

Does the Lion Lie down with the Lamb?

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Most commentators agree that the book of Revelation is about power. And most Christian commentators see a contrast between the power exercised by the beasts and the power exercised by the Lamb. One represents the epitome of evil; the other represents Christ's victory through self-sacrifice. Further, the hopes engendered by the Lamb are often seen in contrast to the (supposed) militaristic hopes of contemporary Judaism. This is often focused in a discussion of Rev 5:5—6, where John is told:

'See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals.' Then I saw between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders a Lamb standing as if it had been slaughtered.

Caird took these verses to be the key to all of John's use of the Old Testament, as if he were saying to us,

'Wherever the Old Testament says "Lion", read "Lamb". Wherever the Old Testament speaks of the victory of the Messiah or the overthrow of the enemies of God, we are to remember that the gospel recognizes no other way of achieving these ends than the way of the Cross.'¹

This judgment is quoted with approval in a number of recent commentaries. For example, John Sweet says:

We may agree, then, with Caird that what John *hears*, the traditional OT expectation of military deliverance, is reinterpreted by what he *sees*, the historical fact of a sacrificial death, and that the resulting paradox is the key to all his use of the OT.²

In his own words, the 'Lion of Judah, the traditional messianic expectation, is reinterpreted by the slain Lamb: God's power and victory lie in

¹G. B. Caird, *The Revelation of St John the Divine* (London: A&C Black, 1984), 75.

²J. P.M. Sweet, *Revelation* (London: SCM Press, 1990), 125.

self-sacrifice'.³ Boring says: 'It is as though John had adopted the familiar synagogue practice of "perpetual Kethib/Qere," whereby a word or phrase that appears in the traditional text is read as another word or phrase.'⁴ He then quotes Caird: 'Wherever the tradition says "Lion", read "Lamb".' The implication for both Sweet and Boring is that the apocalyptic violence of chapters 6—19 must be seen in the light of the slain Lamb, and definitely not vice versa. Bauckham is more nuanced and recognizes that the 'hopes embodied in the messianic titles of Revelation 5:5 are not dismissed by the vision of the Lamb'.⁵ Nevertheless, he also quotes Caird and states that 'by juxtaposing these contrasting images, John forges a symbol of conquest by sacrificial death, which is essentially a new symbol'.⁶ Finally, Beale says that 'John is attempting to emphasize that it was in an ironic manner that Jesus began to fulfil the OT prophecies' and then paraphrases Caird, 'Wherever the OT predicts the Messiah's final victory and reign, John's readers are to realize that these goals can begin to be achieved only by the suffering of the cross'.⁷

It is clearly a view that fits well with certain strands of modern theology, such as Moltmann's 'crucified God'. The crucifixion and in particular, the cry of dereliction, exposes our ideas of God's power as idols, mere projections of human dominance. But as Paul discovered, God's power is found in weakness not strength and thus for Moltmann, the church should be a 'fellowship of persons, which . . . transcends society's power struggles and conflicts'.⁸

But is such a theology really to be found in the book of Revelation? Certainly the Lamb is its key christological title but the characteristics attributed to it are hardly those of self-sacrifice and vulnerability. For example, in the chapter that follows Rev 5, the destruction brought about by the opening of the seals leads people to seek death rather than face 'the wrath of the Lamb' (6:16). The beast may do all sorts of despicable things to God's people but none compares with 14:10, where God's enemies 'drink the wine of God's wrath, poured unmixed into the cup of his anger, and they will be tormented with fire and sulphur in the presence of the holy angels *and in the presence of the Lamb*'. Had such a statement been written about the beast, commentators would have described it as the epitome of malice, vindictiveness and evil.

³Sweet, *Revelation*, 125.

⁴M.E. Boring, *Revelation* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1989), 110.

⁵R. Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), 183.

⁶Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 183.

⁷G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 353.

⁸J. Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit* (London: SCM Press, 1977), 106.

