

The Woman, the Lamb and the Dragon

TOWARD A HERMENEUTIC FOR INTERPRETING APOCALYPSE IN APOCALYPTIC TIMES

**"TO SHOW THE THINGS WHICH MUST SHORTLY TAKE PLACE . . . HE
SIGNIFIED IT"**

INTRODUCTION

Rarely in her two-thousand year history has the Church of Christ stood on such a brink of opportunity as she does today at the end of the second millennium. To say that there is increasing interest in apocalypse and apocalyptic events is an understatement. The arrival of the third millennium, and the twenty-first century, within a brief time are arousing much excitement about the end of the age, the end of the world, and much more. Not only are Christians concerned about this matter, but so is our society in the West and perhaps elsewhere. We are living in apocalyptic times such as the world has rarely seen.

The present time-warp provides a great opportunity for the Church to address anew the meaning of biblical apocalypse. More importantly, the present provides a once-in-a-millennium opportunity for the Church to identify herself--to make clear her identity and her mission in this world. All over the world the Church has the opportunity to address real concerns about the present, the past, as well as the end, and to do so in a responsible, prophetic manner.

Until recently there has been general neglect of, even opposition to, the meaning of apocalypse. This stems, no doubt, from the extreme, even outlandish interpretations made of apocalyptic literature in the Bible, especially of the Apocalypse. In addition, there has been confusion over the terms "apocalypse" and "apocalypticism" (two nouns) and "apocalyptic" (an adjective). Finally, the tension over how to interpret the Bible, that is, whether there is a place for figurative interpretation in a literal approach, has affected the discussion of apocalypse.¹

The present fever over the end of the millennium, and perhaps the end of the world, will help put to an end the past neglect of apocalypse. To discover how to get meaning out of apocalypse is particularly critical to this apocalyptic moment in history. If we are to impact responsibly the fever and frenzy over "the end" we must point people to appropriate principles for understanding the literature central to all the speculation and concern, namely the biblical apocalypses, particularly the only book in all the world known as the Apocalypse, the Revelation. So let the Church seize the moment offered it.

¹For an excellent discussion of this matter, see Moises Silva, *Has the Church Misread the Bible? The History of Interpretation in the Light of Current Issues* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987; rep. as vol. one in Moises Silva, ed., *Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 44-61 (where he discusses figurative, allegorical, and literal interpretation), and 78-80 (where he applies these approaches to messianic prophecy).

It is the purpose of this study to address some very basic issues involved in the narrow matter of apocalypse as a literary form and its presence in the Bible. My aim is to discover those principles of hermeneutics for interpreting biblical apocalypses, particularly the Revelation. I first survey the past and present hermeneutics on this matter. Then I offer some insights which I have derived from reflecting on a paradigm for interpreting Scripture in general. This paradigm flows from a particular perspective on the biblical world view of reality and how it impacts hermeneutics.

In this study I follow the suggestions of recent scholarship in distinguishing certain words. "Apocalypse" is a noun referring to the literary genre or a particular work of this genre (e.g., the Revelation); "apocalypticism" refers to an ideology or religious social movement; and "apocalyptic" is an adjective used in such ways as "apocalyptic eschatology" (a system of religious beliefs) or "apocalyptic genre."² These distinctives invite consideration of how world view with its concern for reality influenced the development of apocalypse.³

The three most significant matters involved in pursuing a hermeneutic of apocalypse are: (1) the definition of what constitutes apocalypse or apocalyptic writing; (2) the corpus of apocalyptic writings; (3) the hermeneutical principles involved in interpreting apocalypses. While my focus is on point (3), I briefly address the other two.

There are three crucial questions common to most who wish to understand apocalypse: What is symbolical and what is not? What is the meaning of the symbolism? When does the language find fulfillment? I return to these questions at the end of the study.

THE DEFINITION OF APOCALYPSE

Much discussion has centered on a definition of apocalypse and the distinctions involved in such terms as apocalypse and apocalyptic as literary and social designations. There appears to be general consensus on these definitions. There is less agreement on the source or origin of apocalypse, for some see the source in Babylonian, Persian, Egyptian, Grecian, or Iranian literature, or the dream-vision of the Ancient Near East, but these fail to provide a wholly adequate explanation. While Hebrew writers may have borrowed

²See David E. Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 107; John J. Collins, "Introduction: Towards the Morphology of a Genre," *Semeia* 14 (1979), 2-4, where he summarizes the contributions of several scholars; Leonard L. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire* (New York: Oxford, 1990), 18-24, who accepts such distinctions; Paul D. Hanson, ed., *Visionaries and Their Apocalypses* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 16-36; and Hanson, *The Dawn of Apocalyptic* (Philadelphia: Fortress, rev. 1979), appendix, 428-429, where he makes these three distinctives in his historical and sociological explanation of apocalyptic.

³See Hanson, *Dawn*, where he describes apocalyptic eschatology as "a way of viewing reality in relation to divine providence which reaches back to Hebrew prophecy" (428), and as a "religious perspective which views divine plans in relation to historical realities in a particular way" (431). The recognition of world view (438) is refreshing.

elements of the literary form, at least in regard to the theology of the biblical apocalypses foreign influence is questionable at best and highly unlikely.⁴

A definition of apocalypse usually involves setting forth the elements of apocalypse and then incorporating these elements in an extended definition. Limiting himself to the book of Revelation, Alexander in his extended treatment of Old Testament apocalyptic literature finds six essential elements:

1) it is a type of prophetic literature, 2) the milieu is one of Gentile oppression and exilic conditions, 3) its literary form consists of visions, 4) symbolism, 5) a divine guide and interpreter, and 6) its message and content is eschatological.⁵

In light of these elements he defines apocalyptic literature as:

. . . apocalyptic literature is symbolic visionary prophetic literature, composed during oppressive conditions, consisting of visions whose events are recorded exactly as they were seen by the author and explained through a divine interpreter, and whose theological content is primarily eschatological.⁶

In more recent years, with the increasing awareness that interpretation is linked to literary genre, the definition of apocalypse has undergone rigorous review. In his study, Robert L. Webb notes the earlier neglect of the genre apocalypse.⁷ He surveys the recent attempts to define apocalyptic genre in various ways. He faults various approaches, including the traditional, the literary-form, and the "essentialist."⁸ Webb prefers what he

⁴See the treatment of this matter in Ralph H. Alexander, "Hermeneutics of Old Testament Apocalyptic Literature," Th.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, May, 1968, 250-255. He surveys the arguments for and against such influence. He does allow for the influence of the cultural milieu of Babylon and Persia and the dream-vision literary form. The Old Testament apocalypses arose in these places. He also discounts the value of extra-biblical apocalyptic literature for interpreting the biblical apocalypses.

The question of the dating of Daniel is especially crucial. The traditional view (my position) puts Daniel as a writer of the sixth century B.C., and places the book at the fountainhead of all known apocalypses. The higher critical view puts Daniel as a writer in the second century B.C., making the book one of several flowing in the stream of apocalypse begun elsewhere. The former view allows one to use Daniel and other biblical apocalypses as determining and forming the literature and deserving greater prominence in the definition of apocalypse.

⁵Ibid., 45.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Robert L. Webb, "The Apocalyptic Debate: Recent Discussions on Apocalyptic Genre," paper presented to the Evangelical Theological Society, 1987, 1-3.

⁸Ibid., 4-7. (1) He faults the traditional approach that defines apocalypse by its contents, in terms of "exclusively eschatological motifs" (4-5). Other motifs found in various apocalypses, such as astronomy, cosmology, mysticism, the secrets of nature and Wisdom, etc., are often neglected. There is also not a unified view of eschatology. (2) He next faults the literary-form approach which defines apocalypse only in terms of its literary genre, as the "direct unveiling and communicating of God's esoteric truth to man" (7). This approach is too broad; it includes literature normally considered broader than apocalypse. It also neglects the significant role of eschatology in over-reaction to the traditional approach. (3) Finally, Webb

calls "the eclectic approach" which includes comprehensive diversity.⁹ It is the outgrowth of the Apocalypse Group of the Society of Biblical Literature Genres Project. The results of this group were published as the entire contents of the journal, *Semeia* 14 (1979). These scholars, including the chairman, John Collins, pursued an inductive study of not only Christian and Jewish apocalypses but also Gnostic, Greek, Latin, Rabbinic, Mystic, and Persian ones. This approach formulates a master paradigm of apocalypse consisting of thirteen elements falling basically into two major categories, the form and content (having both temporal and spatial axes). Hence it embraces the best of the preceding approaches, giving adequate place both to motifs of content and to literary form. An outline of this paradigm follows.¹⁰

- A. Manner of revelation.
 - 1. The medium of the revelation.
 - a. Vision.
 - b. Auditory revelation.
 - c. Otherworldly journey.
 - d. Writing.
 - 2. Otherworldly mediator (an angel or Christ).
 - 3. The human recipient.
 - 1. Pseudonymity.
 - 2. Disposition of recipient.
 - 3. Reaction of recipient.
- B. Content of revelation: temporal axis.
 - 4. Protology (pre-history or beginning of history).
 - a. Theogony and/or cosmogony.
 - b. Primordial events.
 - 5. History.
 - a. Explicit recollection of the past, or
 - b. *Ex eventu* prophecy.
 - 6. Present salvation through knowledge (in Gnostic texts).
 - 7. Eschatological crisis, in the form of
 - a. Persecution, and/or
 - b. Other eschatological upheavals.
 - 8. Eschatological judgment and/or destruction on
 - a. The wicked, or the ignorant (in Gnostic texts).
 - b. The natural world.
 - c. Otherworldly beings.
 - 9. Eschatological salvation.
 - a. Cosmic transformation.

faults the "essentialist" approach which cites the themes of revelation and reversal as crucial to defining apocalypse. The reversal of Israel's or the righteous' destiny, their being restored from oppression, is the "essential" element in defining the literary form. Yet this view suffers from being too general--it covers prophecy as well--and from neglecting other motifs.

⁹Ibid., 10ff.

¹⁰Collins, "Morphology," 5-9.

- b. Personal salvation.
 - (1) Resurrection, or
 - (2) Other forms of afterlife.
- C. Content of revelation: spatial axis.
 - 10. Otherworldly elements.
 - a. Otherworldly regions.
 - b. Otherworldly beings.
- D. Paraenesis.
 - 11. Paraenesis (by mediator to the recipient).
- E. Concluding elements.
 - 12. Instructions to the recipient.
 - 13. Narrative conclusion.

From the elements which are constant in the list above, this approach defines apocalypse as:

"Apocalypse" is a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world.¹¹

This definition avoids some of the shortcomings of the other approaches, while incorporating the positive elements of them all. It focuses not on some distinctive theme or themes but on the distinctive combination of elements as the essence of apocalypse.

While the matters of content and form are the focus of the definition in the earlier issue of *Semeia*, a later issue adds the element that addresses the function of apocalypse. In this issue, David Hellholm suggests that the definition be expanded by the following words: ". . . intended for a group in crisis with the purpose of exhortation and/or consolation by means of divine authority."¹² So the paradigm above would have these additional elements:

¹¹Ibid., 9. This definition has been widely accepted. For example, see Thompson, *Revelation*, 24, who points to the omission of the social aspect in the definition of apocalypse, so he devotes a whole chapter (2) to the social setting.

¹²David Hellholm, "The Problem of Apocalyptic Genre and the Apocalypse of John," *Semeia* 36 (1986), 27. Hellholm insists that the paradigmatic approach of the SBL group and others needs to be complemented necessarily by a syntagmatic approach (33-34). This approach not only takes into account the three paradigmatic groups of form, content, and function, but the syntagmatic aspects, in forms of micro- as well as macro-syntagmatic structures. Hellholm discovered six levels of communication, with Revelation 21:5-8 as the most embedded text. This constitutes the summary of the Apocalypse. It gives the function of the Apocalypse as (1) the authorization of the message and (2) the promise of vindication and redemption for the faithful and the threat of exclusion and death to the unfaithful (45-46). At the sixth level Hellholm discovered supplementary visions in form of either intercalations within or an addendum to the seven-visions of the seals, trumpets, and bowls. Interestingly, the three series pertain to macro-cosmic events, whereas the supplementary visions that are intercalations (7:1-14; 10:1-11:14; 12:1-14:20) pertain to the micro-cosmic situation of the Church, while the supplementary vision that is an addendum combines

F. Function.

14. Intended for a group in crisis.
15. Exhortation to steadfastness and/or repentance.
16. Consolation through promises of vindication and redemption.
17. Authorization of message.

David Aune suggests a more elaborate addition to address function. He rewrote the entire definition to include all three elements of form, content, and function, especially as they apply to the Revelation.¹³ In light of both of the suggestions made by Hellholm and

macro-cosmic events (17:1-19:10) with micro-cosmic situations (19:11-22:5). Hellholm observes: "The micro-cosmic situation is evidently the major concern of the author and the verification of these supplementary visions lies in the macro-cosmic events" (53). This interrelationship is typical of apocalypses (53).

In other words the series of the seals, trumps, and bowls would seem to correspond to what I call the essential message or reality of the book, and the supplementary visions pertain to the particular situation, the existential reality, of the readers. I will return to these observations later when I deal with the hermeneutic of apocalypse.

See a critique of Hellholm's suggestions in David E. Aune, *Revelation* (Dallas: Word, 1997), lxxix-lxxxii.

¹³David Aune, "The Apocalypse of John and the Problem of Genre," *Semeia* 36 (1986), 86ff. His definition is (86-87):

(1) *Form*: an apocalypse is a prose narrative, in autobiographical form, of revelatory visions experienced by the author, so structured that the central revelatory message constitutes a literary climax, and framed by a narrative of the circumstances surrounding the revelatory experience(s). (2) *Content*: the communication of a transcendent, often eschatological, perspective on human experience. (3) *Function*: (a) to legitimate the transcendent authorization of the message, (b) by mediating a new actualization of the original revelatory experience through literary devices, structures and imagery, which function to "conceal" the message which the text "reveals," so that (c) the recipients of the message will be encouraged to modify their cognitive and behavioral stance in conformity with transcendent perspectives.

What is interesting here is point (b) of the function. The idea is that the writer portrays his revelatory experience with such skill that the audience participates in the original experience "to such an extent that the experience is 're-presented' or re-actualized for them" (89). Apocalypse functions to conceal what it purports to reveal. The writer leads his audience from a surface level of communication to deeper levels in order that they may discover for themselves the innermost or deepest level of communication, thereby replicating the original revelatory experience by a literary, rather than a ritual or spatial, idiom. Aune writes: "That is, the author does not merely *narrate* (italics his) the substance of the divine revelation he has received to his audience, he provides the audience with a literary vehicle so that they can, in effect, relive the experience of the seer and thereby appropriate for themselves the revelatory message" (90).

See further discussion of this in Aune, *Revelation*, lxxxii-lxxxviii, where he elaborates on each of the elements in the paradigm as found in the Revelation. He also criticizes the way of defining apocalypses through lists of traits as "not completely satisfactory" (lxxvii-lxxviii).

