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# **JESUS, REVOLUTIONARY OF PEACE**

**A Nonviolent Christology in the Book of Revelation**

Mark Bredin

Foreword by Richard Bauckham



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## PATERNOSTER BIBLICAL MONOGRAPHS

### Series Preface

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## Foreword

It can safely be said that no other book in the New Testament has suffered so seriously from misinterpretation as the book of Revelation. Like the book itself the history of its interpretation both inspires and appalls. At stake in the struggle over the interpretation of Revelation that has been going on, with more or less awareness of the key issues, in the Revelation scholarship of the last few decades is not just the correct reading of this or that passage or the elucidation of this or that mystery of meaning in this complex work, but the central message of the whole book and the whole theological and ethical thrust of its teaching. Mark Bredin's is a significant new voice in this interpretative struggle.

In his study of the figure of the human Jesus in Revelation several distinctive angles of vision converge in an exciting way. He brings to his study a Gandhian understanding of non-violence and a Girardian suspicion of redemptive violence, not as prejudicial but as heuristic approaches by which to highlight what is ideologically remarkable in Revelation's presentation of Jesus' victory by non-violent witness. He also approaches the text from the perspective of the Hebrew Bible and early Jewish traditions, recognizing and appreciating John's deep immersion in these traditions, and arguing that his engagement with them includes creative transformation of key images and motifs. Finally, he keeps in the forefront of his study of Revelation the image of the revolutionarily non-violent Jesus of the Gospels and the rest of the New Testament, an image which is too often left aside as interpreters enter the apparently so different world of the last book of the New Testament. Bredin invites us to see in Revelation, not a betrayal of that Jesus, but a powerful expression of the impact of that Jesus in a world dominated by military and economic violence. He brings to the fore the earthly and human aspect of Revelation's Jesus, the Jesus who bore faithful witness in his life and his suffering to the point of death, and who requires his followers to follow in precisely that way of non-violent witness. In ways that others have adumbrated but few have pursued so consistently, and none have developed so fully, he argues that the Jesus of Revelation never becomes unfaithful to this faithful witness he bore in his earthly life and death - a witness to which non-violence, as well as non-cooperation with evil, is integral. The controlling christological image of the slaughtered Lamb remains the controlling image even when the apparently so militaristic image of the Rider on the white horse fills the vision in chapter 19. Revelation's Jesus appears not as a violent revolutionary, but as a revolutionary against the forces of violence.

This is a bold and engaging thesis with much that is fresh to offer any reader ready to engage in their own struggle with the meaning and message of Revelation.

Richard Bauckham

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### Concluding Remarks

Intertextuality is a valid term in historical exegesis. Karl Barth's hermeneutical axiom was: 'consider well'. When we approach Revelation we must consider the it as part of a process of development of sacred tradition. John considered well the teachings of Jesus and the depository of Jewish tradition. He was profoundly moved and his very being was challenged. He needed to make sense of his faith in Jesus against the backdrop of an intra-Jewish debate and Roman policies in the provinces. John's self-understanding is dominated by the figure of Jesus and his teaching. John interprets the teachings, life and death of Jesus in a way that had integrity for himself and his sacred traditions. Fundamental to understanding Revelation is appreciating the traditions upon which John drew and the particular social issues that challenged him, both from the synagogue and from Rome. Intertextuality is not a term John was familiar with, but it is a term that expresses something he did. If John's traditions, and Jesus' teachings are to have any meaning, John repeated and rethought what they meant. I approach Revelation as an important tradition that also needs to be considered well, and rethought.

## CHAPTER 4

### Interpretations of Revelation

No part of the Bible has aroused greater controversy. From early times, Christians have disagreed about its status as scripture. While some of its readers regard it as the most wonderful book in the Bible, others question its right to be there at all. *Arthur W. Wainwright*

#### Introduction

In this chapter I will consider ways in which Revelation has been understood in terms of violence and vengeance. I will set out the view that Revelation's Jesus is distant from the nonviolent Jesus of the Gospels. Two recognizable responses are: (1) a justification of the violence in the book. (2) Jesus of Revelation is the same Jesus who teaches love and forgiveness in the Gospels.