For Caird and his followers, the Lamb's victory has nothing to do with the overthrow of enemies but his own self-sacrifice. But that is not the obvious interpretation of 17:14, where the confederacy of kings 'make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings'. This title makes it virtually certain that the Lamb is to be identified with the figure on the white horse in chapter 19, from whose mouth 'comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron; he will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name inscribed, "King of kings and Lord of lords"' (19:15—16). The effect of all this violence for Bloom is that Revelation is

lurid and inhumane, its influence has been pernicious, yet inescapable... Resentment and not love is the teaching of the Revelation... It is a book without wisdom, goodness, kindness, or affection of any kind. Perhaps it is appropriate that a celebration of the end of the world should be not only barbaric but scarcely literate. Where the substance is so inhumane, who would wish the rhetoric to be more persuasive, or the vision to be more vividly realized.⁹

Indeed, there is a line of interpretation that draws a contrast between the all-powerful Lamb of Revelation and the Lamb 'who takes away the sin of the world' in John 1:29. Thus Dodd cites 1 *Enoch* 90 and *Test. Joseph* 19:8 and concludes that 'we have here a prototype of the militant seven-horned "Lamb" of the Apocalypse of John'.¹⁰ Barrett looks to passages like Exod 12, Isa 53, and Lev 16 as possible backgrounds for the Lamb of John 1:29, but discounts *Test. Joseph* 19:8 since it 'recalls the conquering lamb of Revelation . . . rather than the present passage'.¹¹ And Raymond Brown concludes his discussion of John 1:29 with the words, 'Thus we suggest that John the Baptist hailed Jesus as the lamb of Jewish apocalyptic expectation who was raised up by God to destroy evil in the world, a picture not too far from that of Rev xvii 14'.¹² This line of interpretation reaches its climax in the commentary of Josephine Ford, who argues that the book of Revelation derives (largely) from followers of John the Baptist. Lion and Lamb, she says, are not contrasting symbols, as if one represented raw power while the other is about sacrifice and vulnerability. Jewish apocalyptic texts predicted a conquering Lamb who will appear in the last days and destroy evil, as *Test. Joseph* 19:8 makes clear:

⁹H. Bloom, *The Revelation of St John the Divine* (New York: Chelsea House, 1988), 4—5.

¹⁰C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 232.

¹¹C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John* (London: SPCK, 1978), 147.

¹²R. E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Vol. 1, 1966), 60.

I saw that a virgin was born from Judah, wearing a linen stole; and from her was born a spotless lamb. At his left there was something like a lion, and all the wild animals rushed against him, but the lamb conquered them, and destroyed them, trampling them underfoot.

Ford maintains that there is nothing in the book of Revelation which compels us to depart from this picture. The Lamb of Rev 5 has seven horns, indicating power, and seven eyes, a symbol of omniscience. In the very next chapter (6:16—17), those who suffer the calamities set loose by the Lamb cry out:

Fall on us and hide us from the face of the one seated on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?

And the picture does not change when the confederacy of kings in Rev 17:14 confront the Lamb:

They will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful.

Ford thus concludes that John's use of the title 'Lamb' is thoroughly consonant with the 'apocalyptic, victorious, and destroying lamb' known to tradition.¹³

Thus we return to our title: Does the Lion lie down with the Lamb? Are we supposed to reinterpret the apocalyptic violence, with its note of vengeance and gloating, as symbolic of Christ's self-sacrifice? Or is this just Christian wishful-thinking? Are Bloom and Ford more honest in reflecting the impression the book actually leaves on less-biased readers? It is clear that one cannot offer a statistical argument that references to the vulnerability of the Lamb outweigh references to its supreme power. They do not. As Aune says, while a theology of the cross is 'certainly a central theological emphasis here in Rev 5, it is a marginal conception elsewhere in the book'.¹⁴ On what basis then does the reader choose a particular interpretative stance from among a number of possible ones? In order to pursue this question, we will briefly outline the literary notion of deconstruction. This leads to the suggestion that determining *the* meaning of a text always involves privileging some aspects of it at the expense of others.

¹³J. M. Ford, *Revelation* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975), 31. I am informed that she no longer holds the position that the book derives from followers of John the Baptist and this will be reflected in the revised version of her commentary.

¹⁴D. Aune, *Revelation 1-5* (WBC 52A; Dallas: Word Books, 1997), 352.

