,27; 3,5; 3,21; 14,1.

of the more than fifty times this title is used in the N.T. it is <sup>always</sup> used by the Master in speaking of himself, with the exception of three instances. Two of these exceptions occur in the Apocalypse (1,13 and 14,14).<sup>3</sup> The title first occurs in Daniel 7,13, and the Saviour repeats it in the same connection in Matt. 24,30. The use of this title in the Apocalypse brings to mind the true human nature of Him who had now ascended on high in His state of exaltation and appeared to the apostle in His glorious power and majesty (1,13ff). Jesus was true man, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered and died for men. The "Son of man" was true man and is true God.

Christ is designated as God by being associated with Him upon the footing of equality, as the second Person of the Godhead. Those who have part in the first resurrection "shall be priests of God and of Christ" (20,6). Again the same equality is maintained with respect to the virgins redeemed from among men "being the firstfruits unto God and unto the Lamb" (14,4). In the description of the heavenly Jerusalem, it is significant to note that St. John saw no temple in it, but that "the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it" (21,22), and the "glory of God and of the Lamb" are the light of it (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). These expressions in which God and the Lamb are placed upon a basis of equality cannot be passed over merely as meaningless flourishes.

<sup>3</sup>(The other occurrence is in Acts 7,56.)

They have a true theological significance. They present to us a beautiful conception of how the two Persons of the Godhead, Father and Son, are coequal in power, majesty, and glory.

A single one of the proofs submitted above is sufficient to prove the deity of Christ. Consideration of all of them makes our conclusion convincing and persuasive. Indeed it is not denied by outstanding critics that Christ is identified with God in the Apocalypse. Bousset<sup>14</sup> explains this, however, by saying: "We have in it the faith of a layman unaffected by any theological reflection, which with heedless naivete simply identifies Christ in His predicates and attributes with God". Baur says: "The highest predicates ascribed to Jesus are only names borne outwardly by Him, and are not associated with his person in any inner unity of nature". Frank C. Porter<sup>15</sup> is not ready to admit that absolute identity exists, stating, "He would seem almost to identify Christ and God. -- Yet close as the association is, closer and more abiding than in I Cor. 15, 20 to 28, subordination remains, and is expressed in simple and unreserved fashion. 1,1; 2,7.27; 3,2.12.14.21."

This question is of greatest theological importance, and the true Christian cannot do otherwise than accept the Word as he receives it. To him who believes, Jesus is the "Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the ending, the first and the last, which is and which was and which is to come, the Almighty".

<sup>14</sup>Bousset. (Meyers Com. on Apoc.)

<sup>15</sup>Porter, F. C. Hastings Bible Dictionary. Vol. II. p. 262.

## II. THE WORK OF CHRIST.

The end and purpose of the work of Christ is the salvation of men. This He accomplishes through His teaching, by His atonement, and in His reigning over the universe. A threefold office of Christ has been distinguished from the time of the Church Fathers<sup>16</sup> (the prophetic, the sacerdotal, and the royal), and it will be found convenient to retain this division in the consideration of the work of Christ according to the Apocalypse.

### A. The prophetic office of Christ.

Christ is the teacher of mankind, the teacher of teachers, and the prophet of prophets. In the Gospels we have a record of His teaching when He dwelt among us. After His ascension He continued to teach through His Word and Spirit by means of His called servants. He exercised this office in a special manner in His state of exaltation when He appeared to the apostle John on the island of Patmos and gave him the messages to the seven churches and revealed to him in visions the history of the Church throughout the ages.

It should be especially noted in this apocalyptic writing that Jesus Himself is the speaker. He is speaking directly to His hearers. The personal pronoun, "I", is used fifty-three times in the letters to the seven churches. He identifies Himself again and again in such words as: "I am he that liveth and was dead, and behold I am alive

<sup>16</sup>Eusebius. Church History.

for evermore" (1,18); "I am the Root and the Offspring of David" (22,16).

In these epistles to the seven churches we behold the one, true, invisible Church of Christ in her graces and her failings, in her strength and in her weakness, in her joys and in her sorrows, in her falling under the influence of temptation and in her return to the path of duty. The Church, holy, pure, and perfect, is found in the midst of worldly cares and troubles, blemished and marred by the sins of man.