I do not intend to give a detailed exegetical discussion at this point in my work on the merits and demerits of response (1) that is contrary to my argument. Such will be undertaken when examining the texts in detail. Nevertheless, some points will be raised in terms of whether violence and vengeance can ever be justified.

#### Revelation: Horror of the New Testament

D.H. Lawrence called Revelation a reinforcement of envy on the part of the 'have-nots';<sup>1</sup> H. Bloom comments that 'resentment, not love is the teaching of the Revelation of St. John the Divine. It is a book without wisdom, goodness, kindness, or affection of any kind'.<sup>2</sup> A.N. Whitehead writes of its 'barbaric elements'. W.D. Davies comments on Revelation's teaching about the political authorities as 'an abortive hatred that can only lead, not to their redemption, but to their destruction'.<sup>3</sup> Preisker comments: 'the Revelation of John manifests a virtuosity of hatred and satisfies itself with the punishment coming to the enemies'.<sup>4</sup> C.J. Jung sees Jesus in the opening vision of Revelation as a figure of fear, not love: 'This apocalyptic "Christ" behaves rather like a bad-tempered, power conscious "boss"'.<sup>5</sup> Jung sees the 'outburst of long pent-up feelings such as can frequently be observed in people

<sup>1</sup> See discussion of Lawrence in Wainwright (1993):199-200.

<sup>2</sup> Bloom quoted by Wainwright (1993):113-114; see Bloom (1988):1-5.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted by Klassen (1966):301.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted by Klassen (1966):301.

<sup>5</sup> Jung (1965):123.

who strive for perfection' in the author of Revelation.<sup>6</sup> Wink comments that John abandons 'Jesus' teaching on love of enemies and the liberation of women. Male domination of women remains intact, and it is not even clear that women will be permitted in the New Jerusalem - so deep is this author's misogyny'.<sup>7</sup> Selvidge writes: 'The book of Revelation advocates terrorism and, like the ancient prophets, it justifies the complete annihilation of the other in order to bring into existence a new social order... Revelation advocates the total destruction of a people who are presently in power'.<sup>8</sup> M. Waldmann sees Revelation as an exception to the rest of the New Testament due to its violence,<sup>9</sup> while R. Völkl comments that hatred is condoned and encouraged in Revelation.<sup>10</sup> Even W. Barclay was alarmed by Revelation's call to rejoice over fallen Babylon in Revelation 18.20 thus lamenting that the book does not represent the way that Jesus taught.<sup>11</sup>

We see above a broad consensus of views regarding Revelation from D.H. Lawrence to William Barclay. Such views are startling in contrast to the claims I am attempting to make in my book. There has been no shortage of scholarly and less-than-scholarly responses to the above. It is important to look at some of these.

### Response One

This is probably the most dominant response.<sup>12</sup> Yarbrow Collins accepts that Revelation is 'flawed by the darker side of the author's human nature'.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, she believes Revelation is a healthy work in which emotions of fear and pity are purged through a process of catharsis.<sup>14</sup> Yarbrow Collins acknowledges that Revelation 'is an explicit rejection of the militant option'.<sup>15</sup> She argues that John intensifies resentment against Rome. John predicts the destruction of the hearers' enemies by God in the last days.<sup>16</sup> This has a cathartic effect and is considered healthy. Yarbrow Collins follows Jung in this understanding of the dark side of human nature and his reading of Revelation.

We need to ask whether this is the best integration of the evidence - not what we think John might or might not have done. John knew of Jesus' teaching of love and

6 Quoted in Klassen (1966):301.

7 Wink (1992):99; also Garrett (1992):377-382; Pippin (1992) and Selvidge (1992 and 1996).

8 Selvidge (1996):275.

9 Quoted in Klassen (1966):301.

10 Quoted in Klassen (1966):301.

11 Barclay (1976):vol.2 165.

12 Representatives of this view are many and varied. Charles (1920):133, the blood on the garments is the blood of the enemy; Swete (1922):252; Ladd (1978):254; Mounce (1977):344.

13 Yarbrow Collins (1984b):172.

14 Yarbrow Collins (1984b):152.

15 Yarbrow Collins (1977):247.

16 Yarbrow Collins (1984b):154.

compassion towards his enemies. It seems odd that he would encourage hatred of them and hope through God's destruction of them. We need to explore whether John has really abandoned the teacher of mercy and compassion. If he has, then we can accept the views stated above that Revelation teaches violence. This interpretation has not really responded to the above, it has merely justified violence on the basis of redemptive violence.