DECONSTRUCTION

The variety of interpretations of the Lamb illustrates the main theme of deconstruction, namely, that the meaning of a text is always fluid and provisional. Texts do not dictate what readers must believe about them. As Ellen van Wolde says, a 'writer does not weave a web of meanings that the reader merely has to follow, but . . . presents them to the reader as a text. The reader reacts to the offer and enters into a dialogue with the possibilities the text has to offer'.¹⁵ The error of much reader-response criticism is that it pretends to avoid this subjectivity by making definitive statements about a so-called 'implied reader'. But every act of reading, even by a reader-response critic, muddies the waters. As Derrida says, a text

always reserves a surprise for . . . a critique which might think it had mastered its game, surveying all its threads at once, thus deceiving itself into wishing to look at the text without touching it, without putting its hand to the 'object', without venturing to add to it.¹⁶

Deconstructive criticism seeks to expose the bias of particular interpreters by pointing out those parts of the text that have been prematurely silenced. For example, many commentators would agree with Tina Pippin that the violence and vengeance of the Apocalypse is aimed at exposing the corruption and violence of the state. But Pippin goes on to point out that 'also exposed is the desire for the violent destruction of the enemy at the hands of God'.¹⁷ And whereas Kraybill says that while 'the world follows a beast with all its power and violence, Christians follow a gentle and (seemingly) powerless lamb',¹⁸ Stephen Moore suggests that what Revelation actually offers is the assertion that

God's imperial splendor far exceeds that of the Roman emperor, just as the emperor's splendor far exceeds that of any of his 600 senators, and just as the senator's splendor far exceeds that of any provincial plebeian, and so on down the patriarchal line to the most subdued splendor of the feeblest father of the humblest household.¹⁹

¹⁵ Ellen van Wolde, 'Trendy Intertextuality' in *Intertextuality and Biblical Writings* (Kampen: Kok, 1989), 47.

¹⁶ J. Derrida, *Positions* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1972), 71.

¹⁷ T. Pippin, *Death and Desire: The Rhetoric of Gender in The Apocalypse of John* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992), 100.

¹⁸ J. N. Kraybill, *Imperial Cult and Commerce in John's Apocalypse* (Sheffield: JSNTSup 132; 1996), 201.

¹⁹ S. D. Moore, 'The Beatific Vision as a Posing Exhibition: Revelation's Hypermasculine Deity', *JSNT* 60 (1995), 40.

Thus a survey of scholarly views shows that 'multiple interpretations of a text are not only possible but inevitable.'²⁰ Consequently, Daniel Patte suggests that all exegesis 'needs to be multidimensional in the sense that it needs to acknowledge as equally legitimate several (rather than one) critical readings of each given text'.²¹ He says that a text (and this is surely true of Revelation) 'does not offer itself as a simple, one-dimensional puzzle, but rather as a complex, multidimensional puzzle, the pieces of which can be organized into several different coherent pictures'.²² A metaphor that springs to mind since upgrading my computer is the fact that its present complexity means that there is no longer one single way of configuring it. I have a number of software packages which can all run other applications from within. Thus I can opt for running the word processor as my main programme and send faxes and email from that. Or I can run a communications package and call up the word processor when needed. My choice depends on a number of factors: What did I install first? Can I be bothered to change? Which is the most convenient? Which seems to offer the most stable system (fewer system crashes)? Returning to the book of Revelation, if multiple interpretations are inevitable, how do scholars decide which interpretation to privilege and which to discard?

Authorial Intention

The dominant criterion in biblical interpretation, at least in the last two or three centuries, has been to try and decide what the original author intended. Thus while Revelation *uses* the language of violence and destruction, many commentators would argue that it was not John's *intention* to promote it. Deconstruction may question whether a God who assigns unbelievers to endless torture is any better than a beast who inflicts temporary earthly pain but that (it is argued) was not John's concern. As Kraybill says at the end of his book:

John looks to a future when pretensions to divinity will end and God himself will live among mortals ... Death and pain — inevitable byproducts of a corrupt Empire — no longer will torment humanity in the New Jerusalem ... Far from destroying art, wealth and beauty, the holy city will be a lavish place that gives everyone equal access to the resources of the earth. Roman imperial society, with its pyramid of power and economic elites, will be gone forever. In contrast to class-conscious and exclusive Rome, the New Jerusalem will have three gates on each side, welcoming

²⁰ E. Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), 59.