Aune, Adela Collins suggests the following addition to the SBL definition: "intended to interpret present, earthly circumstances in light of the supernatural world and of the future, and to influence both the understanding and the behavior of the audience by means of divine authority."¹⁴

This paradigm and definition is quite similar to that of Alexander cited above. Since Alexander limited himself to the Apocalypse of the Bible in order to understand Old Testament apocalyptic literature, his list of the elements of content is quite short in comparison to that of the SBL group. The larger definition contains certain elements which should be added to Alexander's, including otherworldly journey, otherworldly mediator, otherworldly world, tracing of history, paraenesis, and exhortation and consolation (to represent the function of apocalypse).

However, it seems that the matters of world view and a biblical center are neglected in these definitions of apocalypse. I make a suggestion how world view impacts the definition of apocalypse at the end of this study.

THE RELATION OF APOCALYPSE TO PROPHECY

A crucial issue is the relationship of apocalypse to prophecy. Is apocalypse a form of prophecy? Did apocalypse supplant prophecy? Did apocalypse arise out of prophecy? If apocalypse is merely a form of prophecy, then separate hermeneutical principles may be unnecessary or inappropriate. I take up the "apocalypse as prophecy approach" below. However, if apocalypse is a genre in its own right, then special principles for interpretation are warranted. Perhaps there is a middle ground.

In this study it is not my intent to examine this issue in detail.¹⁵ There seems to be a general consensus that apocalypse is a literary form in its own right. However, when we

Yet how does this definition represent the biblical world view of reality? Cannot a biblical apocalypse be more oriented toward the central theme or message of the Bible? I make a suggestion about revising this definition later in this study.

¹⁴Adela Y. Collins, "Introduction," *Semeia* 36 (1986), 7.

¹⁵See such studies as the following. D. S. Russell, *The Method & Message of Jewish Apocalyptic* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964). He believes that apocalypse came about as prophecy, from which apocalypse arose, declined, although in the intertestamental period there is evidence that there is awareness of the spirit and that writers believed that they were inspired by God in their work (82). Writers before (late-dated) Daniel which show signs of apocalypse include Ezekiel, Zechariah, Joel, and Isaiah (88-91). As characteristics of apocalypse he gives a list of features that *impress* one of apocalypse (91, 104-106) and then four formal features: it is esoteric in character, literary in form, symbolic in language, and pseudonymous in authorship(106-139). His larger list of impressions is similar to the list of elements in the paradigm of the SBL study group.

Another major study is that of David E. Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983). After considerable discussion he concludes that apocalypse is an (one among many) "offspring of Israelite prophecy" (114). Apocalypse exhibits both continuity and discontinuity with prophecy (112). He distinguishes apocalypse as a genre from apocalyptic eschatology (a system of religious beliefs) and apocalypticism (a social movement) (107). His list of major characteristics (108-110) include many similar to that of others (including those of Collins, although he criticizes the lack of function in Collins' definition). He rejects pseudonymity as an essential feature of apocalypse (110).

think of the Revelation, it is clear that at least the three genres of apocalypse, prophecy, and epistle are all involved.

The following discussion assumes the view that the Revelation is in major portions apocalypse within a prophetic (note the explicit claims to be prophecy in 1:3; 22:7, 10, 18f.) and epistolary (note chs. 1-3) framework. A pursuit of special hermeneutical rules seems justified to interpret those portions which are apocalypse within the larger whole. In addition, the distinction between Revelation and other non-canonical apocalypses should be kept in mind. Revelation is a Christian apocalypse.¹⁶ This not only sets it apart from the rest of Jewish apocalypse, but affects (so it would seem) hermeneutical principles.

THE CORPUS OF APOCALYPTIC LITERATURE

The SBL study group included all apocalyptic literature in its search for a definition and paradigm of apocalypse. This includes all apocalypses from the region of the Middle East, including Christian and Jewish apocalypses, as well as Gnostic, Greek, Latin, Rabbinic, Mystic, and Persian ones. The complete list includes well over a hundred apocalypses. I refer the reader to the sources for the list.¹⁷ Nonbiblical, Jewish apocalypses include such works as 1 Enoch, 2 Enoch, 2 Baruch, 4 Ezra, Testament of Abraham, A Description of the New Jerusalem, and about twenty others.

For purposes of this study I limit my concerns to the hermeneutic of biblical apocalypses. These include portions of Ezekiel (chs. 37; 40-48); Daniel (chs. 2; 7-8; 10-12); Zechariah (chs. 1-6); the Apocalypse; and perhaps other portions. I especially concentrate on the book of Revelation.

SURVEY OF APPROACHES FOR INTERPRETING APOCALYPSE

David Hill, *New Testament Prophecy* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1979), argues that Revelation is prophecy not apocalypse (ch. 3). He acknowledges that some of the features of apocalypse are present but believes that they were taken over to serve a prophetic purpose or intention (71). He then cites numerous features of apocalypse that are lacking in Revelation and features that distinguish Revelation from apocalypse (no secret knowledge, no pseudonymity, inspiration of the Spirit, and especially its view of history as bounded by the death/resurrection of Christ and his return), so that it is prophetic "in intention and character" (75). Hill cites many features that show Revelation to be prophetic in form and content. For form he cites eleven points of vocabulary and phrases and five extended formal elements (76-85). For content he gives three elements (rebukes and exhortations that represent divine judgments; history viewed on the basis of *heilsgeschichte*; etc.) (85-87). Finally, he gives eight features that speak to the prophet's relationship to the communities addressed (his authority, the prophetic character of the community, a setting of worship, as one controlled by the Spirit, an interpreter of history, a re-interpreter of the Old Testament, not a miracle worker, and one distinguished from false prophets) (87-93).

¹⁶This point is made by G. K. Beale, *The Use of Daniel in Jewish Apocalyptic Literature and in the Revelation of St. John* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984), at the conclusion of his study (328).

¹⁷See *Semeia* (1979), 14, 219ff.

It is difficult to arrange the recent suggestions for the hermeneutic of apocalypse. One could follow a generally chronological, theological, or conceptual order. The arrangement contributes little to any particular understanding of the hermeneutic of apocalypse. However, there is a perceptible evolution from more narrow distinctions to broader ones, it seems.

A DISPENSATIONAL APPROACH (APOCALYPSE^D)

Ralph Alexander presents a dispensational approach. In his extended work, he appropriately addresses three areas in turn: the hermeneutics involved in the critical study of the literary form (chap. 4), the hermeneutics of symbolism (chap. 5), and the hermeneutics of eschatology (chap. 6). He then concludes with general hermeneutical principles (chap. 7). It is in chapter 6, "The Theological Hermeneutics of Old Testament Apocalyptic Literature," where Alexander signals his dispensational commitment. He discusses the matters of belief in the supernatural, dispensationalism, and premillennialism as the presuppositions of his study, and eschatology.¹⁸

It is beyond the scope of this study to list in full all the hermeneutical principles which Alexander suggests in his study. Each of the four chapters cited above has its own list of principles, and a couple of the lists involve more than twenty-five principles each! I will give a selective list of principles, focusing on those which reflect the distinctives of his approach as well as those which seem to reflect a general consensus. Others are not necessarily limited to the hermeneutics of apocalypse but are pertinent to all literary genre.

Alexander finds the origin of apocalypse as a literary form in the dream-vision of the Ancient Near East. The principles arising from the literary form are twenty-six in number. Some of these include the following:

1) the interpreter of Old Testament apocalyptic literature must be thoroughly acquainted with the milieu of the sixth century B.C.; 4) apocalyptic literature is more nationalistic than individualistic; 15) apocalyptic visions employ the principle of repetition; 21) some items need no interpretation; 22) many divine interpretations are not self-evident; 23) divine interpretation tends to expand an item or event in the vision; 24) divine interpretation places emphasis upon basic concepts rather than detail; 25) every item in a vision does not necessarily need to be interpreted.

Other principles in this area concern principles pertinent to any literature, including the need to interpret according to the context, history, archaeology, culture, literary form, vocabulary, syntax, motifs, and theological framework (belief in the supernatural) of the author.¹⁹ Several principles (numbers 4, 23, 24, 25) reinforce each other and the idea that apocalypse finds interpretation in general features, not the details.

¹⁸Alexander, "Hermeneutics," 207ff. The dispensational work by J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come: A Study in Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Dunham, 1958), gives principles for interpreting figurative language (34-44), prophecy (45-50; 59-64), and symbols (53-55). Since he makes virtually no reference to apocalypse (see 55) he apparently places its interpretation under symbol and prophecy.

¹⁹Ibid., 263-265. For full discussion of these principles, see chapter 4.

In regard to the principles for interpreting symbolism, Alexander gives twenty-three. Distinctive ones include:

1) the interpreter should distinguish between the literal and the symbolic on the basis of the divine interpretation and context; 3) the interpreter must apply the concept of literal interpretation with respect to the basic nature of the symbol, and to the divine interpretation thereof; 7) make every analogy or resemblance possible within the context of the vision and its interpretation, but at the same time, continually remember that the resemblance can only be partial, and not complete; 9) one should be able to substitute an equivalent literal communication for the symbol; 11) the cultural milieu should be employed in interpreting symbols; 14) symbols are not stereotyped; 15) identifications of symbols are not always specific persons or events; 16) similarities do not mean equivalents; 17) correspondence between the symbol and the object symbolized should be basic rather than detailed; 19) observe the frequency and distribution of a symbol, but allow each context to control the specific meaning; 20) foreign mythological and polytheistic rites are not needed to interpret symbolic literature; 21) some symbols are similar to types; 22) the interpreter may not employ subjectivity and speculation in interpretation; and 23) colors, numbers, and animals in apocalyptic visions will be taken as literal, unless proven to be approximate, not symbolic.²⁰

Several principles (numbers 1, 7, 14, 15, 16, 17, 19) are especially helpful ; they reinforce the general nature of symbols. Others (numbers 11, 20, 23) seem to be contradictory. I have special concern about numbers 3, 9, 20, 21, 23, for they concern the nature of symbol and its relation to literal interpretation.

Alexander next presents thirteen "fundamental theological hermeneutical principles" that should guide one's theological approach to the apocalyptic text.²¹ Some of these are:

1) belief in the supernatural; 2) the exegete must keep dispensational distinctions clear in his interpretation of apocalyptic visions; 4) the premillennial system is alone satisfactory to interpret the eschatological portions of this genre; 5) the eschatology of apocalyptic literature is not something necessarily new; 6) apocalyptic eschatology has a broader outlook than prophecy in general with regard to the scope of eschatology; 7) apocalyptic visions concentrate on the future end times; 8) God is sovereign and deterministic in His execution of history; 9) a biblical dualism should form a mental background in which the exegete interprets apocalyptic literature; 10) the emphasis of the prophecies of apocalyptic literature is more nationalistic than individualistic; 12) a principle of an hiatus in prophetic passages is sometimes true in apocalyptic visions; 13) double reference is employed in this genre; 14) social ethics are not characteristic of apocalyptic, but they are not altogether absent.

²⁰Ibid., 265-266. For full discussion of these principles, see chapter 5.

²¹Ibid., 267. For full discussion of these principles, see chapter 6.

The explicit commitment to a particular eschatology (numbers 2 and 4) is prominent and would be a matter of concern to many. Several (numbers 5, 6 and 10) appear helpful. Others (numbers 7, 8, 9, 12, and 13) reflect a particular concept of reality or world view--including a certain concept of time--and thus a particular view of hermeneutics which some would challenge (see below).

Finally, Alexander presents eleven principles of "general hermeneutics which apply to Old Testament apocalyptic literature, and which do not fall into one of the preceding classifications, or which apply to the literature in general."²² Some of the principles include:

1) the use of literal, or normal, interpretation, unless there is proof to the contrary; 2) the interpreter should avoid any and all means of speculation in interpreting apocalyptic literature; 4) the student of this genre should not approach it with any preconceived ideas as to the meaning of the given passage; 5) truth does not constitute correctness in interpreting apocalyptic literature; 8) all mythological and paganistic influences should be omitted in the interpretation of Old Testament apocalyptic literature; only those cultural institutions from the milieu of Babylon and Persia are permitted in the interpretation of this genre; 9) extra-biblical apocalypses have very little to offer in the interpretation of Old Testament apocalyptic literature; and 11) the interpreter should employ past history from the revelation of the apocalyptic vision to the present day to help interpret this genre, but he must not think that he is the first one who is able to interpret the literature because of history, nor should he speculate some interpretation from his contemporary political history or from what he thinks will occur in the future.²³

Some of these principles seem contradictory (numbers 1, 4, 8, 9, 11) or beyond implementation (numbers 2, 4, 8, 11), or unnecessarily restrictive (numbers 8, 9). Again the crucial matter perhaps overlooked is the nature of the sign or symbol.

It is not possible to give here a full evaluation of this particular dispensational approach. Suffice it to say that many principles are valuable because they focus on the distinctive principles for interpreting apocalypse. Others seem to prejudice interpretation because of prior commitment to a theological position, as in the area of eschatology (e.g., dispensationalism or premillennialism, which seems to contradict number 4 above), or a hermeneutical position regarding the nature of symbol and literal interpretation (how can one use literal interpretation to interpret what is nonliteral or contrary to normal use?).²⁴ Others seem to hinder fuller understanding by restricting the use of nonbiblical apocalypses, especially since the cultural milieu would include the totality of a people's practices and beliefs, not just institutions.

²²Ibid., 267.

²³Ibid., 267-268. For full discussion of these principles, see chapter 7.

²⁴Paul L. Tan, *The Interpretation of Prophecy* (Winona Lake: BMH Books, 1974), defines literal interpretation as the "normal, customary usage" (29).

THE APOCALYPSE AS PROPHECY APPROACH (APOCALYPSE^P)

It is not clear just how to categorize the remaining approaches to the hermeneutics of apocalypse. Clearly some are nondispensational. Others emphasize the literary genre, while others place apocalypse under the broader hermeneutic of prophecy. I will begin with this last approach.

Mickelsen treats apocalypse under the procedures for interpreting prophecy. He suggests that there are three approaches for handling the language of unfulfilled prophecy (italics his).²⁵ 1) One may "insist upon a *literal fulfillment of all details*." 2) One may "insist on *the symbolic meaning of an entire prophecy*." 3) One may approach prophecy "in terms of *equivalents, analogy, or correspondence*." His view is the last. This means, for example, that Ezekiel 40-48 does not predict the shadows of a restored literal temple but the reality of the equivalents in Christ.