Schüssler Fiorenza and Yarbrow Collins defend the violence, hatred and vengeance of Revelation with their argument that those who attack the desire for vengeance, as seen, for example, in Revelation 6.9-11, only do so insofar as such people do not suffer unbearable oppression and are not driven by the question of justice.<sup>17</sup> Such likewise is the reading of M. Volf followed by J.L. Coker. Coker notes the importance of pacifism in Volf's reading of Revelation: 'Volf's vision is of a "not yet" eschatology in which Christ will some day return to violently vanquish the forces of evil. Christians can live peaceably in this violent and unjust world because they know that ultimately God's justice and vengeance shall reign'.<sup>18</sup> Coker comments that those who react against a vengeful God must come from 'the quiet of a suburban home'.<sup>19</sup>

This line of argument does not excuse the above claims that Revelation is violent and vengeful. It simply justifies violence. Violence and vengeance is something 'to desire'. This falls into the category of Girard's understanding of classic myth. It is saying that one group or an individual can have hatred for another. They can hope for the violent death of their supposed oppressor because they feel oppressed. This does not take into account how difficult it is to know how much John or his audience suffered. Perhaps they had courted persecution.<sup>20</sup> It should also be remembered that there are examples of suffering individuals and groups who are imprisoned for their witness for peace and justice and who do not seek vengeance against their captors, for example, Gandhi, Luther King, and the Vietnamese Buddhists who torched themselves during the Vietnamese war as an act of conscience against the government.<sup>21</sup> Such people do not come from 'the quiet of a suburban home'.

Vengeance may well be a legitimate cry of rage against the oppressor. Nevertheless, it is difficult sometimes to distinguish the victim from the oppressor. A study of warfare would reveal this. It can be said that there are very few, male or female, or any of the various classes and peoples, that have not experienced

17 Yarbrow Collins (1984b):170; Schüssler Fiorenza (1981):84-85.

18 Coker (1999):266; such a reading resembles Bultmann's reading (1955):vol.2, 175 of Revelation which he reacts to because it is more like a Jewish apocalypse insofar as the present is simply seen 'as a time of temporariness, of waiting'. Missing is the "between-ness" of Christian existence i.e. that Christ has brought believers into a new beginning.

19 Coker (1999):267.

20 For this view see Thompson (1990):191-197, who argues that the work comes from a 'cognitive minority' with its own way of looking at life and the book provides a 'deviant knowledge'.

21 See accounts of witnesses in the struggle for peace and justice in Dear (1990).

humiliation, failure, injustice and depression. War and violence, put simply, occurs between people because someone wants what the other has. People in comfortable suburbia are driven to desire more just as those are who have absolutely nothing. We do not justify someone's violence because they desire something.

Revelation, in this perspective, does not call believers to take up arms. But it does call them to believe that God will carry out his vengeful acts against their perceived oppressors. Rowland rightly warns: 'All too easily the human ego can demand satisfaction of its needs in the promotion of a good cause with the result that the cause itself can become subordinated to that need'.<sup>22</sup> In the light of this, this argument cannot be said to defend or excuse the above attacks.

### Summary

The view of Revelation from this perspective does not really differ in its reading of Revelation from that to which it responds. The violence of Revelation is present. This perspective differs in its estimate of the importance of Revelation. Revelation is justified on the basis of a redemptive vengeance ideology. This is an ideology I am not persuaded by and one that I believe cannot be harmonized with the Jesus of the New Testament elsewhere. If there is a call for the punishment of Rome in Revelation, then I will accept the view of D.H. Lawrence and others. This is the crux of this work: can Revelation be understood in terms other than of a violent God who kills people because they belong to a certain social group?

### Response Two<sup>23</sup>

#### *G.B. Caird (1966)*

In Revelation people are given the opportunity to repent (6.1-8; 8.6-12; 11.13). Caird writes:

For unless God is to acknowledge defeat by abandoning his world to the destructive forces of evil, he must provide a way of stopping men from endlessly producing the means of their own destruction and must release them from the tyranny of demonic powers they themselves have brought into being.<sup>24</sup>

Caird allows that there will be some who will not repent (cf. 20.12): 'For such people [the violent] the presence of God could be nothing but a horror from which they, like the earth they made their home, must flee, leaving not a trace behind. For

<sup>22</sup> Rowland (1993):38.