²¹ D. Patte, *Ethics of Biblical Interpretation: A Reevaluation* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1995), 116.

²² Patte, *Ethics of Biblical Interpretation*, 99.

people from all directions of the compass. The gates will never shut (21:25), and no privileged group will monopolize wealth. Hope for human society redeemed, in every political, economic and social dimension, undergirds the message of John's Apocalypse. Rome will fall, and something better for humanity will take its place.²³

These are fine sentiments but how does Kraybill know that this was what John intended? The sheer quantity of violent imagery in Revelation does not immediately suggest it. Nor does the history of interpretation, as Ian Boxall shows in his contribution to this volume. Nor does the popular reception of the book today, which regards it as weird and distasteful (at least in the Western world). The usual response to this has been to cite the extreme circumstances under which John wrote. John has been banished to Patmos (1:9) and is writing under conditions of extreme persecution (3:10). Based on a statement by Irenaeus, this has usually been thought to be in the reign of Domitian, though some scholars have opted for Nero. The point is that extreme circumstances call for extreme measures. After the suffering inflicted by the state, it is hardly surprising that the martyrs cry out, 'how long will it be before you judge and avenge our blood on the inhabitants of the earth?' (6:10). The book might appear distasteful to those living comfortably, but we are assured that it is quite understandable given the extreme conditions of the first century.

However, the idea of a severe persecution under Domitian has been largely rejected today and has been replaced either by some form of 'local harassment' or a 'complacency' theory. In both cases, there is no longer a match between extreme language and extreme circumstances. We are now talking about rhetoric, the deliberate use of strong language to achieve particular purposes. On the 'local harassment' theory, John's enemies (including fellow Christians) are demonized by aligning their behaviour with the cosmic battle between good and evil. On the complacency theory, the language is deliberately excessive in order to shock Christians out of their lukewarmness (3:16) and expose the seemingly benevolent state as demonic (18:2). John's intention, it is argued, is not to promote violence but use (bad) violent imagery to promote (good) Christian aims. Thus Resseguie says:

The horsemen thus portray human wickedness in its grim alliance with demonic wickedness. Yet John does not dwell on this unfortunate alliance; rather he wants to assure the reader that God uses wickedness — as fearsome and disheartening as it is — to further God's gracious purposes on earth.²⁴

²³ Kraybill, *Imperial Cult*, 222—3.

²⁴ J. L. Resseguie, *Revelation Unsealed: A Narrative Critical Approach to John's Apocalypse* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1998), 146.

However, it needs to be stressed that John does not tell us this. There are no marginal notes to say to the reader, 'Please take my military language in a non-military sense'. Rather, it is how Resseguie thinks the book *ought* to be read. In other words, the criterion is not really 'authorial intention' (which we do not possess) but certain literary and narrative features that *suggest to Resseguie* what 'the author' intended. Are there then literary criteria which will help us decide between competing interpretations?

Literary Criteria

Resseguie analyses the book of Revelation in terms of point of view, setting, characters and plot. He acknowledges that a reader is required to fill in a number of indeterminacies in order to make sense of a text and he lists five that stand out in Revelation. These are the relationship between: (1) the three septers; (2) the letters and the rest of the book; (3) what John hears and what he sees; (4) the scrolls of Rev 5 and 10; (5) the measured temple and unmeasured courtyard in Rev 11. However, according to Resseguie, this is not a subjective task. Rather, 'the reader fills in the gaps, *the way the author imagines those gaps should be filled in*'.²⁵ How is this possible? According to Resseguie, by attending to the literary features of the text. Thus an analysis of plot reveals the U-shaped structure of comedy, where a 'stable condition, moves downward due to a series of threatening conditions and instabilities, and at the end moves upward to a new stable condition'.²⁶ Thus Rev 4—5 describe a

scene of perfect order and symmetry [which] establishes a primacy/recency effect that determines the way the reader reads the subsequent chapters. The overwhelming primacy effect is that order and coherence rules the universe. The cosmos is centered around the throne and the one who sits on the throne. In this dramatic scene there is an unsurpassable unity among all creatures, which binds them to the creator and redeemer in an endless display of worship and praise. The recency effect of gloom and doom found in the subsequent chapters can not overturn this ebullient and marvelous primacy experience of splendor.²⁷

Point of view is established by attending to a number of constrasts, such as hearing and seeing, above and below, outer and inner, and centre and perimeter. The first is established as a principle in the seven letters with the command to *hear* what the Spirit says to the churches. In Rev 9:13—21, John *sees* a vision of horses with lion's heads

²⁵ Resseguie, *Revelation Unsealed*, 30. Emphasis original.