In giving the procedures for interpreting prophecy,²⁶ Mickelsen's fifth asserts that for interpreting apocalypse, one should follow the principles for interpreting symbols. He gives the latter as:

1. Note the qualities of the literal object denoted by the symbol. . . .
2. Try to discover from the context the purpose for using a symbol. . . .
3. Use any explanation given in the context to connect the symbol and the truth it teaches. . . .
4. If a symbol which was clear to the initial readers is not clear to modern readers, state explicitly what the barrier is for the modern reader. . . .
5. Observe the frequency and distribution of a symbol . . . but allow each context to control the meaning. . . .
6. Think or meditate upon your results.²⁷

In an earlier discussion, Mickelsen addresses the relationship of the referent (object), the thought, and the symbol (written or oral). In this "triangle of meaning" found in linguistic semantics, meaning proceeds from the referent to the thought to the symbol.²⁸ This is important to apocalypse, for the question arises: Did the author of apocalypse write what he saw, or did he "translate" the vision into thoughts meaningful to him and his readers and then write these down? I discuss this matter further in the section dealing with postmodern linguistics.

²⁵Berkeley Mickelsen, *Interpreting the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963), 296.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 299-305. They include the following:

1. Make a careful grammatical-historical-contextual analysis of the passage. . . .
2. State explicitly to whom or to what the statement or passage refers. . . .
3. . . . differentiate for the sake of clarity between direct and typological prediction. . . .
4. Let the finality of God's revelation in Christ color all earlier revelations. . . .
5. For apocalyptic imagery, follow the principles given at the close of the chapter on symbols. . . .
6. Remember that interpretive analysis must precede a decision on the exact relationship between the literal and figurative in any passage. . . . The literal meaning . . . must become the base for figurative meanings.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 278-279.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 75-76.

In his standard work on hermeneutics, Bernard Ramm discusses the interpretation of apocalypse as one of the modes of prophecy and its interpretation. He makes an initial point in asserting that there is no uniformity of meaning among interpreters on the definition of literal, spiritual, mystical, allegorical, typological, and (I would add) figurative.²⁹ The issue in prophetic interpretation is not the place of all of these approaches, for there is general agreement on the validity of grammatical or literal exegesis, and on the figurative language of much of prophecy. Rather the issue is: "Can prophetic literature be interpreted by the general method of grammatical exegesis, or is some special principle necessary?"³⁰ To this question, Ramm gives a definitive answer. Prophecy calls for the special use of an "expanded typological principle" because of the coming of Christ.³¹

²⁹Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: W. A. Wilde, 1956), 220-225.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 225.

³¹*Ibid.*, 239-247.

Ramm gives five major principles for interpreting prophecy (and apocalypse).³² Under his fourth major point Ramm affirms that "an expanded typological principle" must be followed in addition to the "strict, literal principle." This is the hermeneutical method by which the New Testament interpreted the Old.³³ Ramm defends this with several arguments and examples from the New Testament. He cautions against an extreme literalism or an extreme typological approach and affirms (italics his): "Therefore, *interpret prophecy literally unless the implicit or explicit teaching of the New Testament suggests typological interpretation.*"³⁴

After presenting his five major principles, Ramm gives several rules for interpreting the apocalyptic language (which may be prophetic, historical, and symbolic) of apocalypse. These are the following:

(1) In interpreting apocalyptic literature all that has been said of the rules and praxis for general interpretation applies at this point. (2) In the interpretation of

³²Ibid., 226-231. He calls his first major principle (1) "the fundamentals" (226-231). "The fundamentals" are (italics his):

(i) . . . *give careful attention to the language of the prophetic passage. . . .* the interpreter should note the *figurative, poetic, and symbolic* elements. . . . (ii) *We must determine the historical background of the prophet and the prophecy. . . .* (iii) . . . *diligent attention must be paid to the context and flow of the discussion in the interpretation of prophecy. . . .* (iv) *The interpreter must be mindful of the nonsystematic character of prophetic writings. . . .* (v) *Every interpreter of prophetic Scripture should search the entire body of prophetic Scripture to find what passages parallel each other. . . .*

The second major principle is (italics his): "(2) *The interpreter must determine the distinct essence of the passage of prophetic Scripture.*" By this Ramm means that we should determine whether the passage is predictive or didactic, conditional or unconditional, fulfilled or unfulfilled (231-232).

This principle leads to his third, "(3) the problem of fulfillment in prophecy." We can learn from fulfilled prophecy how it was fulfilled, which will teach us to proceed with caution in interpreting unfulfilled prophecy; and there is the possibility of multiple fulfillment (which Beecher called *generic prophecy*) and double reference (232-234).

Ramm's fourth principle is that the "interpreter should take *the literal meaning of a prophetic passage as his limiting or controlling guide*" (italics his). He links the choice between spiritualizing and literal interpretation directly to the problem of the restoration of Israel (234-236).

Ramm's fifth and final major principle is (italics his): "*The centrality of Jesus Christ must be kept in mind in all prophetic interpretation*" (248).

Regarding the third principle above, it is generic prophecy which Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *The Uses of the Old Testament in the New* (Chicago: Moody, 1985), 204, 230, embraces. Also see Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., and Moises Silva, *An Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 34-45. Kaiser has written several books and articles in defense of this literalistic approach. My co-author and I evaluate this in James B. De Young and Sarah L. Hurty, *Beyond the Obvious: Discover the Deeper Meaning of Scripture* (Gresham, OR.: Vision House, 1995), chapter three.

³³Ibid., 239-247.

³⁴Ibid., 247.

apocalyptic imagery a complete literalistic method is impossible. . . . (3) Every effort must be made to discover whether the symbol had any meaning in the culture of the writer. . . . (4) The passage in which the apocalyptic symbol appears must be carefully examined to see whether the meaning of the symbol is there revealed. (5) An examination must be made of history if the apocalypse is fulfilled in history. . . . with reference to much of Daniel and Zechariah this is possible. (6) With reference to New Testament books, inter-Biblical apocryphal literature must be examined to see whether it contributed any of the symbols. (7) With special reference to the book of Revelation the Old Testament must be searched thoroughly for every possible clue to the symbols there used.³⁵

In an earlier chapter, Ramm noted the importance of interpreting according to the literary mold as one of the major specific principles of interpretation. He asserts (*italics his*): "*the literary form governs the meanings of sentences.*"³⁶ In the preceding principles, we can see that he has attempted to delineate the place of genre in a balanced way.

Another major, recent work on biblical interpretation treats the hermeneutics of apocalypse as a subcategory of prophecy.³⁷ The authors distinguish "prophecy proper" (for which they give both general and specific principles for interpretation) from "apocalyptic."³⁸ To meet the "unique challenges" of interpreting apocalypse, the authors suggest the following.

1. Set a modest goal: do not try to understand everything but as much as possible about what a text says. . .
2. It is best to take the symbolism and numbers seriously but not literally. . .
3. Read OT apocalyptic in connection with NT apocalyptic like Mt 24 (par) and Revelation.
4. Observe the prophet's pastoral concern for his audience. . . Its primary purpose, therefore, is to encourage suffering saints. . .
5. Ultimately, the student needs to move beyond the detail to determine the main points. The key question is: What is the text about as a whole? . . .
6. Applications should derive from the text's main points.³⁹

This succinct list of principles provides some general guidelines. As with most other lists of principles, this list suggests the non-literal use of symbols and numbers, and gives greater place to the main message rather than the details.

³⁵Ibid., 249-250.

³⁶Ibid., 139.

³⁷William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, Robert L. Hubbard, Jr., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Dallas: Word, 1993), 302-311.

³⁸Ibid., 311.

³⁹Ibid., 312.

Robert Stein in his basic guide to interpreting the Bible covers the hermeneutics of "apocalyptic" in his chapter on the hermeneutics of prophecy. Indeed, he believes that the distinction between prophecy (usually associated with "this"-worldly events) and "apocalyptic" (usually associated with "other"-worldly events) is "overly simplistic" because "prophecy frequently uses cosmic terminology in its depiction of 'this'-worldly future events."⁴⁰ Thus Stein suggests certain "rules" to interpret the literary genre of prophecy (which includes "apocalyptic").

The following is my distillation of Stein's "rules," for surprisingly he does not clearly list or delineate the "rules." 1) Prophecy of judgment is conditional. God will relent of the judgment proclaimed on a people by his prophet if the people repent. 2) "Much of the terminology found in prophecy makes use of customary imagery used in this genre."⁴¹ Conventional cosmic terminology is part of the imagery and symbolism of this genre, and not to be interpreted literally. "What" the author willed to communicate by this imagery . . . was to be understood 'literally.'⁴² 3) The nature of prophetic language is figurative or "nonliteral." [This seems to be a more general "rule" than point #2]. One "must not confuse the metaphorical nature of the language the prophet uses with the meaning he wills by that language."⁴³ Context helps the reader understand the meaning of the text. 4) There is no "fuller sense" to prophecy distinct and different from that of the biblical author, willed by God and not by him/her. The "*sensus plenior*" is in reality an implication of the author's conscious meaning."⁴⁴ 5) The "ancient prophets 'painted' their prophetic message more along the lines of . . . nineteenth-century impressionists" than in the manner of the realistic art of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.⁴⁵ 6) The contexts of various prophecies show that "what was a future prediction 'then' (when the prophet wrote) may no longer be a future prediction 'now' (when we read the prophecy)."⁴⁶ Numerous prophecies have already been fulfilled. Others (such as a great tribulation, the glorious appearing of the Son of Man, the final judgment) still await fulfillment.

⁴⁰Robert H. Stein, *Playing by the Rules: A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 89-90.

Similar to this is the treatment of Rodney Reeves, "Reading the Genres of Scripture," chapter seventeen in Bruce Corley, Steve Lemke, Grant Lovejoy, *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Comprehensive Introduction to Interpreting Scripture* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 272-273. His treatment of apocalypse comes under prophecy and both together cover no more than two pages. Reeves touches on such issues as the kingdom of God, the idea that apocalypse defies literal interpretation, the place of symbols, the eschaton, and the need to understand literary genre in order to understand the meaning of the Bible.

⁴¹Ibid., 91.

⁴²Ibid., 92.

⁴³Ibid., 94.

⁴⁴Ibid., 97.

⁴⁵Ibid., 98.

⁴⁶Ibid., 99.

From the preceding it is clear that Stein places a strong emphasis on the figurative nature of prophecy and apocalypse. However, some prophecy will yet be fulfilled literally.

Stein is not alone in not distinguishing prophecy from apocalypse.⁴⁷ Many commentators on the book of Revelation, including Mounce, Beckwith, Swete, and others, seem to consider it a form of prophecy.⁴⁸ Hanson makes an especially strong case for

⁴⁷For example, Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Treatise on the Interpretation of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, rep. 1976), applies principles he has already set forth (466) in taking the view that the Apocalypse supports neither a premillennial nor a postmillennial view. While holding that Christ returned during the first generation, he says that the final manifestation of Christ, "when he shall have completed the work of redemption, and delivers over the kingdom to the Father, is left by the sacred writers in too great mystery for us to affirm definitely any thing concerning it" (493).

Similarly, but from a far different eschatological view, Kaiser and Silva, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, give no special attention to apocalypse other than citing three different classes of symbols that characterize it (156). Kaiser, who wrote the chapter on prophecy, clearly includes apocalypse as part of prophecy (156) or as a case of "special problems" within the interpretation of prophecy (148). The features of biblical prophecy are intelligibility, definiteness, and organic unity (141-146). The "guidelines" or "principles" for interpreting prophecy are four (148-156): unconditional prophecies must be distinguished from conditional and sequential ones; terms borrowed from Israel's past history may be used to express the future (such as creation, paradise, the Flood, Sodom and Gomorrah, the Exodus, the wilderness, Achan's sin and the Valley of Trouble); recurring prophetic formulas mark the presence of prophetic passages (the latter days or the last days, the day of the Lord, the Lord comes, restore the fortunes of my people or return the captivity, the remnant shall return, the dwelling of God with men, and the kingdom of God); and certain prophetic terms are rich with allusions (earth, sea, sand of the sea, stars of heaven, day of clouds and darkness, blood and fire and billows of smoke, the sun being turned into darkness and the moon into blood, the North, and marriage of the Lamb). Kaiser rejects the idea of a double sense to prophecy but accepts a double or multiple fulfillment for prophecy, preferring to call the latter "generic prophecy" (158).

Unfortunately, many texts on hermeneutics virtually ignore what, if any, special hermeneutical principles should be applied to apocalypses in Scripture. While these works usually cite peculiar characteristics of apocalypses, they do not embark on hermeneutical principles. See Dan McCartney and Charles Clayton, *Let the Reader Understand: A Guide to Interpreting and Applying the Bible* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1994). They say: "Distinctive of apocalyptic are its peculiar forms of symbolism, dualism, and messianism" (226). They discuss profitably the interpretation triangle (sense, concept, referent) (116-117).

While Tan, *Interpretation*, gives attention to principles for interpreting prophecy (96-130), to the figurative language of prophecy (136-142), and to symbols (152-165), he gives virtually no attention to apocalypse. His only reference to it is to distinguish "apocalypses" (events which relate to the end time) from "predictions" (events which will happen in the near future) (76-77).

⁴⁸Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), discusses the relationship of apocalypse and prophecy, finding that apocalypse arises out of prophecy; it is "prophecy in a new idiom" (19). Mounce relates several traits of the genre apocalyptic and makes several initial distinctions between apocalypse and prophecy (19-23). Yet he shows several dissimilarities between the Revelation and the rest of apocalyptic literature (23-24). He concludes with David Hill, discussed above, that the Revelation is "prophetic in intention and character" (25; see other sources cited here by Mounce).

Henry B. Swete, *The Apocalypse of St John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, rep. 1968), parallels the approach of Mounce, but in greater detail. While giving the traits of prophecy and apocalypse (xvii-xxxii), he distinguishes between the Apocalypse and prophecy in his section on symbolism (cxxxiv). Then, in his section on history and methods of interpretation, he states the principles which have guided his

interpretation of the Revelation (ccxvi-ccxix). (1) The book "must be interpreted as we interpret the prophecies of the Old Testament canon." (2) The prophecy of this book possesses the character of apocalypse. (3) The prophecy "arises out of local and contemporary circumstances." In his interpretation, Swete finds points of contact with all the various systems of exegesis (ccxviii). Clearly, he gives primacy to the view that the Apocalypse is prophecy.

Isbon T. Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1919), gives extended treatment to the matters of apocalypse. He concludes that the correct approach to the interpretation of the Revelation is the "contemporary-historical," or more precisely, the "apocalyptic-prophetic" (336). In matter and form it is apocalyptic, but the "genuine prophetic character of our book removes it from the class of purely artificial, literary apocalypses" (336). In an earlier section in which he seeks to distinguish the permanent and transitory elements in the Apocalypse (291ff.), Beckwith finds the clue in the "real nature and characteristics of prophecy in general" (292). He cites the following major points (292-310): the Apocalypse is a work of prophecy; certain canons of prophecy are to be applied to the Apocalypse (these give permanent value to the Apocalypse and include: (1) the contents of prophecy are determined by the historical situation; (2) many predictions of the prophets were not fulfilled; and (3) the function of the prophet is not to foretell beforehand the history of the future (293-304)); the Apocalypse is to be read from the author's historical and literary standpoint; and the permanent prophetic element, the religious truth, in the Apocalypse must be distinguished from the transient forms in which it is given.