<sup>23</sup>This is not an exhaustive study. There are many other scholars that I could have looked at. Especially Hayes (1996):169-185 and Boring (1986).

<sup>24</sup> Caird (1984):295-296.

them there remains only the annihilation'.<sup>25</sup> Caird further comments: 'In justice to John let it be noted that the "lake of fire" is not for men, as it is for the demonic enemies of God, a place of torment'.<sup>26</sup>

Nonviolent ideology dominates Caird's position with its hope for the transformation of evil. Caird distinguishes between Satan and humankind. He emphasizes that the nations are deceived by Satan (see Rev. 12.12).<sup>27</sup> It is Satan's power that must be destroyed. Caird is careful in his discussion: 'it would be a mistake to suppose that, because John speaks of evil in vast cosmic symbols, he therefore believed in mythical demonic powers operating independently of human wrongdoing'.<sup>28</sup> He writes: 'Satan himself owes to human sin his right to appear in heaven and to thwart the merciful purposes of God by his accusations'.<sup>29</sup> Wink observes that the Dragon in Revelation 12 is embodied in one empire after another.<sup>30</sup> Caird like Wink is fully aware of the self-destructive nature of evil. The Dragon seduces the nations. But it is not the Dragon that perishes in the self-destructive process. Wink writes: 'Violence can liquidate the current regime, but not the Dragon, who leaps upon its exorcists and possesses them each in turn'.<sup>31</sup> The Dragon is destroyed when violence comes to an end.

On the one hand humankind is to blame, while on the hand, Satan is the source. This tension should not cause us problems in terms of the ancient Jewish and Christian writers. Supernatural forces were understood to be the source of human sin. But such powers were not an excuse for human sin. Ancient Jewish and Christian writers believed that when a person did well, the Spirit of God inspired the person. That person is responsible for his or her own good deed. People attacked Jews in Nazi Germany because Nazi propaganda deceived them. But we do not excuse their actions. They are held responsible.

Caird's reading of Revelation draws much from Farrer. Farrer used the phrase 'the rebirth of images' to explain the relationship between Revelation and Old Testament passages. Revelation re-worked Old Testament passages both deliberately and unconsciously.<sup>32</sup> A clear example is Caird's understanding of Revelation 5.5, he writes: 'What John hears is couched in the traditional messianic imagery of the OT; what he sees constitutes the most impressive rebirth of images he anywhere achieves'.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Caird (1984):260.

<sup>26</sup> Caird (1984):260.

<sup>27</sup> Caird (1984):300.

<sup>28</sup> Caird (1984):293.

<sup>29</sup> Caird (1984):293.

<sup>30</sup> Wink (1992):91.

<sup>31</sup> Wink (1992):92.

<sup>32</sup> Farrer (1949).

<sup>33</sup> Caird (1984):73.

## W. Klassen (1966)

The apparent gloating of the saints over the fall of Babylon in Revelation 18.20 interests Klassen. He argues that John does not in fact present them as a spiteful set of believers gloating over Babylon's suffering. They are rather rejoicing in the outcome of God's cause.<sup>34</sup> The text might suggest that the saints are rejoicing over the violence Babylon is suffering, but they are rather celebrating Babylon's fall as the fall of Satan. It is the end of violent nations. The faithful witnesses have brought about the transformation away from violence. Satan has nowhere left to dwell. Satan cannot exist unless fed by human violence and greed. We must remember that at this stage in Revelation the majorities have repented of their violence (Rev. 11.13). Babylon's fall is self-inflicted and empowered by the violence of those who reject the witness of Jesus and his followers. John may be thinking of civil war. Violence destroys itself and there is no one to represent Satan. In this sense, Klassen points out that the saints rejoice in God's cause. Victory is not gained through violence.<sup>35</sup> Klassen understands that the victory is John's *theologia crucis* (theology of the cross). Faithful suffering gains victory.