²⁶ Resseguie, *Revelation Unsealed*, 166

²⁷ Resseguie, *Revelation Unsealed*, 175—6.

and hears their number, 200 million: 'The number is the inner reality that says something about the nature of evil.'²⁸ In Rev 12, John *sees* a heavenly battle between Michael and Satan but does not understand its meaning until he *hears* the heavenly voice. In Rev 14, John *sees* the 144,000 and *hears* a multitude singing. In Rev 15, John *sees* those who have conquered the beast and *hears* the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb. In Rev 21, John *sees* a new heaven and earth and *hears* about its meaning (that God will wipe away their tears and dwell with them). Thus is established the principle that *hearing* interprets *seeing*. However, when it comes to the Lion/Lamb juxtaposition, this has to be modified:

John *sees* a lamb but *hears* about a lion. The Lion of the tribe of Judah interprets what John sees: death on the cross (the Lamb) is not defeat but is the way to power and victory (the Lion). In this instance, seeing also reinterprets the hearing. The traditional expectation of messianic conquest by military deliverance (the Lion of Judah) is reinterpreted so that messianic conquest occurs through sacrificial death (the Lamb).²⁹

I have no quibble with this conclusion. I have argued in a number of publications (against Caird *et al.*) that the Lion/Lamb juxtaposition involves mutual interpretation and not simply one element (Lamb) replacing another (Lion).³⁰ However, I am intrigued at the way Resseguie arrives at this conclusion, for the pattern he has established would suggest that the Lamb is *really* a roaring Lion, a view that the following chapters could amply support. This is clearly unacceptable to him so he introduces, without explanation, the suggestion that this is a special instance where 'seeing also reinterprets the hearing', which by the end of the book has become the Caird principle that 'Lamb reinterprets Lion'. There is clearly more than literary criteria being used here.

The rationale of literary readings is coherence. There are many ways to read a text but some ways are said to be more coherent than others. But what does coherent mean? *Chambers English Dictionary* offers the following: 'to fit together in a consistent, orderly whole'; 'connected'; 'consistent in thought or speech'.³¹ But on purely formal grounds, could we not say that a reading of Revelation along the lines of 'God has

²⁸ Resseguie, *Revelation Unsealed*, 34.

²⁹ Resseguie, *Revelation Unsealed*, 34.

³⁰ S. Moyise, *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation* (JSNTSup 115; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995)

³¹ *Chambers English Dictionary* (Edinburgh: Chambers; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 278.

coherent reading? The book opens with a vision of him 'coming with the clouds... and on his account all the tribes of the earth will wail' (1:7). The description of him in 1:12—18 is awesome. He receives from God 'power and wealth and wisdom and might' (5:12). As he opens the seals, disasters come upon the earth so that the inhabitants shrink from the 'wrath of the Lamb' (6:16). The trumpets bring further disasters, so that a 'third of humankind was killed, by the fire and smoke and sulphur' (9:18). In chapter 14, the Son of Man 'reaps' the earth with a sickle and 'blood flowed from the wine press, as high as a horse's bridle, for a distance of about two hundred miles' (14:20). Under the symbol of 'Babylon', God's enemies not only pay for their crimes but receive 'double for her deeds' (18:6), while those in heaven rejoice because 'the smoke goes up from her for ever and ever' (19:3). This may sound a less Christian reading but it is difficult to conclude (from purely literary criteria) that it is a less coherent reading. It does make sense of much of what we find in Revelation and is how many people do read it until Christian commentators teach them otherwise. Is it then the desire to produce a Christian reading that is really the governing criterion?