Mounce (*Revelation*, 44) criticizes Beckwith for these statements for, he believes, they mean that one must commit himself to the "essential truthfulness of a message which in its specific presentation may bear no resemblance to what actually will occur." In contrast, Mounce would affirm that there is a final, complete fulfillment in the last days of history which will "sustain the same relationship" with what has gone before. It is a "pattern of imperceptible transition from type to antitype" (45). However, while Beckwith may be preterist-historical in his broad approach, he seems to allow for something akin to Mounce when he writes: "It is true that events more or less parallel with the scenes here described have occurred in history, and it is quite possible that others even more closely parallel may occur in future ages; yet it is certain that these are not the actual events which the Apocalyptist sees in his visions" (303). Indeed, Beckwith states (304) that "the catastrophic establishment of the Kingdom by an objective coming of God in a return of the Lord" is not mutually excluded by an evolutionary coming of the Kingdom. The New Testament views the kingdom "as always coming and on the other hand as yet to come" (304; see also 134-137). Beckwith simply believes that the manner in which God will work out a result in the future is "not one of pressing practical importance" (304)!

Philip E. Hughes, *The Book of the Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), stresses the apocalyptic nature of the book, and says little about prophecy in his brief introduction. He points to the significant place of symbols as necessary because "the reality of the scenes revealed and recorded is transcendental in character" (8). The seer uses "analogical approximations and images which suggest and point beyond themselves to realities that far exceed all that can be said" (8).

A. Berkeley Mickelsen, *Daniel and Revelation: Riddles or Realities?* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1984), emphasizes that the Revelation is both a prophecy and an apocalypse (26-27). He stresses the apocalyptic rather than the literal, scientific nature of the Revelation. The language is suggestive, but imprecise (186), yet it refers to "real occurrences" (185), "physical happenings" (188), and "physical realities" (227).

John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Chicago: Moody, 1966), after evaluating the four major approaches to the Revelation and showing its distinctions from other apocalyptic writings, discusses the interpretation of its symbolism. His main idea is that one must patiently and consistently resolve what is symbolic and what is "intended to be understood literally" (27-28). Numbers may be understood literally, but "often carry with them also a symbolic meaning" (28). The "general rule" is "to interpret numbers literally unless there is clear evidence to the contrary. The numbers nevertheless convey more than their bare numerical significance" (28). He concludes that there is "a presumption that, where

deriving apocalypse from prophecy, and for citing the role of world view in understanding apocalypse.⁴⁹

expressions are not explained, they can normally be interpreted according to their natural meaning unless the context clearly indicates otherwise" (30). He says nothing about the relation of prophecy to apocalypse.

Aune, *Revelation*, discusses the three approaches to the genre of Revelation as a letter, prophecy, and an apocalypse, favoring the last one (lxxi-lxxxii). He cautions that in "some respects, the dichotomy between prophecy and apocalyptic is a false one, since neither 'prophecy' nor 'apocalypse' designates a static type of literature; rather, each represents a spectrum of texts composed over centuries" (lxxv). Syncretism is involved. He concludes that in Revelation the apocalyptic and prophetic literary traditions "have been synthesized through juxtaposition" and that the book "conforms to no known ancient literary conventions" (lxxxix). He believes that Revelation gives a "new lease on life to apocalyptic traditions" that could not keep their vitality in early Christianity because of their association with nationalistic myths connected with ancient Israel. The Revelation mitigates the "suprahistorical perspective of apocalyptic literature" by incorporating "prophetic concerns that have a distinctly historical orientation" (xc).

In other words, the Revelation is a unique literary blend. It ties the transcendent to history, to immanence. This parallels the view that the kingdom is both here but not yet, and the features of the paradigm of reality as a world view presented later in this study.

⁴⁹Hanson, *Dawn*, argues that what he calls apocalyptic eschatology arose out of prophetic eschatology because of the tension or dialectic between the realism or historical and the vision found in Israel's world view. In his sociological approach, he views eschatology as the heart, the primary strand, of prophecy and apocalypse. He traces the source of apocalyptic eschatology back to the pre-exilic times of the sixth and fifth centuries B. C., rather than to O. T. wisdom or Persian forms. It was then when the prophet who had translated God's plans for Israel's future into the context of the historical realm began to give place to the visionary who, because of a pessimistic view of reality growing out of the bleak conditions when Israel as a nation was no more, confined to the cosmic realm God's activity of restoring Israel (11-12). When Israel fell into judgment, the "mythopoeic worldview" of Deuteronomy, that God works through history to save his people, expressed as promise and fulfillment, gave place to a renewed emphasis on the cosmic aspect of divine activity on behalf of Israel (22-23). The prophets forged the realistic and visionary aspects of the religious experience into one tension-filled whole; prophetic eschatology was born when the prophets "forced the translation of the pure cosmic vision into the terms of plain history" (17), as in Isaiah. Second Isaiah raised the dialectic between vision and realism to a high tension, but the world was still viewed optimistically as the context where God would fulfill his promises. With the exile the delicate balance between vision, the cosmic, and realism, the mundane, could no longer exist, and visionaries (as Third Isaiah) spoke only of a cosmic fulfillment of promises. Yet the prophetic concern for realism persists in the assumption of "an historical framework" and "an historical sequence" for the cosmic vision (28).

Hanson summarizes his portrayal of the rise of apocalyptic eschatology as follows (29):

(1) the sources of apocalyptic eschatology lie solidly within the prophetic tradition of Israel; (2) the period of origin is in the sixth to the fifth centuries; (3) the essential nature of apocalyptic is found in the abandonment of the prophetic task of translating the vision of the divine council into historical terms; (4) the historical and sociological matrix of apocalyptic is found in an inner-community struggle in the period of the Second Temple between visionary and hierocratic elements.

Hanson calls his method of study the "contextual-typological" method (29). He believes his approach has implications for fields other than biblical studies. He suggests that the elements of realism and vision constitute the "heart of all ethical religions" (29-30).

Hanson rejects static definitions of apocalyptic, whether literary or theological, because of the sociological dimension of conflict described above. For Hanson, apocalyptic eschatology "represents a

THE GENRE CRITICISM APPROACH (APOCALYPSE^{GC})

While many of the approaches in this study would implicitly embrace the approach of genre criticism, others do so explicitly. The idea is that interpreters must recognize that different literary genres call for different ways of interpreting, and that genre partly determines the interpretation.⁵⁰

In their excellent work on hermeneutics, Fee and Stuart devote an entire chapter to the interpretation of the Revelation. As in all their chapters, they distinguish between exegesis (the discovery of the "original, intended meaning" of the text when it was written) and hermeneutics in its narrower sense ("the contemporary relevance of ancient texts"-- what the text means today).⁵¹ They first discuss the nature of the Revelation: it is a unique blend of apocalypse, prophecy, and epistle. Under apocalypse they set forth several characteristics of all apocalypses. 1) It finds its taproot in Old Testament prophetic literature, especially that found in Ezekiel, Daniel, Zechariah, and parts of Isaiah. Apocalypse was born in persecution or oppression. It is concerned about coming judgment and salvation. 2) Apocalypses are literary works from the beginning. 3) The content of apocalypse is in the form of visions and dreams, in language which is cryptic ("having hidden meanings") and symbolic. Pseudonymity gives apocalypses a sense of "hoary age" (but Fee and Stuart reject this for the Revelation). 4) The images are often "forms of fantasy, rather than of reality" (e.g., a beast with seven heads and ten horns). 5) Because they are literary works, apocalypses are "formally stylized." The symbolic use of numbers is prominent.

Fee and Stuart present exegetical principles for interpreting Revelation. These are similar to principles they set forth to interpret all other biblical genre. They include the following.

1. The first task of the exegesis of the Revelation is to seek the author's, and therewith the Holy Spirit's, original intent. . .
2. Since the Revelation intends to be prophetic, one must be open to the possibility of a secondary meaning, inspired by the Holy Spirit, but not fully seen

certain perspective, a distinct way of looking at reality" (408). The writers view a more perfect future order imposed on a fallen world where their beliefs will be realized.

Hanson is to be commended for his emphasis on prophecy as the source of apocalyptic eschatology, and the place of reality and world view in his thinking. I return to the matter of world view later in this study.

⁵⁰Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "The Semantics of Biblical Literature: Truth and Scripture's Diverse Literary Forms," in D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge, eds., *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 79-80, who speaks of the importance of genre relative to truth. Genre affects the exactness of truth. He observes: "Surely the kind and degree of exactness required must vary with the particular literary form and a consideration of its communicative content" (84). He goes on to observe that every text is comprised of four elements: proposition or issue, purpose or function, presence or form, and power or force, with the last factor dependent on the preceding three. So genre partly determines power or force (91-92).

⁵¹Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth: A Guide to Understanding the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 21, 25.

by the author or his readers. However, such a second meaning lies *beyond* (italics theirs) exegesis in the broader area of hermeneutics. . .

3. One must be especially careful of overusing the concept of the "analogy of Scripture" in the exegesis of the Revelation. . . Therefore, *any keys to interpreting the Revelation must be intrinsic to the text of the Revelation itself or otherwise available to the original recipients from their own historical context* (italics theirs).

4. Because of the apocalyptic/prophetic nature of the book, there are some added difficulties at the exegetical level, especially having to do with the imagery. .

a. One must have a sensitivity to the rich background of ideas that have gone into the composition of the Revelation. The chief source of these ideas and images is the Old Testament, but John also has derived images from apocalyptic and even from ancient mythology. . .

b. Apocalyptic imagery is of several kinds. In some cases the images . . . are constant. . . . some images are fluid. . . . some of the images clearly refer to specific things. . . . many of the images are probably general. . .

c. *When John himself interprets his images, these interpreted images must be held firmly and must serve as a starting point for understanding others* (italics theirs). There are six such interpreted images .

d. *One must see the visions as wholes and not allegorically press all the details* (italics theirs). . .

5. One final note: Apocalypses in general, and the Revelation in particular, seldom intend to give a detailed, chronological account of the future.⁵²

Having discussed these more general *exegetical* principles, Fee and Stuart present some *hermeneutical* "suggestions." By these they intend to address the fact that the "yet to be" often has a "temporal immediacy to it," that the "temporal" word is "often closely tied to the final eschatological realities."⁵³ These suggestions are the following.

1. We need to learn that pictures of the future are just that--pictures. The pictures express a reality but they are not themselves to be confused with the reality, nor are the details of every picture necessarily to be "fulfilled" in some specific way. . .

2. Some of the pictures that were intended primarily to express the *certainty* of God's judgment must not also be interpreted to mean "*soon-ness*," at least "*soon-ness*" from our limited perspective. . . But "*short*" does not necessarily mean "*very soon*," but something much more like "*limited*. . ."

3. The pictures where the "temporal" is closely tied to the "eschatological" should not be viewed as simultaneous--even though the original readers themselves may have understood them in that way (cf. p. 164). The "eschatological"

⁵²Ibid., 209-211.

⁵³Ibid., 216.

dimension of the judgments and of the salvation should alert us to the *possibility* of a "not-yet" dimension to many of the pictures. On the other hand, there seem to be no fixed rules as to how we are to extract or to understand that yet future element. .

4. Although there are probably many instances where there is a second, yet to be fulfilled, dimension to the pictures, we have been given no keys as to how we are to pin these down. In this regard the New Testament itself exhibits a certain amount of ambiguity. The antichrist figure, for example . . .

5. The pictures that were intended to be totally eschatological are still to be taken so. Thus the pictures of 11:15-19 and 19:1-22:21 . . .

Fee and Stuart are comprehensive in discussing principles for interpreting apocalypse. Clearly, they would not give as central a place to literal interpretation as does Alexander above. They emphasize the "already--not yet" paradigm in their understanding of Scripture including apocalypse. They also recognize the possibility of a secondary meaning beyond the human author's intention.

Craig Blomberg makes genre criticism the basis of his interpretation of apocalypse.⁵⁴ He distinguishes the Revelation as combining the genres of epistle, prophecy, and apocalypse. Regarding prophecy, he asserts that the idea of interpreting all texts literally unless there is clear evidence of figures of speech is "almost certainly more misleading than helpful when one approaches prophecy."⁵⁵ Clearly, he would say the same about apocalypse. He goes on to affirm that how well what John "actually saw" corresponds to "photographs" of end time events or to well-known symbols "cannot be determined apart from meticulous study and research."⁵⁶ It is not clear what this study might involve. He also does not seem to address whether John records what he saw or interprets what he saw.

Blomberg next defines apocalypse along the lines of the SBL study group cited above. However, he cites Leon Morris' seven differences between the Revelation and typical apocalypses.⁵⁷ Wisely, Blomberg cautions that error in interpreting Revelation usually results from overemphasizing either the prophetic element (the error of many conservatives) or the apocalyptic element (the error of many liberals with an antisupernatural bias).

Blomberg then lists several criteria for an interpretation of a given passage of Revelation to be "relatively convincing." These are the following.

⁵⁴Craig L. Blomberg, "The Diversity of Literary Genres in the New Testament," chapter seventeen in David A. Black and David S. Dockery, eds., *New Testament Criticism & Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 506-532.

⁵⁵Ibid., 524.

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Ibid., 525. See Leon Morris, *The Revelation of St. John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), 25-27. See also Morris' *Apocalyptic* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), a valuable little book.

(1) When John interprets a particular symbol, that interpretation must be preferred to any other speculations (e.g., the lampstands of 1:12 are the seven churches . . . (2) When key Old Testament texts, or for that matter other Jewish texts well known in the first century, use imagery in a consistent way that John seems to echo, those meanings should be carried over into Revelation (e.g., the "son of man" in 1:13 almost certainly hearkens back to Daniel 7:13). (3) When other historical information accessible to first-century Asian readers sheds light on particular details, it should be utilized (e.g., the five months of 9:5 was the average life cycle for a locust . . .). (4) When imagery seems merely to support the central truth of a passage, no specific, allegorical interpretation should be given to it (e.g., all the jewels adorning the walls of the new Jerusalem simply reinforce the picture of its magnificence . . .).⁵⁸

Blomberg adds a final word. "Above all, any interpretation that could not have been deduced by John's original readers must be rejected out of hand."⁵⁹ He goes on to observe that while Daniel does not understand the meaning of his prophecy-apocalypse, and is told to seal it up until the end when all would be clear (Dan. 12:4, 4-10), Revelation reverses this. The words are not to be sealed up for the time is near (Rev. 22:10). The presumption is that the readers would understand the language John was using to describe what would happen at the end of history.⁶⁰

Blomberg's treatment focuses on several things. He directly opposes the presumption of beginning with literal interpretation, and points to the importance of interpreting according to literary genre. He focuses on the significance of language and symbol and context in various forms, and calls for balance in interpreting Revelation as both a prophecy and an apocalypse.