## J. Sweet (1979)

The Lamb is not 'a lion in sheep's clothing'.<sup>36</sup> Jesus as Lamb is the complete contrast to the second beast (13.11). The second beast uses trickery and violence to make people worship the beast. Sweet puts it well: 'this is indeed a dragon in sheep's clothing. It is a deliberate parody of the spirit of the Lamb, whose only power is that of the sword which issues from his mouth'.<sup>37</sup> Sweet at times tends towards Jung's analysis when accounting for the negative aspects of Revelation. John's desire for vengeance is due to his personal situation and psychology.<sup>38</sup> But Sweet's exegesis is a different story. He interprets vengeance texts in the light of the Lamb figure. Sweet adds much to our understanding of Revelation 6.9-11. He notices that the vengeance sought by the martyrs under the altar does not result 'in the punishment of individual enemies but in the "judgment of the great harlot" who deceives the nations (17.1-19.2)'.<sup>39</sup> Jesus as the shepherd of the nations with a rod of iron draws Sweet's comments that perhaps the rod of iron is a shepherd's crook to those who respond (cf. 7.17) and an iron bar to those who do not.<sup>40</sup> Sweet quotes Caird favourably in acknowledging that evil is not threatening people from outside. It is that which humanity contributes.<sup>41</sup>

34 Klassen (1966):304.

35 Klassen (1966):305-306.

36 Sweet (1979):51.

37 Sweet (1979):51.

38 Sweet (1979):42-44, .50.

39 Sweet (1979):141; cf. Caird's observation (1987):260 of the 'lake of fire'.

40 Sweet (1979):96.

41 Sweet (1979):168.

## W. Harrington (1993, 1995)

Harrington argues against Yarbrow Collins. Jesus as Divine Warrior is transformed by the dominant suffering Lamb image.<sup>42</sup> Victory has been 'won by suffering, not by inflicting hurt'.<sup>43</sup> He comments further: 'He is worthy precisely as the slain Lamb, as the crucified One. Like Paul and Mark, John, too, in his manner, proposes a *theologia crucis*'.<sup>44</sup>

Harrington observes that the violent imagery is mythological. The battle of Armageddon is not an historical but a mythical battle.<sup>45</sup> Harrington suggests that the mythological language explains John's observations of society as violent. The four riders in Revelation 6.1-8 express 'the mindless folly of war'.<sup>46</sup> The violent depiction of the destruction of the violent in Revelation 19.17-21 shows not the literal eschatological consequences. Harrington quotes Schillebeeckx: 'The evil have excluded themselves from communion with the living God - excluded themselves from life. They no longer exist. But there is no shadow kingdom of hell next to the eternally happy kingdom of God'.<sup>47</sup> Harrington develops his understanding of evil in line with Schillebeeckx. Evil is the lack of good. 'Good', it follows, will be the principle upon which the cosmos is created. Evil is non-existence. It denies all that exists. Those who engage in violence share and expand the power of evil and choose to be separated from God. This is the path to non-existence expressed in Revelation 19.17-21 (see chapter 15).

Harrington contributes significantly to exegesis in developing the importance of Farrer's idea of the rebirth of Old Testament imagery in Revelation. He believes that if we examine Revelation's re-birthing of Old Testament imagery we will appreciate the reversal of a violent messianic expectation.<sup>48</sup> In his discussion of the rider in 19.11-17, he comments that instead of the rider being the violent, crushing warrior of Isaiah 63, 'might not John, in a startling rebirth of images, be challenging his hearers/readers to reinterpret the imagery to which he and they are heirs? John has reversed the image of Isaiah'.<sup>49</sup>

## R. Bauckham (1993)

Bauckham proposes that Revelation is a Christian war scroll.<sup>50</sup> His work is not unlike Yarbrow Collins' study of martyrdom in holy war tradition. Instead of God

42 Arguments for this are made in 1993 and 1995.

43 Harrington (1995):59.

44 Harrington (1993):87-88.

45 Harrington (1993):229.

46 Harrington (1993):92.

47 Harrington (1993):234.

48 There are great similarities at this point with Bauckham.

49 Harrington (1993):192.

50 Bauckham (1993a):213.

gaining a military victory, it would be gained by martyrdom.<sup>51</sup> Bauckham does not accept the model of catharsis to excuse the conquering/vengeance aspect of Yarbrow Collins' Revelation. The warfare metaphor is re-interpreted in the light of the suffering witness theme. Martyrdom is not one that brings about vengeance as in Yarbrow Collins' view (cf. *T. Mos.*10), but brings about salvation. He observes, for example, that John reinterprets the military conquering Lion with a slain Lamb.<sup>52</sup> Bauckham points out that John draws upon Old Testament motifs other than that of holy war; for example, he thinks it quite plausible that John recalls the lamb led to the slaughter in Isaiah 53.7.<sup>53</sup>