Christian or Canonical Readings

It is not surprising that Christian writers resist readings of Revelation that make God out to be a tyrant. Not many cite their Christian faith as a criterion of interpretation, but Brevard Childs uses the notion of canon to distinguish between multiple interpretations. Whatever the book may have meant to the author and the original readers, the most significant interpretative factor now is that it is part of the canon of Scripture. Though the history of how this came about is exceedingly complex and was never universal, the modern reader is unlikely to encounter Revelation as a single artefact but as the last book of the Bible. And various studies have attempted to show that it is a fitting conclusion. For example, it abounds with images of 'paradise restored'. According to Bauckham, it is the 'climax of prophecy'. It is the answer to the psalmist's cry, 'How long will the wicked prosper?' A canonical approach will use all this to show that loss of confidence in recovering authorial intention need not and should not lead to postmodern pluralism.

Childs suggests that the issue of canon shows itself in three features of the book of Revelation. First, John's extensive use of Daniel shows how the author understood apocalyptic. It is to be *reinterpreted* in the light of Christology:

God's decisive event in defeating the cosmological power of evil lies in the past. In the event of the cross, God's reign was forever established and Satan

defeated ... The apocalyptic imagery of Daniel now serves the function of identifying the defeated enemies of God and of the church who act from an earthbound perspective as if they were still in control.³²

Second, the opening and closing sections of the book show how it is to be received. In the epilogue, the warning not to add or subtract from the book (22:18) shows 'its author laid claim to its being divine revelation at the outset'.³³ And the voice of the prologue, which describes how the revelation given to Christ was transmitted to John, 'offers a canonical guideline by means of which the book was to function as authoritative scripture for generations long after the author'.³⁴

Third, the book soon became known as 'The Revelation of John' (despite its opening words), which shows that it belongs with the other Johannine writings. Childs does not wish to make a historical point about authorship here but simply to 'affirm that there is a larger canonical unity to the church's scriptures which is an important guideline to its correct theological understanding. For the last book of the Bible such a canonical control is especially useful'.³⁵

However, one might question the desirability of 'canonical control' if it means conforming books like Ecclesiastes, Job and Revelation to more mainstream traditions. How is that doing justice to the sheer variety of material we find in the canon? Furthermore, how can Childs be so confident that he is offering a canonical reading of Revelation? Is it the *only* way that other material from the Bible can be related to Revelation? Could one not also link it with the destruction of Canaan and judgment oracles against the nations and claim that 'exclusion' is a theme that runs right through the Bible? And should we be interpreting the Bible exclusively for the Christian community? Does no one else have a voice? Indeed, it might be said that this is enacting precisely the interpretation of Revelation (silencing outsiders) that it is actually seeking to counter, as Carey has demonstrated in this volume.

Justice and Judgment

A different option comes from Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. She interprets Revelation not from the standpoint of canonical consistency but of justice and judgment. This is partly suggested by Revelation itself but is also a personal commitment. All interpretation is ideological. History writing takes place by analogy, what an author

³² B. S. Childs, *The New Testament as Canon: An Introduction* (London: SCM Press, 1984), 514—15.

³³ Childs, *The New Testament as Canon*, 517.

³⁴ Childs, *The New Testament as Canon*, 517.

³⁵ Childs, *The New Testament as Canon*, 517.

thinks is most likely to have happened given his or her own understanding of how the world works. Literary readings depend on choosing certain aspects of a text to privilege and canonical readings are explicitly ideological. The way forward then is not simply to argue the merits of one's particular interpretation but to inform the reader (as much as one can) about one's own ideological commitments:

What is appropriate in such a rhetorical paradigm of biblical scholarship is not detached value-neutrality, but an explicit articulation of one's own rhetorical strategies, interested perspectives, ethical criteria, theoretical frameworks, religious presuppositions, and sociopolitical locations for critical public discussion.³⁶

Interpretations of Revelation that encourage war-mongering, imperialism, racism or sexism are certainly possible but are deemed unacceptable. By their fruits you will know them, says Jesus. Any interpretation that leads to any of these ethical 'isms' is unacceptable, whatever basis it may have in the text. Now for some, like Bloom and Pippin, this is a criterion that Revelation cannot survive. It is so riddled with the 'lurid and inhumane' that the book itself must be judged unacceptable. But for Schüssler Fiorenza, Revelation can be seen as a 'fitting response' to the 'dehumanizing powers of Rome':