Each letter begins with a striking description of Christ, in which His divine attributes are set forth. This is followed in each letter by the statement of His omniscience, "I know thy works". Words of praise and of censure then follow, directed to the individual church, but characteristic as well of the Church universal. For two churches, Smyrna and Philadelphia, there are only words of praise. For one church, the Laodiceans, there is no praise, only words of reproof. For the other churches, words of praise are mingled with words of rebuke. Each letter closes with the admonition "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches", and with a promise to "him that overcometh".

Christ's teaching in these letters may be briefly summed up as follows: In the first group of three, love to the Redeemer is praised, yet their love is pointed out as liable, and even beginning to grow cold; followers of Christ

must endure persecutions and trials; the Church is preserved by the grace of God. In the second group of four, yielding on the part of the majority to sins associated with unchristian doctrine is reproved; formalism in religion is condemned; warning is given against weakness in the midst of trials and against luke warmness. Thus the living Church in the midst of the vicissitudes of man is presented to us in these letters to the seven churches <sup>as</sup> the object of the Lord's care and watchfulness.

In the remainder of the Apocalypse the history of the Church is unfolded to us in the form of visions. The Church throughout all ages, from the time of the Apocalypse to the end of the world, is revealed to us. It is this portion of the book with its marvellous and wonderful visions that makes it characteristically an apocalyptic and eschatological work. It is the one prophetic book of the New Testament; in it, Christ is the Prophet.

The Church triumphant with Christ the worthy Redeemer as Victor, to whom all praise and glory is given, is the substance of chapters four and five. The seven seals of chapters six to eight reveal the history of the Church throughout all ages. Christ, the rider of the white horse (6,2 and 19,11), conquers and is victorious. War, the red horse (6,4), brings suffering to the end of the world (Matt. 24,6). There will be famines and pestilences (the black horse, 6,5) followed by death (the pale horse, 6,8). Through

all, God will keep His Church (6,11). He knows the definite number of His children; they have been elected (Ch.7). True spiritual Israel is saved. They "have come out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb"(7,14).

At the sounding of the seven trumpets (Chs. 8 and 9), distress and spiritual sorrows of the Church is revealed. These plagues and woes represent false teachings and heresies that harass the Church. The early Church interpreted these to signify Gnosticism, Montanism, Arianism, and Pelagianism, which correspond today to philosophy, pietism, unitarianism, and Arminianism.

Subsequent chapters describe the great dragon, which is Satan, who makes war with the Church, but cannot destroy it. Anti-Christ is described in his strength and horror and in his final downfall (11 and 18). The final chapters describe the heavenly Jerusalem in its magnificent beauty and grandeur. Again at the close, the reader is reminded of Christ's eternity and His second coming, with the invitation: "And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

In this remarkable book of visions, Christ reveals to us heavenly powers. Furthermore, it is the clearest revelation we have of the essence of evil, and of the final judgment of the devil and sin. He who studies this revelation realizes as never before the horrible, ghastly, hideous, and unnamable nature of sin, that taxes the highest energies

of the universe to control it. The Apocalypse is a picture of ceaseless conflict between good and evil. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit with their followers are on one side; the dragon, the wild beast, and the false prophet with their followers are on the other. There is no truce between these hosts; for there can be no peace nor compromise in earth or heaven, in time or in eternity, between righteousness and unrighteousness, light and darkness; Christ and Belial.<sup>17</sup> This conflict ends in glorious victory for the Lamb. Christ is the Great Overcomer. (This last point is to be more fully treated in the following division of this paper.)

#### B. The sacerdotal office of Christ.

How is Christ the Great Overcomer as He is revealed to us in the Apocalypse? How is He the triumphant Victor? This question is of central importance in theology. All doctrine is vitally dependent upon the answer to this question, the chief teaching of Christianity. Treatment of this central doctrine forms the saddest chapter in the history of mankind, for it is incorrectly understood and applied by so many. Yet it is the source of truest happiness and joy to the Christian, for in it he comes to "the knowledge of the truth".

In reading this book with its marvelous visions brought before the ecstatic eye of Saint John, in which all the

<sup>17</sup>Hayes. John and His Writings. p.303ff.

forces of nature and of the universe seem to be brought into the great conflict between God and His followers and the forces of evil - dragons, beasts, woes, plagues, wars, famines, pestilences, and the like,- it would be expected that in the end that the Lord would muster together a mighty force of all the hosts of heaven and of earth, and in a battle of decisive importance with all the forces of evil, in which both sides would be arrayed in tremendous power and all available strength and glory, that the powers of evil would be conquered in this battle and destroyed, and that God and His angels and the saints would reign in peace for evermore. But this is not the case. The victory has already been won before the revelation takes place (1,5). It is sounded as the keynote throughout the entire revelation. The victory has been won by the blood of the Lamb.