Bauckham's work reflects independently Barbé's *theology of conflict* with its nonviolent reading of the Bible as well as Wink's understanding of Israel's development from submission to holy war to prophetic peacemaking.<sup>54</sup> The essence of messianic holy war tradition is that the righteous will conquer by violence (cf. especially 1QM14). Barbé observes that this tradition exists in all societies and in the Old Testament. He observes developments from this in the Old Testament similarly to Wink. Barbé draws upon the work of Girard who contrasts the story of Cain and Abel in Genesis 4.1-25 with that of the Roman myth of Romulus. Romulus slaughters his brother Remus. Cain slaughters Abel. Romulus, unlike Cain, is justified and exalted. Rome is founded.<sup>55</sup> Barbé sees elements in Isaiah 53 as 'reinforcing the evolution we perceive in the Bible toward a new way of making peace'.<sup>56</sup> The Lamb is not the good looking, powerful, strong hero but represents 'suffering'. Barbé writes: 'By the suffering of the righteous victim, the community becomes conscious of the evil it harbors in its bosom'.<sup>57</sup> Bauckham's reading suggests that Revelation is representative and a high point of Barbé's evolution and reconscientization of the mechanisms of conflict with a new nonviolent conception of God: 'Jesus has already defeated evil by sacrificial death. He has delivered God's people, but they are from all nations, not only Jews'.<sup>58</sup> Bauckham sees Jesus as providing a model of active resistance for his followers: 'Christians are called to participate in his war and his victory - but by the same means as he employed: bearing the witness of Jesus to the point of martyrdom. It is misleading to describe this as "passive resistance": for John it is as active as any physical warfare and his use of holy war imagery conveys this need for active engagement in the Lamb's war'.<sup>59</sup> Gandhi, too, saw the battle against oppression as a war. Wink observes this point in Gandhi: 'Gandhi insisted that no one join him who was not willing to take

51 Yarbrow Collins (1977):243, 248-252.

52 Bauckham (1993a):214; this is also emphasized by Caird (1984):73 and Sweet (1979):125.

53 Bauckham (1993a):215.

54 Wink (1992):188.

55 Barbé (1989):25.

56 Barbé (1989):46.

57 Barbé (1989):46.

58 Bauckham (1993a):215.

59 Bauckham (1993a):234.

up arms to fight for independence'.<sup>60</sup> Bauckham's and Harrington's discussions develop Jesus as the Third Way more than the previous thinkers. Wink points out: 'one cannot pass directly from the "flight" to Jesus' Third Way. One needs to pass through the "fight" stage'.<sup>61</sup>

Finally, it is apparent from the above that Bauckham, like Caird and Sweet, is indebted to Farrer for his concept of the rebirth of images.<sup>62</sup>

#### J.N. Kraybill (1996)

Kraybill understands Revelation as nonviolent and active.<sup>63</sup> What he means by active is the testimony that followers of Jesus give, although he nowhere refers to 'witness' or 'testimony'. It seems the witness is in non-cooperation and readiness to suffer and be martyred. Supporting Tertullian's reading of Revelation 18.4, Kraybill writes: 'John was adamant that disciples of Jesus Christ must withdraw from exchange with Rome on every level, including trade'.<sup>64</sup> Kraybill acknowledges that non-cooperation would lead the witness into an economically difficult situation.<sup>65</sup> Non-cooperation was therefore difficult, and further was hindered by the fact that many were well off. He observes rightly that the threat to the Christian communities of Asia Minor was the internal desire to conform rather than 'external pressure in the way of persecution'.<sup>66</sup>