John advocates an uncompromising theological stance because he and his followers view the dehumanizing powers of Rome and its allies as theologically so destructive and oppressive that a compromise with them would mean a denial of God's life-giving and saving power.³⁷

She does not think that every part of Revelation necessarily lives up to this and so advocates an interpretative form of 'testing the spirits' (1 John 4:1). As interpreting subjects, 'biblical readers must learn to claim their spiritual authority to assess both the oppressive as well as the liberating imagination of particular biblical texts and their interpretations'.³⁸ The task of the interpreter is to read for 'justice and judgment', discerning its voices and amplifying them above the sound of more destructive ones. Interpretation is thus rooted both in the particular text and in the interpreter's social location, and relates to the rhetorical purpose of the interpreter/commentator (i.e. whose interests are being served by the publication?).

³⁶ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Vision of a Just World*, 3.

³⁷ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Vision of a Just World*, 57.

³⁸ E. Schüssler Fiorenza, *Rhetoric and Ethic: The Politics of Biblical Studies* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 47.

A MULTIDIMENSIONAL APPROACH

Is the book of Revelation best served by finding ways to eliminate all interpretations other than one's own? Or should we acknowledge that such a text is capable of generating more than one valid interpretation? The answer depends on what one considers to be the purpose of interpretation. If it is simply to shed light on the text, there is no intrinsic reason why multiple interpretations should not be allowed. For example, science recognizes that certain experiments show that light behaves like a wave, with a measurable frequency and wavelength, while others show it to be a stream of particles. Nothing is gained by suppressing one of these interpretations in favour of the other. Both give insight into the nature of the phenomenon we call light. Similarly, it is a common experience that reading Revelation from a variety of perspectives leads to a fuller appreciation of the text (even if one disagrees with some of those perspectives). If this is combined with an articulation of the interpreter's social location, rhetorical purpose and methodology, as Schüssler Fiorenza urges, this is likely to be even more useful. One then has both the *type* of experiment that has been performed on the text and the results that it yielded.

On the other hand, if the goal of interpretation is to promote the Christian faith, empower oppressed people or some other ideological purpose, then certain interpretations need to be resisted. They are not necessarily inferior readings if judged by historical or literary criteria alone. But they are inferior when judged by certain ethical or ideological commitments. Some will call this an imposition on the text but it is surely in keeping with the ethos of Revelation, which challenges the very possibility of ethical or political neutrality. Thus I am completely in favour of reinterpreting the military imagery of Revelation in a non-military way. But I am sceptical of those positions that confidently tell us that this is what John intended or that this is *the* proper literary reading of the text. The relative instability of the Lion/Lamb juxtaposition (given the amount of violence with which the Lamb is later associated) is a constant reminder of how easily the oppressed can become the oppressor. However good and noble John's motives might have been (or might not have been), he is not exempt from this. As Carey says:

John's ethos cannot sustain both resistance and mutuality. John subordinates every other voice to his own. He demands absolute obedience from his audience, and anyone — Christian or otherwise — who would diverge from John's vision stands under his curse.³⁹

³⁹G. Carey, *Elusive Apocalypse: Reading Authority in the Revelation to John* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1999), 172.

Readers might adopt the view that the end justifies the means. The danger of assimilation or collusion or falling away is such that it justifies John's strong response. But the modern interpreter surely has a responsibility to point out the dangers of such a strategy (which have frequently been actualized in history). The Lion/Lamb juxtaposition is not so stable that readers are forced to reinterpret the apocalyptic violence in non-violent ways. It is imperative that they do so (for the good of humanity), but it is also imperative that they realize the precarious instability of such a position. Thus in answer to this chapter's title, I do not think the Lion does lie down with the Lamb. The juxtaposition *allows* a non-violent interpretation but it also reveals a fundamental danger, namely, that the weapons of resistance can end up supporting the very values being resisted. It does not do justice to the book of Revelation to advocate a position where Lamb simply replaces Lion. Evil is much more complex than that.

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