Grant Osborne similarly approaches apocalypse as a special literary genre, although he recognizes that there is no such thing as a pure genre.⁶¹ He separates the more specific, formal features of style and content that distinguish apocalypse as a genre from the more general concepts or characteristics that betray the mindset that led to the production of such texts.⁶² Drawing on various sources (such as Collins, Rowland, Aune, and Hanson), Osborne defines apocalypse as:

⁵⁸Ibid., 526.

⁵⁹Ibid., 526

⁶⁰Ibid., 527.

⁶¹Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1991), 221-234.

⁶²Ibid., 222. The formal features are: (a) a revelatory communication; (b) angelic mediation; (c) discourse cycles; (d) ethical discourse; (e) esoteric symbolism; (f) a recital of history; and (g) pseudonymity (which Osborne thinks is dubious for biblical apocalypses). The general characteristics are: (a) pessimism toward the present age; (b) the promise of salvation or restoration; (c) a view of transcendent reality; (d) determinism; and (e) a modified dualism. See 222-227.

Apocalyptic entails the revelatory communication of heavenly secrets by an other-worldly being to a seer who presents the visions in a narrative framework; the visions guide readers into a transcendent reality that takes precedence over the current situation and encourages readers to persevere in the midst of their trials. The visions reverse normal experience by making the heavenly mysteries the real world and depicting the present crisis as a temporary, illusory situation. This is achieved via God's transforming this world for the faithful.⁶³

Osborne's discussion of the interpretation of symbol emphasizes that "symbols are literal in that they point to future events but not so literal that they tell us exactly how God is going to accomplish his purposes."⁶⁴ The goal is to understand what both the conceptual idea in the symbol and the image that represents it meant in the ancient world. Yet the past use of a symbol is "a pointer to its meaning but is not determinative in itself. Symbols rarely became absolutely fixed or formalized in meaning." Hence the "total semantic field behind the associative senses of a term" must be pursued. The theological thrust of the whole passage is the key to which of the possible meanings suggested by diachronic and synchronic study is best.⁶⁵

Osborne identifies these principles for interpreting apocalypse. (1) Note the type of literature--the formal traits of apocalypse. (2) Note the perspective of the passage--the mindset or general characteristics. (3) Note the structure of the passage or book. (4) Note the function and meaning of the symbols--exegete the parts, giving the predominate place to the author's original meaning as the key to the fulfillment. (5) Stress the theological and note the predictive with humility. Especially "note the congruence of present and future throughout biblical apocalyptic literature."⁶⁶

Osborne's emphasis on the theological meaning of apocalypse is especially helpful. In his discussion of the origins of apocalyptic he reminds us that apocalyptic is primarily a way of thinking. "It was first a divinely chosen means of revelation and then became an outlook on life" that cut across various Jewish sects.⁶⁷

Very helpful in stressing the particular principles needed to interpret apocalypse is Leland Ryken. Affirming that there are two different categories of literature, he distinguishes that which replicates existing reality (realism) from that which imagines an alternate reality (fantasy). The latter he designates visionary literature; it "pictures settings, characters, and events that differ from ordinary reality," although these things have happened in the past or will happen in the future. They "exist in the imagination, not in empirical reality."⁶⁸ Visionary literature includes the genres of prophecy and apocalypse (which he distinguishes).

⁶³Ibid., 222.

⁶⁴Ibid., 228.

⁶⁵Ibid., 227-229.

⁶⁶Ibid., 230-232.

⁶⁷Ibid., 234.

Ryken sets forth several principles for interpreting visionary literature derived from the elements or nature of visionary literature.⁶⁹ (1) The element of otherness leads to the motifs of transformation and reversal and the principle: "in visionary literature, be ready for the reversal of ordinary reality."⁷⁰ (2) The element of transcendence leads to the principle: "when reading visionary literature, be prepared to use your imagination to picture a world that transcends earthly reality."⁷¹ (3) The visionary strangeness of this literature leads to the rule: "visionary literature is a form of fantasy literature in which readers must be willing to exercise their imaginations in picturing unfamiliar scenes and agents."⁷² (4) Visionary literature challenges our normal way of thinking about reality and literary structure (it is much like a dream) and leads to the principle: "instead of looking for the smooth flow of narrative, be prepared for a disjointed series of diverse, self-contained units."⁷³

At this point Ryken suggests that the usual narrative elements of scene, agent, action, and outcome occur. It is appropriate to ask these narrative questions: (a) What overall plot conflicts govern the work? (b) Who are the main actors in the work? (c) What changes occur as the book unfolds? (d) What final resolution is reached in regard to the overriding conflicts?⁷⁴

Finally, the symbolic mode of apocalypse suggests the principle: "of what historical event or theological reality or event in salvation history does this passage seem to be a symbolic version?"⁷⁵ Ryken suggests that the "salvation history" consists of repeated pictures of the degeneracy of the end times and the final judgment. Finally, Ryken notes that visionary literature is heavily symbolic but not pictorial (that is, it is not clearly-drawn pictographs); that to discover the meaning is relatively easy (using the Old Testament and prophecy already fulfilled); that every detail should not be allegorized; that some of the literature is meant to convey a sense of "more-than-earthly mystery"; and that it is revolutionary literature intended to liberate us from the familiar and literal to show us alternate possibilities.⁷⁶

This discussion helps to clarify significantly the nature of apocalypse and its value or contribution. Ryken emphasizes the ideas of imagination and reality (mentioned three times and reflecting a world view--an emphasis I will make below). He shows us how to

⁶⁸Leland Ryken, *How to Read the Bible As Literature* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 165.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, 166-172.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, 167.

⁷¹*Ibid.*

⁷²*Ibid.*, 169.

⁷³*Ibid.*, 170.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, 171.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, 172.

⁷⁶*Ibid.*, 172-175.

understand apocalypse. By pointing to its liberating value and revolutionary character, he encourages all of us to enjoy it as we read and interpret it.

Reinforcing Ryken's suggestions for interpreting apocalypse this way is the study of D. Brent Sandy.⁷⁷ In a paper presented in 1992, Sandy studies the apocalyptic in Daniel 8 in light of subsequent history surrounding Alexander the Great and the division of his kingdom. He observes that Daniel's "word-pictures are more impressionistic than realistic."⁷⁸ His procedure is to examine the text of this apocalypse to discover how the fulfilled prophecies concerning Alexander and his successors compare with the history known to us from many external sources. While he finds that the "fulfillment of these prophecies is a stunning testimony to God's foreknowledge, sovereignty, and inspiration," such that only "divine revelation" can explain the prophecies,⁷⁹ Sandy believes that his examination of how the prophecies were fulfilled "demonstrates the allusive nature of the vision *and* (italics his) of the celestial interpretation of the vision."⁸⁰

At the center of his study, Sandy makes eight careful observations about the language of Daniel 8 and finds that the prophecies lack precision in the symbolism employed. He sets this in contrast to the expectation of "a very close, literal interpretation of prophecy" found in most eschatologies, particularly dispensational ones.⁸¹ After his study of the text of Daniel 8, Sandy asks: "What can be learned from the fulfilled prophecies of Daniel 8?" He then makes a most obvious yet powerful observation for the interpretation of the remaining prophecies of apocalypse: "If the apocalyptic predictions that are not yet fulfilled are to be interpreted correctly, the hermeneutical principles should come from apocalypses that have already been fulfilled."⁸² He then suggests five conclusions for the interpretation of apocalypse:

- 1) The language of apocalypse is expressive and may not have a specific referent for each object included in the description;
- 2) The language of apocalypse is poetic and will use figures of speech freely;
- 3) The language of apocalypse is selective and may give an incomplete picture of what it describes;
- 4) The language of apocalypse is flexible and may adopt a secondary meaning for common terms;
- and 5) The language of apocalypse is fluid and may use the same term or phrase in different ways in the same vision.⁸³

⁷⁷D. Brent Sandy, "Apocalyptic in Daniel and Non-literal Fulfillment: Toward a Hermeneutic for Apocalyptic," paper presented to the Evangelical Theological Society, San Francisco, CA., November, 1992.

⁷⁸Ibid., 3.

⁷⁹Ibid., 4-5.

⁸⁰Ibid., 5.

⁸¹Ibid., 3.

⁸²Ibid., 9.

⁸³Ibid.

Sandy relates these principles to literal interpretation. He writes:

A literal exegesis must seek to discover what the author intended to communicate by his choice of words in the framework of his choice of genre. Hence, the words of apocalypse must be interpreted in the special context of apocalyptic genre, which generally means that words will not designate what they normally would in other literature. But now the term literal has become meaningless if not misleading. For literal denotes the ordinary meaning of a term or expression, that which is obvious. Apocalyptic, however, is characterized by unusual or non-normative referents for its language symbols.⁸⁴

The point that Sandy seems to be making is this. The successors of Alexander were numerous and fought among themselves for forty years and never settled into four kingdoms. Yet the hearers of Daniel's prophecy in chapter 8 would have understood it because the meaning "is not in the details of the symbolism but in the broad shape of change in the future."⁸⁵ A complete understanding of each detail eludes the interpreter, even when the vision is fulfilled. A vision is not fulfilled "with the precision that the language would normally suggest." A hearer of apocalypse is "incapable of anticipating much of what the vision was alluding to."⁸⁶ Sandy concludes:

From Daniel 8 it should be clear that interpreters of apocalyptic should begin with three assumptions: 1) Symbols will not have clear referents; 2) Referents may not be known until after the prophecy is fulfilled; and 3) Identifying the referents is not important to grasping the message of the apocalypse.

It appears that Sandy has made several significant points, and has derived them from Scripture. His hermeneutical principles are broad; that is, detailed interpretation or literal interpretation is not the goal, and cannot be the goal, of interpreting apocalypse. Literal interpretation cannot be the method for interpreting words which are not used in their normal or ordinary sense. He distinguishes referents from the broader message. Most importantly, he argues that we should derive principles for interpreting apocalypse from principles the biblical authors have used to interpret fulfilled apocalypses. This provides an authoritative or inspired hermeneutic.

A Seventh-day Adventist approach to apocalypse is part of a larger investigation into biblical hermeneutics in general. Interpretation of symbols and apocalypse is especially crucial to the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist movement.⁸⁷ In his

⁸⁴Ibid., 10.

⁸⁵Ibid.

⁸⁶Ibid., 11. Beckwith, *Apocalypse*, also writes that prophecy when fulfilled is often conditional, imprecise, fallible in certain details, hidden, incomplete, different in form from the prophecy, etc. (297-310).

⁸⁷See W. G. C. Murdoch, "Interpretation of Symbols, Types, Allegories, and Parables," in Gordon M. Hyde, ed., *A Symposium on Biblical Hermeneutics* (Washington: Review and Herald Publishing

discussion of interpreting prophetic and apocalyptic eschatology, La Rondelle, an Adventist, says that Adventists embrace several principles that flow from the Reformation, from the use of the Old Testament in the New, and from a Christological center.⁸⁸ LaRondelle cites three unique characteristics of the apocalyptic books of Daniel and Revelation.⁸⁹ Then LaRondelle suggests the following principles for interpreting apocalyptic literature:

1. The OT apocalyptic and the NT apocalyptic constitute a general spiritual unity in and through Christ Jesus.
2. It is important for the gospel interpretation of the OT apocalyptic to determine, when the data permits, where each prophetic outline series passes the time of the cross of Christ, for OT terminology and imagery from that point on would receive a Christological interpretation.

Association, 1974), 210. Hans K. La Rondelle claims that almost half of the statements of the fundamental beliefs of Adventists are based on apocalyptic prophecies (225).

Murdoch defines symbol as "a timeless representation of something or someone. It pictures a meaning rather than expresses it in spoken or written words. Religious symbols point beyond themselves to spiritual reality" (209). He suggests some principles for interpreting symbols which he has derived from Ramm (which I have given above) (212-213).

In the same volume, Gerhard Hasel presents some general principles of interpretation (163-193). He presents the "basic principle of biblical interpretation is to take words always in their literal sense unless there is an unmistakable contextual indication to the contrary" (176). Then he proceeds to identify instances where nonliteral meanings exist: metaphors, similes, and symbols. Regarding symbols he says:

In interpreting symbols the guiding principle is to let the Holy Spirit, who provided the symbol, be also the guide in identifying the symbol. With regard to symbols the interpreter must exercise care so as not to fall into the trap of allegorical interpretation, where the Holy Spirit does not explicitly provide guidance. A sound principle for the interpretation of words with figurative or nonliteral meanings is to avoid interpreting figures of speech beyond the meaning they seek to communicate (176).

⁸⁸Hans K. LaRondelle, "Interpretation of Prophetic and Apocalyptic Prophecy," *Symposium*, 225-226. He cites the Reformation principles of *sola scriptura* and Jesus Christ as the unifying theme, and honoring the context of the entire Bible, not merely the immediate context (225-226). He affirms that "the deeper dimension of the literal sense of the Bible can be discerned only when the dynamic interrelationship of the OT and NT is fully honored (226). The Adventist hermeneutic "seems to acknowledge a multiple fulfillment of the broad terms of God's ancient and conditional covenant promises . . ." (228). A threefold Christological application or interpretation of God's covenant with Israel (meaning that promises were partially fulfilled after the Babylon captivity, in the New Testament, and at the second advent) "constitutes the underlying hermeneutical foundation" of the seven-volume *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, the five books of the Conflict of the Ages Series by Ellen G. White, and *Questions on Doctrine* (228).

⁸⁹Ibid., 231. These are:

1. Both books contain several series of outline prophecies that unfold an unbroken sequence of events leading up to the establishment of the eternal kingdom of God.
2. The focus of these prophetic series is the perennial conflict between the nations and Israel of God, between the Antichrist and Christ.
3. Each distinct series reveals a repetition and further enlargement of certain parts of a previous series, always focusing on redemptive history, specifically on the final conflict of good and evil.

3. OT apocalyptic prophecies that have remained unfulfilled, generally because of Israel's failure to meet God's conditions, will find their fulfillment in the faithful remnant people of Jesus Christ, according to the NT and its apocalyptic.
4. Interpretation of the NT apocalyptic must first consider the historical and theological root context in the OT, yet recognize the hermeneutical weight of the wider context of both testaments.
5. Although the same symbol in different apocalyptic outline series may carry the same basic meaning, each symbol is to be determined in its precise historical application by its own immediate context, where it may have a different historical or geographical application . . .
6. As the apocalypse of John refers more than 490 times to the OT . . . it becomes a valid principle to determine how the redemptive history and message of each book find their culmination in the apocalypse.⁹⁰

LaRondelle suggests that a multiplex approach is required to interpret apocalypse. This includes a recognition of the "typological structure," "the promise-fulfillment idea," and "the salvation-historical perspective."⁹¹

A BIFOCAL APPROACH (APOCALYPSE^B)

I now consider the contributions to understanding eschatology and apocalypse from what I call the bifocal approach. G. B. Caird makes some significant suggestions about the interpretation of eschatology and its development into apocalypse. After reviewing how eschatology has seen at least seven major definitions given to it,⁹² he suggests three propositions toward a definition flexible enough to do justice to all the various insights suggested in more recent years. These are:

1. The biblical writers believed literally that the world had had a beginning in the past and would have an end in the future.
2. They regularly used end-of-the-world language metaphorically to refer to that which they well knew was not the end of the world.