Kraybill's understanding of victory is rooted in a *theologia crucis* (theology of the cross). He points out that Revelation 'parts dramatically from the Jewish tradition of heroic armed revolt against imperial oppression'. Rather, 'in Revelation it is a Lamb "standing as if it had been slaughtered" (5.6) that leads God's people to triumphant celebration on Mount Zion'.<sup>67</sup> Picking up on Revelation 13.10, 'if you kill with the sword, with the sword you must be killed', he comments that the saints must endure with patience and nonviolence. Kraybill observes that John structures his work on the two polarities of 'beast' which signifies greed and idolatry resulting in non-existence in the lake of fire, and 'Lamb' which points to hope and love resulting in the New Jerusalem.<sup>68</sup> The beast is represented in the violence and oppression that proceed from Rome's rule. It 'violated Christian standards of love and justice'.<sup>69</sup> Such love and justice run through Revelation and this is reflected in its soteriology. Kraybill observes that Revelation 'never suggests that people who

60 Wink (1992):187.

61 Wink (1992):187.

62 Bauckham (1993a):178.

63 Kraybill (1996):202.

64 Kraybill (1996):29.

65 Kraybill (1996):30.

66 Kraybill (1996):197.

67 Kraybill (1996):201.

68 Kraybill (1996):202.

69 Kraybill (1996):200.

co-operated with idolatrous pagan institutions are beyond redemption'.<sup>70</sup> Kraybill comments that 'people who love greed and violence more than the kingdom of God will have excluded themselves'.<sup>71</sup>

Kraybill reflects more the work of Yarbro Collins when he observes the joy of the saints at the fall of Babylon.<sup>72</sup> He comments in the same interpretative way as Yarbro Collins: 'The bile of the book pours out as a catharsis of emotion, offered to God as the only one capable of redressing the situation'.<sup>73</sup> This cannot be harmonized with Christian values of love and compassion. Kraybill's work does not engage with Klassen's view that the joy comes from seeing God's rule being established rather than the self-destruction of human lives. Kraybill's reading of the four horses in Revelation 6.1-8 certainly suggests that Kraybill acknowledges the self-destructive nature of violence when he observes that 'they are evil agents of Roman oppression' and that the red horse is the horse of 'civil war'.<sup>74</sup>

### Summary and Conclusions

Some believe that the Jesus of the Gospels is different from the Jesus of Revelation. One response justifies the more violent aspects of Revelation in favour of justifiable violence.<sup>75</sup> It maintains that Revelation's presentation of Jesus is a move away from the Jesus of the Gospels who taught love and forgiveness. Revelation looks to God to deal violently with the oppressors. The witnesses are ready to suffer so that God will punish those who inflict suffering. Its non-violence is a strategy to bring about God's vengeance. It is nonviolence but not in the way that I define it. It may not call upon believers to kill their enemies, yet it does hope that God will slaughter their enemies.

Another response emphasizes the slain Lamb in Revelation. The war metaphor is rebirthed in the light of suffering witness. Revelation offers another way of perceiving and resisting the world. It implores people to confront the dominant power, but in such a way that seeks their conversion rather than their destruction. Nonviolence is the essence of Revelation's understanding of God and his creation. Nonviolence is not a strategy. It is a way of transformation to wisdom and life from ignorance and death. Revelation transforms scapegoat ideology of the righteous destroying the unrighteous into the conviction that all can be righteous.

The above review demonstrates that Revelation can be read in a way that corresponds to Gandhian nonviolence. It is surprising that such concurrence has not been celebrated or commented on before. Gandhi would have missed the subtlety of Revelation and would not have been inspired by it in the same way that it failed to inspire D.H. Lawrence and others. New Testament exegetes can miss this subtlety

<sup>70</sup> Kraybill (1996):203.

<sup>71</sup> Kraybill (1996):203.

<sup>72</sup> Kraybill (1996):205.

<sup>73</sup> Kraybill (1996):205.

<sup>74</sup> Kraybill (1996):147.

<sup>75</sup> A phrase that Wink uses (1992):17-31.

and rebirthing of tradition. This work hopes to develop and celebrate a reading of Revelation that corresponds to Gandhian nonviolence.

The witness of Jesus and his followers through suffering and death can lead the heart of the violent away from the ignorance of their violence. This is atonement in the nonviolent sense. The witness of the nonviolent reveals the ordering principles of the cosmos: love and forgiveness. The witness then rejects those who reject the witness.

In Part Two, I will examine the religious traditions that would have influenced John and the social setting of Revelation.