The evidence for the vicarious atonement of Christ is very clear and decisive in the Apocalypse. At the beginning of this book we read the beautiful words: "And from Jesus Christ --- who loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood" (1,5). This is a simple and clear statement of the forgiveness of our sins in the atoning blood of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. "Das Waschen bezeichnet die Hinweherschaffung der Sünde durch die Vergebung und die darin wurzelnde Kraft der Heiligung". (Hengstenberg.)<sup>18</sup> The original text comes to our assistance in establishing the substitutionary death of Christ as the

<sup>18</sup>Hengstenberg. Offenbarung. Vol. I. p.97.

propitiation for our sins. The best texts have the aorist active participle λύσαντι (for 'wash') from λύω, which means to loose, ransom, release from bonds, set free, annul, do away with. This immediately connects 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". "He gave himself a ransom for all" (I Tim. 2,6). By the "precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (I Pet. 1,19) we were redeemed. "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin"(I John 1,7). The teaching of these passages, as well as a number of others concerning the atonement,<sup>19</sup> is simply and clearly expressed in the words of the Apocalypse: who "loved us and set us free from our sins in his own blood". His sacrificial blood is a substitution for our own guilt and punishment which justice demands. Upon the basis of His atonement we are reconciled with God in that we are set free from our sins.

It may be argued that we are "set free" (ransomed) from sin in that we are made pure and righteous in his blood insofar that it is a power within us to follow His example and do good. This position cannot be maintained, however, when 7,14 is considered. There he<sup>who</sup> was a condemned sinner stands in the presence of God "arrayed in white robes", spotless and clean, without blemish and trace of defilement. How has this condition been attained? Not by living a perfect life; for "if we say we have no sin, we deceive

<sup>19</sup>2 Cor. 5,19; 1 John 2,2; John 1,29; Gal. 3,13; Hebr. 9,12.

ourselves, and the truth is not within us" (1 John 1,8). They stand in the presence of God who "have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (7,14). Let the one word 'white' (ἁλῶσθε) be emphasized. They alone have "white" robes who have been declared righteous in the blood of the Lamb.

The striking evidence of the Apocalypse that the blood of Jesus Christ is the sacrificial atonement for our sins is the use of the term 'Lamb'. 'Lamb' is the beloved epithet for Jesus in this book. It is the golden thread of its interpretation and the keynote of its understanding: It is used as many as twenty-eight times, more than once for each chapter. Nowhere else in the New Testament is this title given to the Saviour, except in the Gospel according to John, where it is recorded that the Master was pointed out to him who was to be His 'beloved disciple' in the words: "Behold, the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world". To Saint John Jesus always was the Lamb of God, taking away the sin of the world, and in the Apocalypse it is the Lamb he sees from the beginning to the end of the book.

This symbolical title does more than refer to the character or disposition of the Saviour. It refers to the sacrificial victim of which the sacrifices of the Levitical<sup>10</sup> order were the type. 'Lamb' is to be understood in this sense in Isaiah 53,7: "He is brought as a lamb to slaughter".

<sup>10</sup> Lev. 4,32; 5,6 and 18; 14,12-17. Numb. 6,12.

Paul also wrote concerning Christ in this way: "For even Christ, our Passover, is sacrificed for us"(1 Cor. 5,7). Christ is the sacrificial lamb, spotless and unblemished, sacrificed once for all for the sins of the world. At the head of heaven's host and sitting on heaven's throne (5,13), He is still the Paschal Lamb, slain for sin, and saving from sin.

Was Christ's sacrifice accepted by the Father? That Christ gave himself as a sacrificial victim of sin is universally admitted. But, was His sacrifice accepted by God the Father as atonement for our sins? Are not such statements as we have in the Apocalypse concerning the atonement merely the idle imagery of man in his own deception? Are not the clear statements of the Gospels and the epistles examples of delusions of man in his dire effort to satisfy a keen desire of his soul? Was not the Apocalypse the result of abnormal conditions of the mind, <sup>which were</sup> caused by severe persecutions and afflictions the early Christians experienced? Such questions as these are raised concerning the truth of the atonement.