⁹⁰Ibid., 231-232.

⁹¹Ibid., 232.

⁹²G. B. Caird, *The Language and Imagery of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1980), 243-256. After broadly defining eschatology as the study of the "destiny of man and of the world" (243), he cites the *OED* (1891; 1933) as giving the definition as "the department of theological science concerned with the four last things, death, judgment, heaven, and hell" (243), which Caird calls Eschatology^I (Individual). The next definition is that eschatology concerns the final destiny of the Jewish nation and the world in general: Kohler's Eschatology^H (Historical). Subsequently arose other definitions: Eschatology^K (*Konsequente Eschatologie*: the view of Weiss and Schweitzer that the end of the world is imminent); Eschatology^R (Dodd's realised eschatology: "the time is coming and now is"); Eschatological^E (Bultmann's existential eschatology); Lindblom's Eschatology^N (eschatology means "newness" not finality nor imminence); and Clements' Eschatology^P (eschatology is teleology: God is working out a purpose, a goal in history). See Caird's *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966).

3. As with all other uses of metaphor, we have to allow for the likelihood of some literalist misinterpretation on the part of the hearer, and for the possibility of some blurring of the edges between vehicle and tenor on the part of the speaker.⁹³

Caird defends each of these proposals by examples from Scripture. He shows how the two phrases, "the latter end of the days" and "the day of the Lord," should be understood by these proposals. The former phrase has the blurring of proposition #3, so that it has the idea of the time of the end, or "sooner or later" or "in the future." The phrase, "the day of the Lord," illustrates proposition #2. The prophets looked to the future with bifocal vision, viewing imminent historical events in terms of their long sight of the day of the Lord. So the nearness of the day is "given both a short range and a long range application."⁹⁴

Caird then applies this proposal for understanding eschatology to apocalypse. While historical circumstances of the apocalyptic writers changed from that of the prophets (Israel's boundaries had been broken down and they had to view their history in light of world history; and they wrote during a time of intense nationalism when Israel was struggling to survive and could give little attention to social and moral concerns). The symbolism makes it clear that apocalypse is not to be taken literally, and their eschatology is to be understood in light of the three propositions above. There is an end but the writers also speak of current events with the metaphors of the end. Apocalypse uses the mythological language of the beginning of time to impart significance to an event in time, and thereby enriches it; and it uses the language of the end time to interpret a historical event. In Mark the language addressing the destruction of the temple uses terminology such that the disciples are to see in that event the coming of the Son of Man. Two levels of meaning are involved: Jesus will come within a generation (to destroy the temple), but the day and hour are known only to God (when the full, literal reality of the day arrives) (see Mark 13:30-32). Likewise, for Matthew, the "coming of the Son of Man on the clouds of heaven would be seen not merely at the end of time but continuously or repeatedly from the moment of Jesus' death."⁹⁵ Caird cites Matthew 24:3; 26:64 to support these two levels of meaning. Caird also shows how his approach is agreeable with Luke and with Paul, especially the two problematic passages of Romans 13:11-14 ("the day is near") and 1 Corinthians 7 (esp. vv. 26, 29, 31: "the form of this world is passing away").⁹⁶

In conclusion, Caird asserts that certain elements in various definitions of eschatology are correct, but not adequate. It is insufficient to say that eschatology is central to the understanding of biblical thought; that it is a Jewish understanding of history; and that it is realized (in part). Caird observes that John "provides this notion with its full

⁹³Ibid., 256.

⁹⁴Ibid., 258-260. Thus in Mark 1:15 the short range is indicated by "is near" and "has arrived," while the long range is shown by "a day will come" (2:28) and "when that time comes" (3:1) (260).

⁹⁵Ibid., 266-268.

⁹⁶Ibid., 268-271.

theological justification."⁹⁷ For John the *eschaton* is not an event but a person who is the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end (22:13).

Caird makes several valuable suggestions. He stresses that the language of apocalypse is metaphor and observes (by his three propositions) that apocalypse, like eschatology, uses end time metaphorical language to describe present or earlier events. This alone suggests imprecision or generality. He emphasizes the centrality of Christ. There are several similarities with the world view approach discussed below, which I note there.

A POSTMODERN LITERARY APPROACH (APOCALYPSE^{PM})

A fruitful area to pursue is what contributions a postmodern approach to hermeneutics might make to the interpretation of apocalypse.⁹⁸ One such evangelical study suggests that the key to the interpretation of Scripture in general and the formulation of theology is in the interpretative sign, i.e., in semiotics, the system of signs. Applying concerns of philosophical linguistics and literary theory to how evangelicals do theology, Glenn Galloway has investigated the various options involved in the nature of meaning and the linguistic sign.⁹⁹ There are two primary definitions or forms of "sign." Saussure's dyadic formulation of signifier-signified is one definition, and Peirce's conception of the triadic sign is a second.

Galloway suggests that both deconstructionists and conservative evangelicals follow a dyadic approach to semiotics inherited from Saussure. The former emphasize the difference between the signifier and the signified, that there is no access to reality, that there is no meaning to which the text refers.¹⁰⁰ The latter embrace identity to the extent

⁹⁷Ibid., 271.

⁹⁸For a postmodern view of the abyss, see Tina Pippin, "Peering into the Abyss: A Postmodern Reading of the Biblical Bottomless Pit," in Edgar V. McKnight and Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, eds., *The New Literary Criticism and the New Testament* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1994), 251-267.

⁹⁹See Glenn M. Galloway, "The Efficacy of Propositionalism: The Challenge of Philosophical Linguistics and Literary Theory to Evangelical Theology," Ph.D. dissertation, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky, May, 1996.

¹⁰⁰Galloway points out that the dyadic sign has been radicalized in recent years by structuralists and later by poststructuralists. The latter, along with such deconstructionists as Jacques Derrida, deny that the signified can serve "as the basis for or final deposit of meaning, because signifiers refer only to other signifiers" (221). Thus language cannot give us direct access to reality, to the thing-in-itself. It becomes a "play of signifiers" which has "no reference to signified meanings" (222; here Galloway is quoting Alan Bass, "Translator's Introduction," in Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1978), p. xv, quoting Jacques Derrida, *Positions* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1972), 30). There is "no ideal meaning to which the text refers" (222). There is no natural bond between the signifier and signified, between the "sound-image" and the "concept." The dyadic sign promotes "the endless deferral of the meaning of signs, language, and texts" (224). Whatever meaning is found in a text is an imposition forced on the text from the outside. This is one direction, wherein difference is amplified, that the dyadic approach takes.

that the "facts" and "external referents" are sure, that all literature can be made propositional, no matter what the literary genre is.¹⁰¹

Galloway suggests another alternative, that of the triadic sign system of semiotics. He draws upon Umberto Eco's use of Peirce's triadic definition of a sign. Human thought should be considered in terms of "sign" rather than "idea." Thought is the process of sign interpretation (semiosis). The meaning of a thought is established by the triadic relation of an object (concept), sign, and interpretant. The thought is itself received in the mind of the writer as a sign and this sign is in turn interpreted by the writer. This is the interpretant. The interpretant is the sign produced in the mind which is an addition to the sign and object in the Saussure or dyadic approach. The interpretant becomes the locus of meaning, even if it itself gives rise to another interpretant. Galloway writes: "The thought cannot be communicated without the interpretant, which mediates between the original sign and its object and serves to illumine, in some respect, the content of the sign."¹⁰² With regard to Scripture, both the thoughts and the words of Scripture are inspired. "The semiotic approach theoretically supplies the human writer with a broader range of words from which to choose in order to match a word with the divine thought."¹⁰³

Galloway suggests that post-conservatives or postmodern evangelical thinkers (such as S. Grenz, D. Taylor, M. Erickson) are linked to a dyadic approach to language in their attempt to reconceptualize theology, while philosophical and literary theorists pursue meaning and interpretation in terms of triadic sign processes.¹⁰⁴ Nevertheless, both approaches have in common such things as an anti-Cartesian view (they oppose the separation of subject and object), certainty rather than absoluteness, phenomenology, platonic realism, community, experience, and anti-foundationalism.¹⁰⁵ This suggests that

¹⁰¹This direction of a dyadic approach to language promotes identity. This is characteristic of strict propositional theology which assumes a rigid correlation of the signifier with the signified. Propositionalists such as C.F.H. Henry speak of a "conceptual/verbal" idea of revelation, which corresponds to the "concept/sound-image" idea of a dyadic approach to sign-theory. Biblical statements are treated as "first-order ontological truth-claims having a single determinate meaning regardless of the divergent interpretations and multiple meanings that the Bible's own literariness evokes" (226). This position has difficulty with the multitude of literary, nondiscursive passages in the Bible. It views language as "closely bound to 'facts' and external referents" (156). Whatever the literary genre, Scripture is analyzed to produce "its cognitive, interpretive value as reconstructed proposition" (156).

See Vanhoozer, "Semantics of Biblical Literature," in his discussion of the impact of literary genre on the making of propositions. At the end he quotes Holmes regarding the difficulty of using symbol for theology (104):

Its literary diversity is more than a historic accident or a decorative device; it is a vehicle for imaginative thought and creative expression about things difficult to grasp. Analogy, metaphor, symbol, poetry--these and other forms cannot be translated without risking cognitive loss into univocal and pseudoscientific form.

¹⁰²Ibid., 191.

¹⁰³Ibid., 192.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., 229.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., 229-250.

evangelical theologians might benefit from a triadic sign theory to avoid the pitfalls of a dyadic approach.

The consequence of a literary theory approach is that "words comprising biblical statements are correlated with thoughts or concepts, but not with objects."¹⁰⁶ Galloway remarks:

Contrary to a language theory where words have a purely objective correspondence to objects, consideration of the uses of words is necessary in order to allow scripture to speak aesthetically from its literariness as well as cognitively in its propositional dimension. . . . the referents of words, even though these are not objects, nevertheless maintain contact with reality. . . . Things-in-themselves are knowable, but they are not knowable apart from a mind that interprets them and relates them to other thoughts. A one-to-one correspondence between word and thing is ruled out, but a genuine though not absolute knowledge of reality is attainable through the trials of experience, and this includes religious experience.¹⁰⁷

Other ramifications flow from a triadic approach, according to Galloway. A triadic approach supports the notion that it is not so much the author's intention with which we must deal but the intention of the text. The text is "free to speak God's 'intention' beyond what could possibly have been intended by any human writer."¹⁰⁸

So how does this all impact the interpretation of apocalypse? As I understand what Galloway is suggesting, there is greater certainty to interpreting apocalypse. A triadic

¹⁰⁶Ibid., 255.

¹⁰⁷Ibid., 255-256.

¹⁰⁸Ibid., 261. Galloway sees the triadic approach to meaning to be a third alternative to either the demise of authorial intention (and the author) in the postmodern structuralist/poststructuralist approach or the Hirschian strict adherence to authorial intention. In light of a triadic sign system, authorial intent

may be reconceptualized as the semiotic fount from which the author's own interpretation flowed. Even as a sign's object evokes an interpretant in the mind of the interpreter, the object also supplies the complex of "grounds" which forms the grammar of the sign. The author, therefore, writes from a certain perspective, which coincides with the "grounds" of the signs which the author has utilized (259).

In addition, there is an implication for inspiration. Galloway remarks: ". . . in a sense the full meaning of scripture depends as much on the process of illumination (emphasis his) as it does on the inspiration process" (262). Reflecting on the role of the Holy Spirit, he continues:

. . . it may be that the doctrine of biblical inspiration should be broadened to acknowledge the continuing work of the Holy Spirit in interpretation at points in time other than the occasion of writing. While no individual interpretation would be granted authoritative status, a corporate decision based on the on-going community experience with God in Christ may sustain an interpretation as a legitimate product of the Holy Spirit intended for the edification and praxis of the faith community (263-264).

See also the earlier reference to the Holy Spirit as the one who mediates "God's dynamic message . . . through scripture" (254).

approach acknowledges that interpretation of symbol and image is general, not precise. It involves a process of the interpretation of signs on two different levels. The first concerns the apostle John's writing. Did he receive the exact sign to record, and recorded it; or did he interpret what he saw and wrote down his interpretation? The text says that God's message was mediated through Jesus Christ through an angel to John, and John showed it to God's servants, the seven churches (Rev. 1:1-2). Did God reveal the sign or words, like a photograph, and John wrote them down? Or, did God reveal the sign as a concept, even an abstract painting or symbol, and John interpreted this (the "interpretant") and wrote down his interpretation in imagery meaningful to him and his readers? A triadic approach to signs supports the latter. The second level or stage has implications for how we interpret the Revelation, especially its symbols. Do we take the objects/concepts/symbols as signs or do we interpret them with other signs to make them meaningful? The latter, triadic approach acknowledges the essential message in the symbols and translates it into contemporary words.

A NEW PROPOSAL: A WORLD VIEW OF REALITY APPROACH (APOCALYPSE^{WV})

The preceding survey of views for the interpreting of apocalypse leaves some questions yet unanswered. What role does world view have in shaping the hermeneutic of apocalypse? Are there not some broad principles, is there perhaps a biblical center, that would guide us to interpret within certain parameters? Since we know of details that were fulfilled in the first coming of Christ, can we discover guidelines relative to the second coming which will enable us to know what details are important or essential and which are not? What kind of relationship prevails between symbolism and literal interpretation?

I offer here for consideration a way of interpreting apocalypse that recognizes the essential place of world view.¹⁰⁹ World view determines everything about reality, knowledge and truth, and ethics or morality or the good. It determines hermeneutics. When various writers, such as Alexander, Fee and Stuart, Blomberg, Ryken, Sandy, Caird, and others advocate that we should derive our hermeneutic for apocalypse still awaiting fulfillment from that apocalypse already fulfilled we are embracing a biblical hermeneutic derived from a biblical world view. The hermeneutic for interpreting apocalypse or any literary genre, for that matter, must and does derive from a biblical world view.

The biblical world view represents what I call a *paradigm of reality*, a way of looking at reality. It is a model of reality which involves three broad concepts: there is essential reality (the eternal, the heavenly), existential reality (the particular, the occasional, the temporal), and actualization. Actualization means that a process is underway by which

¹⁰⁹Hanson, *Dawn of Apocalyptic*, 1-31, repeatedly refers to world view in his explanation of the definition of apocalyptic eschatology and its development from prophetic eschatology.

