

The Book of Revelation

Session 2: Introduction

1. *Dei Verbum* paragraph 12 on interpreting Scripture

“However, since God speaks in Sacred Scripture through men in human fashion, the interpreter of Sacred Scripture, in order to see clearly what God wanted to communicate to us, should carefully investigate what meaning the sacred writers really intended, and what God wanted to manifest by means of their words.

“To search out the intention of the sacred writers, attention should be given, among other things, to ‘literary forms.’ For truth is set forth and expressed differently in texts which are variously historical, prophetic, poetic, or of other forms of discourse. The interpreter must investigate what meaning the sacred writer intended to express and actually expressed in particular circumstances by using contemporary literary forms in accordance with the situation of his own time and culture. For the correct understanding of what the sacred author wanted to assert, due attention must be paid to the customary and characteristic styles of feeling, speaking and narrating which prevailed at the time of the sacred writer, and to the patterns men normally employed at that period in their everyday dealings with one another.

“But, since Holy Scripture must be read and interpreted in the sacred spirit in which it was written, no less serious attention must be given to the content and unity of the whole of Scripture if the meaning of the sacred texts is to be correctly worked out. The living tradition of the whole Church must be taken into account along with the harmony which exists between elements of the faith. It is the task of exegetes to work according to these rules toward a better understanding and explanation of the meaning of Sacred Scripture, so that through preparatory study the judgment of the Church may mature. For all of what has been said about the way of interpreting Scripture is subject finally to the judgment of the Church, which carries out the divine commission and ministry of guarding and interpreting the word of God.”

2. Principles of interpretation

- a. Content and unity of the whole of Scripture
- b. Living Tradition of the whole Church
- c. Coherence of the truths of faith among themselves and within the whole plan of Revelation

3. The four senses of Scripture

- a. Literal
- b. Allegorical (Typological) (1 Corinthians 10:1-4)
- c. Moral (1 Corinthians 10:6-11)
- d. Eschatological (Anagogical)

4. Title of book: Revelation/Apocalypse/Unveiling

5. Date of composition: Mid-90s A.D. (Emperor Domitian) or mid-50s/mid-60s A.D. (Emperor Nero)

6. Author: John (the apostle/evangelist/epistle writer?)

- a. Western fathers (e.g., Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Irenaeus, Origen, and Athanasius): John the apostle authored the Gospel, the epistles, and Revelation.
- b. Eastern fathers (e.g., Dionysius of Alexandria, Cyril of Jerusalem, Gregory of Nazianzus, and John Chrysostom): John the apostle did not author Revelation.

7. Audience: Churches in western Asian Minor

8. Apocalyptic literature

a. Characteristics

- i. Divine revelation from heavenly being
- ii. Often addressed to those suffering persecution
- iii. Attribution to a figure with great authority
- iv. Dualistic view of world
- v. Divine judgment and cosmic transformation
- vi. Vivid symbolism
- vii. Revelation 1:1-3

b. Old Testament Examples

- i. Proto-apocalyptic passages in the prophets (e.g., Ezekiel 1)
- ii. Apocalyptic passages throughout Daniel
- iii. Daniel 8:1-17

c. New Testament Examples

- i. Revelation (the exemplar)
- ii. Olivet discourse, the “Little Apocalypse” (Matthew 24/Mark 13/Luke 21)
- iii. Passages in the Pauline epistles (e.g., 2 Thessalonians 2)

iv. Mark 13:14-27

9. Common interpretive approaches

- a. Historicist view
 - b. Preterist view
 - c. Futurist view
 - d. Idealist view
10. Integrated approach
11. Reading for Session 3: Revelation 1-3