In the first place, the true Christian accepts in faith the statements of the inspired writings as he receives them. More than this, the positive guarantee to every Christian that Christ's sacrifice was accepted by the Father as atonement for our sins is His resurrection. He is "the first begotten of the dead" (1,5). The Lamb "that was slain" (5,12) lives, "and was dead; and behold, lives for evermore"(1,18).

What more forceful, simple, and clear presentation of the atonement is possible! "There could be no more striking indication of the high significance the writer attached to the sacrificial death of Christ, and to the dominance of the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah in the framing of his Messianic conceptions."<sup>21</sup> We have been redeemed by the Lamb who was slain. In His blood we are set free from our sins. Our sin-stained garments are made spotless and white. In His presence we are declared righteous and are arrayed in white robes. Our redemption by the Lamb is acceptable to God the Father, for the firstborn of the dead reigns with Him that sitteth on the throne in equal majesty and honor and glory and power for ever and evermore.

#### C. The royal office of Christ.

The Redeemer of mankind also rules His kingdom in His grace and power and glory.

In His kingdom of grace He has "made us kings and priests unto God and His Father" (1,6; 5,10). We are kings, for all that is His is ours. He will grant that we may sit with Him on His throne (3,21). He gives us power over the nations (2,26). We are "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ" (Rom.8,17). In faith, we are victors over sin, death, and Satan. In "tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, or sword --- we are more than conquerors through him that loved us" (Rom.8,35ff). He has

<sup>21</sup>Warfield. The Lord of Glory. p.291.

"made us priests" (5,10). "We are a royal priesthood"; the Levitical order is abolished. Jesus Christ is our High priest, and by His sacrifice, once for all, He gained accession to God for all men for all time to come. There is no distinction nor caste system; all are equal in His sight. Our High priest intercedes for us. He will confess that name which is written in the book of life before His Father and His angels. (3,5.)

Those whom He has made kings and priests in His kingdom He also keeps and preserves in the true faith. "I will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world" (3,10) is His promise. The Christian is not to be exempted from temptation, but in the hour of temptation He promises to keep us secure. This He does by means of His Word and Sacraments. He sends the Spirit to strengthen us. In Him we have forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation, and in this respect He is the "living water". In his Gospel Saint John wrote concerning the "living water" (John 4,14); and in the Apocalypse Jesus also "gives unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely" (21,6). The invitation is extended to all to "come and take the water of life freely" (33,17). He stands at the door of man's heart and knocks; and if any man hear his voice, resist not with his obstinate will, and open the door, He will come in to him and sup with him. (3,20) All those who are with Him in eternal blessedness have all their wants perfectly 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" (7,16ff).

Our Lord reigns in power and glory supreme over all things in heaven and in earth throughout eternity. The glory and power of Jesus Christ as ruler of the universe is described in the Apocalypse in the most magnificent and exultant language ever penned by an inspired writer. How comforting and how encouraging it is to know that He who "was slain" and "was dead", He who set us free from sin "in His own blood", lives, and that "the kingdoms of this world are become His; and He shall reign for ever and ever" (11, 15). He is "KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS" (19,16). All kings of the earth are subject to His law and to His will; for He is "the Prince of the kings of the earth" (1,5). There is no other god beside Him; He is our Lord and our God, the "Lord of lords, and King of kings" (17,14). It is He who sits on the throne of the new Jerusalem (21,6; 22,3) in all its splendor and grandeur. The glory of God and of the Lamb is the light thereof (21,23). "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, praise Him, saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne,

and unto the Lamb for ever and ever" (5,12ff). "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." They worship, saying, "Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen." (7,9ff.)

In the study of this book, one is impressed with the infinite depths of the truths it enfolds. The mysteries which it holds are ever absorbing and delve into the limitless and boundless realms of spiritual realities that are never reached by the mind of man. They seem to increase in geometric proportion as one reads and rereads. We are given a glimpse of the glory and greatness of God. Aside from this, two things cannot fail to be impressed indelibly upon the reader, no matter how little or how much he understands of this apocalyptic writing. They are these: 1) Jesus Christ is true God, reigning with the Father in equal majesty and glory through eternity; 2) we are set free from our sins in the blood of the Lamb.

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