See our discussion of world view and its impact on hermeneutics in De Young and Hurty, *Beyond the Obvious*, chapters 4 and 5. Our distinctive is to link world view to a biblical center, namely the kingdom of God.

essential reality is being actualized more and more in existential reality.¹¹⁰ This paradigm is our terminology for what often occurs in Scripture when Christians are exhorted to transform (or, to recognize the transformation of) their daily experience by their position in Christ. It explains the existence of types, allegory, and fulfillment of prophecy.¹¹¹

The biblical world view of reality finds expression in, and is anchored to, the biblical center of the kingdom, with kingdom defined as both rule (transcendent: eternal, not yet) and relationship (immanent: temporal, here already).¹¹² The kingdom is being more and more actualized; the "not yet" is being actualized more and more in the "here" or "already." The kingdom is both present and not present (as the parables of the kingdom in Matt. 13 and the terminology of Heb. 2:8-9 suggest). As the central theme of the Bible the kingdom encompasses within it the more limited themes of redemption, covenant, promise-fulfillment, etc.

Applying the paradigm of reality to hermeneutics in general, the particular reality of the text may be distinguished from the essential reality, all in the one meaning of the text. In discourse or epistolary literature, these two realities are often, if not always, one and the same. Yet the paradigm enables us to distinguish the essential message that is kingdom oriented and transcends time (what others often call the "principle") from the limited, particular (occasional, historical) message. The essential message anchored to the kingdom center is to be actualized (applied, contextualized) more and more. This aspect is inherent in the text from the very writing of it. The divine and human intentions are basically one.

In prophecy and in literature having a typological or allegorical meaning the essential and existential levels of the text are more sharply distinguished, and perhaps separated by thousands of years. While the human author knew the particular or existential meaning of his words, it is possible that he did not know the essential meaning which God also intended.¹¹³ During the course of this messianic age, there is an essential sense to such

¹¹⁰Hanson, *Dawn of Apocalyptic*, 17ff., seems to come close to these three concepts when he talks about the dialectic or tension experienced in ancient Israel when the prophets attempted to *integrate* or *translate* the vision of the *cosmic* realm into *history*. This tension is basic to the meaning of apocalyptic eschatology, he affirms. These two elements (also identified as vision and realism) "constitute the heart of all ethical religions" (29-30). In an allegory, Hanson identifies the mother of apocalyptic eschatology as realism or history (the concern of prophecy) and the father as vision or the cosmic (when the royalty in Israel ceased) (402-403). This is a "dualistic view of reality" (405). He also speaks of immanence and transcendence (411) and the community of faith (412)--emphases we also make. Yet we believe our paradigm can be applied to all literary genre and the totality of Jewish and Christian living. It is a view of reality communicated from God to people; it did not evolve from pagan primordial myth.

¹¹¹We give several Scriptural examples of the paradigm in *Beyond the Obvious*, Appendix D, "Kingdom Light on Difficult Issues," 273-287.

¹¹²We give several arguments to support the kingdom as the center of the entire Scripture in *Beyond the Obvious*, chapter four, and in Appendix C, "The Kingdom Center as Rule and Relationship," 266-271.

Beckwith, *Apocalypse*, also sees the kingdom of God as a basic theme to prophecy. He writes that it is viewed both as "always coming and on the other hand as yet to come" (304; cf. 134). Prophets, he says, "enshrined great truths regarding the kingdom of God" (301).

Scripture as prophecy which may have many particularizations or existential or occasional meanings, including the author's, within the total complex of meaning.¹¹⁴ This approach to "deeper meaning" has been evaluated recently by various criteria and meets them well.¹¹⁵

¹¹³As we saw above, others often designate these two as two different fulfillments as opposed to two senses, or two different referents of the text. The world view approach is slightly different from these, and deliberately links the meaning of the text to a world view of reality focused in the kingdom.

The matter of intention is crucial, and related intrinsically to referent and sense. The author intends both of these. If we assume that in prophecy there may be double or multiple referents involved (as even the conservative literalist Walt Kaiser allows under the idea of generic prophecy), is the sense affected? While Elliott Johnson accepts multiple referents but rejects multiple senses (hence he accepts *referents plenior* but not *sensus plenior*; see Elliott Johnson, "Author's Intention and Biblical Interpretation," in *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, and the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 416, 425-427), it seems that multiple referents do affect the sense. Caird, *Language and Imagery of the Bible*, directly addresses the difference between sense and referent. Regarding referent, he affirms: ". . . an utterance can have a meaning beyond what the original speaker intended" (57). He gives five different kinds of referents which support this position. He then asks whether a saying can acquire a new sense in addition to a new referent, and concludes: "To a limited degree it would appear that we are already committed to assent to this as well. By the ambiguity of predication we have seen that every act of reference casts some reflection back on the sense" (59). While he attributes this newer sense of Scripture not to the original situation but to its use by later users of it, he acknowledges that there is not a right or wrong answer to this. In addition, he acknowledges that there are "many instances in which the intention of God differs from that of his agent or messenger" (60). He cautions that we not invent something to put in place of what we reject or dislike in the meaning of a text. He says: "A fortiori, we have no access to the word of God in the Bible except through the words and the minds of those who claim to speak in his name" (61).

This is a matter of great importance. In my statement above, by "meaning" I include both the sense, referent, and intention. I've addressed this elsewhere in *Beyond the Obvious*, chapter three, where my co-author and I explain why we dislike the terminology of *sensus plenior*. In chapter one (29-48) and in Appendix F, "Deeper Meaning and the ICBI Statement on Hermeneutics" (305-310), we present the biblical evidence and contemporary Christian support for deeper meaning.

Others similarly distinguish between different levels of meaning or senses in the text due to differing intentions, including Erich Sauer, Darrell Bock (he distinguishes the historical-exegetical meaning from the theological-canonical), Moises Silva (see *Has the Church*, 38-40, 66-71, 104-108, cited above), S. Lewis Johnson, J.I. Packer, E.D. Hirsch, Douglas Moo, F.F. Bruce, C.F.H. Henry, Robert Gundry, Richard Hays, Dan McCartney, G.K. Beale, John Sailhamer, William LaSor, C.H. Dodd, Millard Erickson, etc. For supporting evidence, see *Beyond the Obvious*, chapter 5, and texts authored by these scholars. In a recent study dealing with the exegesis of Psalm 22 and its use in the New Testament, Robert Lillo, "Psalm 22 and Its Use in the New Testament," paper presented to the Evangelical Theological Society, Philadelphia, PA., November, 1996, prefers a predictive/poetic interpretation over the personal, ideal, national, liturgical, and typological interpretations. This allows God to have an intention for the meaning of David's words that exceeds David's intention (see 27-31, 34-37).

¹¹⁴1 John 2:16 illustrates this well. John writes: "Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour." The essential reality of the antichrist is being actualized in many historical particularizations. The last hour produces metaphors which are used to describe the historical present.

¹¹⁵In his recent study Martin Baggs, "Assessing the Deeper Meaning of Scripture: A Comparison of Current Evangelical Approaches," Th.M. thesis, Western Conservative Baptist Seminary, Portland, OR., March, 1966, 48-87, sets forth the case for "deeper meaning" and evaluates four approaches: the *sensus plenior* approach, the canonical context approach, the Jewish hermeneutical approach, and the paradigm of reality approach. Baggs applies the following nine criteria to determine which approach best deals with the

In addition, this approach needs to be distinguished from a spiritualizing or allegorizing of the text.¹¹⁶

The paradigm of reality anchored to a world view corresponds to Galloway's representation of the triadic approach to Scripture. As Galloway acknowledges, our essential meaning corresponds to the "concept" or "grounds" or ideas in the triadic approach, while our existential meaning corresponds to the triadic "sign."¹¹⁷ As stated above, a triadic approach has John receiving visions of eternal truths pertaining to essential reality and translating them into symbols pertinent to his readers' understanding in their particular circumstances.¹¹⁸

biblical evidence: the interpretation must be intuitive (understood as any human communication is understood), coherent (fits the biblical data), comprehensive (applies to the entire canon), consistent (the system fits together and forms a viable pattern), compatible with the biblical world view, continuative temporally (applicable over a long period of time, even millennia), cross-cultural geographically (durable across cultures and lands), relevant (the meaning must be useful and meaningful for the life of the interpreter), and usable (workable and usable to discover further meaning) (127-140). When Baggs applied these criteria to the four approaches he found that the canonical context and paradigm of reality approaches met the criteria best. This represents a basic validation of the world view approach.

In chapter four, Baggs offers twelve "proofs" of the existence of deeper meaning--a meaning unknown to the human author but intended by God (88-125).

¹¹⁶While the kingdom world view of reality approach seems to have parallels with a spiritualizing of the text, there are important, essential differences. To show these I draw upon Silva, *Has the Church Misread the Bible?* and his very helpful discussion of allegory in chapter three, "Literal or Figurative?" He sets forth four emphases of a "rigorous definition of the allegorical method" (58-60). These are: 1) it dehistoricizes the text; 2) it embraces a philosophical system current in the world; 3) it is arbitrary (there is no necessary connection between the text and the allegorical meaning); 4) it requires an elite group of interpreters who hold the key to the interpretation. In contrast, the world view of reality approach based in the kingdom opposes the foregoing at each point. 1) It intrinsically ties the "deeper" or essential meaning to the historical meaning (indeed one cannot engage the essential meaning until he has first found and embraced the existential meaning). 2) It embraces the world view of Scripture and the view of reality flowing from it as the philosophy producing the hermeneutic. 3) It is not arbitrary but based in the historical meaning of the text and emulates how the New Testament authors used the Old Testament. It also proposes as controls the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit (he will never contradict previous teaching--1 John 2:27), a model of sanctification that synthesizes the reformed concern for the Word with the mystical, contemplative concern for experience; the role of community in discerning truth; and the role of general revelation and history as communicators of truth. 4) It champions the ability of the common person to practice this hermeneutic, just as those of Berea were able to emulate Paul (Acts 17:10). It is also important to point out that the essential and existential meanings or senses are not viewed as two elements but aspects of one meaning or sense; they are two levels in the one total meaning or sense. This reinforces the tie of the essential to the existential meaning. Silva says much in his chapter which resonates well with the paradigm of reality approach.

¹¹⁷Galloway, "Efficacy of Propositionalism," 237. He also relates our paradigm to Erickson's preference that the referent of the linguistic sign is not another sign or object but a concept (e.g., the sign "chair" refers to a concept "chair" or "chairness") (236). The existential reality is the sign, the essential reality is the concept. See Millard Erickson, *Evangelical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 116.

¹¹⁸Interestingly, Beckwith, *Apocalypse*, seems to have the same understanding of how the text came to be. He writes that the Apocalypse bears traces of a conscious effort to "embody truth seized in a moment of ecstasy rather than to describe symbols actually seen" (175). The Revelation is not a description penned while visions still present, while still in ecstasy (174). The author expends a "conscious effort as a literary artist struggling to give in familiar apocalyptic form and manner a presentation of the truths revealed in his

In earlier writing I have applied the paradigm to interpreting other genres of Scripture.¹¹⁹ Applying the paradigm of reality as a hermeneutic to apocalypse means that the Revelation has an essential meaning, expressed in the form of symbols, and often very little expressed existential or historical meaning. Indeed, in some cases the author may be totally unaware of, or not have, a particular existential meaning (except chs. 2-3) other than broad spiritual concepts. This contrasts other genre such as prophecy, where the existential meaning is more obvious and the essential meaning somewhat hidden or unknown. In apocalypse, it seems that we have usually only the essential meaning expressed in and through symbols pertinent to the original reader and hearers (Rev. 1:3).¹²⁰ The existential meaning is left to the readers to discover.¹²¹ This is the meaning (some would say, the "application") for them within history. This is the liberating experience for us and readers of any era that Ryken affirms.¹²² It liberates us toward greater understanding of God and his kingdom purposes for this and any other era. Yet none of the existential or particular meanings exhaust the essential meaning.

The paradigm of reality approach is especially appropriate for apocalypse. More clearly than other genre, apocalypse beckons us to connect a biblical world view of reality

ecstatic experiences" (175). He is a "deliberate composer" (214) but the conscious word is not always to be "sharply distinguished from his ecstatic state" (215; cf. 216). The "distinction is unimportant" (216).

This way of presenting how the Apocalypse came to be has implications for inscription of Scripture in general, for inspiration.

¹¹⁹See my application of the paradigm of reality as a world view to the interpretation of allegory in James B. De Young, "But As Then . . . So Even Now': Toward an Understanding and Reproduction of Paul's Allegory in Galatians 4:21-31, with Implications for the Role of History and General Revelation in the Interpretive Process," paper presented to the Evangelical Theological Society, Santa Clara, California, November 21, 1997.

¹²⁰Beckwith, *Apocalypse*, 301ff., seems to echo a similar understanding of levels of meaning when he writes of the great eternal truths of apocalypse realized for the author, or others in the distant future, in transitory forms. He distinguishes between form and content: the "form is transitory, the truth is eternal" (301); he speaks of "the permanent truth enshrined in transitory forms" (306), and even uses the terms "essential character" of a portion of the Apocalypse (308). Indeed, he links the permanent truth to God's purpose "to establish his reign" (306) and to the kingdom of God "as always coming and on the other hand as yet to come" (304).

¹²¹This "discovery" of the meaning of the symbols, of the essential reality, in Apocalypse corresponds to Aune's ("Apocalypse," 89-90) assertion that such discovery is the function of apocalypse: it seeks to mediate "a new actualization of the original revelatory experience through literary devices, structures and imagery" (see n. 12 above).

¹²²Of this liberating feature of apocalypse, Ryken, *How to Read the Bible*, 174-175, writes:

Visionary literature is what its name implies--an imagined picture, frequently symbolic rather than literal, of events that have not yet happened at the time of writing, or of realities such as heaven that transcend ordinary reality. Such writing requires that readers be ready to use their imagination--to let it fly beyond the stars. Visionary literature liberates us from the mundane and familiar and literal. It is an assault on our patterns of deep-level thought in an effort to shake us out of complacency with the normal flow of things. Visionary literature is a revolutionary genre. It announces an end to the way things are and opens up alternate possibilities.

centered in the kingdom with hermeneutics. It concentrates on essential or eternal realities and depicts them by new and fantastic ways. By asking what is the essential reality, we are enabled to discover such essential realities as the fact that the world will not always continue as it now is; that there is a great evil with the present system; that there are unseen spiritual forces that are just as real as the seen physical ones; that there is an ultimate meaning or purpose to our existence; that God's transcendent rule is real; that God is developing an increasingly intimate rule or relationship with his people whom he will preserve; that God's kingdom is being more and more actualized; that there is an end to the present world system when Christ will be enthroned and his people vindicated. These essential realities are similar to Jesus' teaching about the kingdom in the parables of Matthew 13. They enable us to discover the equivalent existential realities for us, and to seek to actualize the essential in our historical situation.

Whether we view the Revelation as prophecy or apocalypse or a combination of both, the paradigm of a world view of reality anchored to the kingdom center enhances our interpretation of the book. It enables us to distinguish the eternal truth from the limited particulars, and to discover whether the essential is being actualized today or how it may be actualized by the contemporary Church as the kingdom unfolds. It gives equal place to earth or history (as prophecy emphasizes) and to heaven or the eternal (as apocalypse emphasizes) as the realms in which God fulfills his purposes for those who are his people and those who are not. The paradigm approach seems helpful to any view of eschatology.

THE IMPACT OF THE PARADIGM OF REALITY ON THE HERMENEUTIC OF BIBLICAL APOCALYPSE

The foregoing discussion has involved many different ways of dealing with the genre apocalypse and a hermeneutic for interpreting such. Each of the various approaches has special emphases and contributions to make: Apocalypse^D with its preunderstanding of dispensationalism and its adherence to the biblical text; Apocalypse^P and its treatment of apocalypse as prophecy; Apocalypse^{GC} with its insight into visionary literature and symbolism as a literary genre; Apocalypse^B which stresses the near and far (bifocal) perspective in understanding symbols; Apocalypse^{PM} with its postmodern insight into the nature of the linguistic sign; and Apocalypse^{WV} with its stress on reading apocalypse in light of the biblical world view of reality anchored to the kingdom. I have also highlighted specific areas of concern repeatedly voiced: the relationship of symbol to literal interpretation; the general nature of the interpretation of symbols; the relation of prophecy to apocalypse; pseudonymity; precision of detail; the fluidity and flexibility of symbols; biblical concepts of reality; and human and divine intentions or deeper meaning in the text.

The Paradigm's Impact on the Definition of Apocalypse.

Because world view affects hermeneutics, it seems to me that both the paradigm and definition of apocalypse should acknowledge the place of the biblical world view of reality as I defined it above relative to the kingdom.¹²³ Thus I would add to the content

¹²³Note that Beale, *Use of Daniel*, 6, makes mention of the "kingdom" in his definition of eschatology (which he includes in his definition of "apocalyptic").

portion of the paradigm of a biblical apocalypse, either in place of #6 or as an additional element after it as a new #7: "affirms a biblical world view centered in the kingdom of God/Messiah as both transcendent and immanent."

Also, element #9 should read: "Eschatological salvation *in the kingdom*." Finally, #16 should read: "Consolation through promises of vindication and redemption *in the kingdom*." Indeed, I think it appropriate to suggest that the terms, "immanent" and "transcendent" (in this order), would be appropriate substitutions for the words, "temporal" and "spatial," in the definition of apocalypse discussed above.¹²⁴ I would then read it (as especially applicable to Revelation):

"Apocalypse" is a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing *kingdom* reality which is both immanent (emphasizing relationship) insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and transcendent (emphasizing rule) insofar as it involves another, supernatural world, intended to interpret present, earthly circumstances in light of the kingdom as both here and not yet, and to influence both the understanding and the behavior of the audience by means of divine authority so that Christians actualize the kingdom (essential reality) in their experience (existential reality).

A shorter statement of the function of apocalypse would be that apocalypse is intended to interpret the existential or particular reality of the readers in light of the essential reality of the kingdom expressed largely in symbols, and to encourage the readers to actualize this essential reality in their existential reality or particular situation. Believers should live by kingdom ways.

Principles of Interpretation According to a World View Paradigm

One of the major considerations in the interpretation of the Revelation is that it is a mixture of epistle, apocalypse, and prophecy, particularly the last two. It is also a book of eschatology and eschatological metaphors. It is unique among the world's literature.

Principles which should not, in my view, be part of the approach to a hermeneutic for interpreting apocalypse are those that preclude the use of extra-biblical sources for the source or meaning of symbols and such that call for an eschatological presupposition such as dispensationalism. Such eschatological positions focus on the future to the neglect of the present. At least, the presuppositions should be more general, as the center of the kingdom (as both here and not yet) is.

I suggest the following principles for interpreting apocalypse, specifically biblical apocalypse, and particularly the Revelation. These principles reflect the various approaches surveyed above but placed in the framework of the paradigm of reality and its world view. They are applicable to the interpretation of the Revelation, whether it is viewed as prophecy or apocalypse.

Specific Principles

1. The principles for interpreting apocalypse should come from the way Scripture interprets earlier apocalypse. In addition, the opening words of Revelation (1:1-3) provide important clues to interpretation.

¹²⁴Collins, "Morphology," 10, says that the key word in the definition is "transcendence."

2. We must interpret apocalypse in light of the biblical center, namely the kingdom of God as both a rule (transcendent) and a relationship (immanent). This principle will give meaning to the big picture of apocalypse--what it is all about.

3. The interpretation, the hermeneutic, of apocalypse derives from a biblical world view of what constitutes reality. It is this world view which makes the Revelation a Christian apocalypse. There is existential or particular reality--the events of the time and temporal; there is essential reality--the abiding reality that is eternal; and there is actualizing of the latter in the former.

4. When expressed as a hermeneutic, this paradigm of reality means:

a. The essential reality corresponds to the sense of the text, while the existential reality corresponds to the referents and applications of the text, and all is intended by the divine author (whose intention on occasion may exceed the human author's). The third element, actualization, means that the readers at any given point of time are to actualize the essential meaning in their particular situation, thereby "rediscovering" the hidden message for themselves.

b. In light of the biblical center, the kingdom is being actualized more and more.

c. The existential meaning and the essential meaning are all part of one complex of meaning. Thus application as part of existential meaning is part of the complex of meaning.¹²⁵

d. At any given (existential) point in history, there may be a fulfillment of the essential reality embodied in the metaphorical language of the end-time.¹²⁶ This corresponds to the two levels of meaning or senses that other writers have seen, or the "here, but not yet" idea of hermeneutics. So the beast of seven heads and ten horns today may be Saddam Hussein, the President of the United States, etc., as yesterday it was Herod, Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin, Vladimir Lenin, Idi Amin, etc., etc.¹²⁷ Each culture around the world may identify its "beast" or antichrist.

e. Apocalypse (especially Revelation) concerns almost exclusively essential reality. Apocalypse differs from other literary genre in that it seems that the author only knows of essential reality revealed to him in certain ideas, objects, or concepts which he interprets into symbols meaningful to his contemporaries (a triadic

¹²⁵This represents a different way of looking at application, which often is viewed as outside of meaning. See the helpful discussion by Bruce B. Miller, II, "Hans-Georg Gadamer and Evangelical Hermeneutics," chapter ten in Michael Bauman and David Hill, eds., *Evangelical Hermeneutics* (Camp Hill, PA.: Christian Publications, 1995). From Gadamer Miller argues that all reading involves application so that a reader of a text is himself part of meaning (223-226). To listen is to obey and to obey is to understand or know (224). This idea is directly connected to the role of the Holy Spirit to actualize his word in believers (225-226). He cites John Frame and Anthony Thiselton among others who support this concept.

See also De Young and Hurty, *Beyond the Obvious*, chapter five and the additional resources (by Vern Poythress and others) mentioned there.

¹²⁶I say, "may be," because some of the symbolism may only have an essential reality--it may not have any preceding existential realities.

¹²⁷Apparently, Dietrich Bonhoeffer viewed Hitler as the Antichrist (so Hanson, *Dawn*, 427).

approach to the linguistic sign). Authors of other genre write of existential reality in which we must find the abiding principle or essential reality. Both realities comprise one, complex meaning in which more than one referent and sense may be present due to the presence of both a divine and human intention, especially in prophetic, eschatological, and apocalyptic writing. We may and must find the contemporary existential or particular meaning.

f. It may well be that the macro visions of the three series of the seals, trumps, and bowls concern essential reality, while the mirco visions of the rest of the text concern existential reality.

g. End-time metaphorical (essential) language is usually used to describe historical (existential) events.

5. The nature of apocalypse is symbolism. The first words of Revelation 1:1 assert: "he signified," that is, "signed" it. The meaning of symbolism is not precise nor exact. It is not intended to give details, but a general message.¹²⁸ Thus the ten horns of the beast may refer to a confederacy of eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve, etc., nations.

6. Apocalypse refers to actual events behind the symbols. Revelation 1:1 says it is an unveiling "to show *the things* which must come to pass quickly" (or, "soon)." The meaning of the symbol is an actual literal event, probably general in its dimension, still future in its essential reality but present or contemporary in various existential (particular) realities. These particulars may take an actual, different form than the symbolical words suggest. The ten horns may be kingdoms, democracies, totalitarian regimes, etc.

7. Apocalypse is understandable. The first words affirm that "God gave it to show to his servants." While the meaning of the symbols is veiled, the readers are blessed if they uncover their meaning *and* obey the message: "Blessed is he who reads and they who hear (understand) and do the things written" (1:3).¹²⁹ We should approach apocalypse expectantly and eagerly, committed to obey what we understand, for it more than any other genre of Scripture provides promise of new discovery and liberates us toward greater understanding of God and his kingdom purposes.

8. Because the *hermeneutic* for apocalypse derives from apocalypse already fulfilled, the *meaning* of the symbols chiefly derives from the Old Testament (Daniel, Zechariah, etc.) and other ancient Jewish writing.

¹²⁸Ryken, *How to Read the Bible*, 173, writes:

We need to make a distinction between symbolic and pictorial effects. Visionary literature in the Bible is heavily symbolic but rarely pictorial. Many of the scenes in Revelation become grotesque the moment we visualize them as pictures. . . . "Symbolic writing . . . does not paint pictures. It is not pictographic but ideographic. . . . The fish, the lamb, and the lion are all symbols of Christ, but never to be taken as pictures of him. In other words, the symbol is a code word and does not paint a picture."

In his *The Literature of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974), Ryken reiterates this by noting that vision conveys a general impression rather than a sharply visualized picture. Such qualities as awesomeness, ancientness, splendor, power, judgment, mystery, etc., are the usual thrust (346).

¹²⁹The single Greek article governing the "hearing" and "doing" suggests that obedience to the message is essential to its understanding. Hearing or understanding is doing. Both are necessary.

9. History is going toward an end when the essential reality will be one with the existential reality.

10. The application is part of the meaning; that is, the complex of meaning includes the sense, referent, and the application or significance as intended by the divine and human authors. The existential reality (various possible particularizations) includes referents and applications, while the essential reality is the sense; and the total is intended by the divine author (whose intention may exceed the human author's). The present and future are equal focuses of apocalypse.

Auxiliary Principles

11. Eschatology as a doctrine, along with ecclesiology, should be studied under Christology, for Jesus is the Alpha and Omega and the head of the Church. "The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy" (Rev. 19:10). He is the focus of the book.

12. Apocalypse and eschatology should be interpreted in community, just as the original Apocalypse was sent to the churches for reading, hearing (understanding), and doing (Rev. 1:3; and chs. 2-3). Community both checks and enhances understanding .

13. Prayer and meditation are crucial in order to have the Spirit's guidance. This meets the Scriptural affirmation that the Spirit is the one who reveals truth (John 14, 16; 1 Corinthians 2:13; 1 John 2:26-27). I mention this last because it is most important.

I believe that the world view approach centered in the kingdom encompasses some of the best points of the preceding approaches. In addition, it gives rightful place to the significant role that world view plays in everything, including hermeneutics. It enables us to give meaning to the symbolism, or at least to discern between proper or improper meanings--those which correspond to the world view of the kingdom and those which do not.

Finally, this approach provides substantial guidance to the answers to the three questions given at the beginning of this study: What is symbolical and what is not? Virtually all of apocalypse is symbolical (except for chs. 2-3). What does the symbolism mean? It pertains to the essential reality of the kingdom of God in rule and relationship. When will the symbolism be fulfilled? It has potentially multiple fulfillments in various existential particularizations during the course of this age and a final fulfillment in the final essential reality of the end. Then essential reality and existential reality become one.

A SUMMARY OF THE PROPOSED HERMENEUTIC FOR APOCALYPSE

THE QUESTIONS

In light of the preceding, here is a suggested list of questions pertinent to the interpretation of the Apocalypse and other apocalyptic literature.

1. What is the nature of the words and the actions? Are they literal (words used in their normal sense) or figurative (symbols, metaphors)?
2. Where does the symbolism come from? From the Old Testament, Jewish apocalypse, or other sources? What is the meaning in this source?
3. What is the essential meaning of the symbolism as it pertains to the kingdom?
4. What is the existential meaning for the first century as it pertains to the kingdom? What is the meaning which I may discover for the twenty-first century?

5. What does the meaning of the symbolical words and events communicate about the kingdom? Does it emphasize God's rule (transcendence) or his relationship (immanence)? Do they suggest actualization of the kingdom?

6. How would the Spirit have me actualize the essential reality in my particular (existential) situation?

THE ILLUSTRATION: THE WOMAN, THE LAMB, AND THE DRAGON

Revelation 12 is a good place to illustrate briefly how the paradigm works. It is one of the key chapters of the book.¹³⁰ The chapter pictures a red dragon seeking to devour the "male child" at his birth. When he fails this, the dragon tries to destroy the woman giving birth to the child. The text identifies the dragon as Satan (v. 9), the male child is Christ (v. 5), and by context the woman is Israel or God's people (cf. v. 17; the symbolism of v. 1 with its sun, moon, and twelve stars is drawn in part from the Old Testament). So the symbolism is clear.

What actions or events does it project? Certainly it points to the birth of Christ, and, more importantly, to his death and his resurrection and ascension, and to the time of tribulation when the saints will overcome Satan by the blood of the Lamb (i.e., Christ, vv. 10-12, 17), and to the end of the world when Satan's time will end (v. 6, 12, 14). Throughout this era Satan and evil will be in conflict with Christ and his people. The general assertions point to any time, to every time, when the world experiences Satan's deception and when the saints experience Satan's opposition and accusation (v. 10-11). The forms of persecution at the hands of the Romans, and of any subsequent force, are evidences of Satan's power. At the end of the second millennium, the red dragon is alive and well; yet we overcome him by the blood of the Lamb (v. 11). These are all existential meanings, particularizations, of the text.

In light of the preceding, the chapter has an overall general message, that God through Christ pictured as the Lamb will always protect his people from the onslaught of Satan and finally bring evil to an end. This is the essential meaning which in the course of history is being actualized more and more.

What does this all have to do with the kingdom center as rule and/or relationship? The chapter affirms that the kingdom and salvation and power have come, along with the authority of Christ (v. 10). The male child "will rule all the nations with an iron scepter" (v. 5); even now he is already enthroned (v. 6). The kingdom is in process of actualization, and will one day be fully realized in the end (note the eschatological reference to three-and-a-half years, vv. 6, 14). This is the essential meaning, the deeper meaning, the meaning which God intended through John's symbols. The contemporary existential meaning is that believers are to actualize the rule of Christ (as the Lamb) over evil and Satan, producing an increasingly intimate relationship. Not even death itself can sever their love for the Lamb who gave his life for them (v. 11).

We live in apocalyptic times to the degree that our world view embraces the Bible's world view of reality. This world view affirms the reality of the conflict between great unseen forces behind the physical ones, between God's program and Satan's attempts to wreck it, with a final destruction of evil occurring at the intervention of Christ.

¹³⁰As Ryken, *How to Read the Bible*, 172, points out.

