

# **The Book of Revelation**

## **An Appeal for Right Understanding**

### **FOREWORD**

We ought to appreciate and give full weight to the fact that the Revelation is part of the Word of God. It cannot be unimportant. It is the last statement, completing the word of God. In the previous 4,000 years there had been substantially a continuous voice of God among his people. Now, silence, apart from the instruction of this last book; it has to cover some 2,000 years to our present day. It must be important. It is not easy to understand because it involves history and is presented in symbols. But with prayer and persistence believers will be able to understand.

I support this appeal to understand the Revelation. Let us approach the book in a spirit of humility, recognizing that Brother Thomas, under the good hand of God, successfully laboured until he had re-stated saving truth centred in “the Hope of Israel”; and that each one of us today is indebted to him and to God for our hope of salvation. This being so, should we not expect God to allow him to continue his work in the rest of his days, to expound this last book of the Bible, this book which is particularly our book? We ought at least to give his exposition a fair and patient study before turning to the new “alternatives.”

Surely God did not intend his last book to be a debating ground. It is noteworthy that the various “alternatives” are mutually contradictory, and this may well indicate that they are departures from the “the old paths.” They have not helped but rather have brought confusion, uncertainty and discouragement.

There are two major objectives in the Revelation. First, to encourage us by being able to recognize the controlling hand of God in world affairs: He prophesied the events and they have come to pass. So today we must rest in the confidence that events and our lives are still in His hands. Secondly, it instructs us as to how God sees the world religious and political today and it stirs us up to be faithful witnesses for his honour. As Brother Billington shows, both these prime objectives are largely destroyed in the “alternative” interpretations. One can say that the growing spirit of tolerance towards the world, our unwillingness to expose error and our disinclination to be regarded as uncharitable, will only be arrested by a right grasp of the Revelation.

Graham Pearce. England.

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#### **NOTE:**

Several brethren have taken valuable time to read through the original manuscript of this booklet. Their comment and suggestions have been most helpful in preparing the final form. The writer expresses thanks to these brethren for their valued encouragement. I should particularly like to mention the help of Bro. H. D. Bartholomew who has supported the concept from the outset. The quality and scale of this production would have been impossible without his assistance, and without the help of those members of the Vernon ecclesia who have so generously contributed their time and skills in the service of the truth.

In appealing for a right understanding of the book of Revelation, it has been necessary to refer to the work of those who offer “alternative” views. It should be understood that this writer has spoken to those concerned, and has discussed their interpretations with them at some length. — P. A. B. [Paul A. Billington]

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## **An Appeal for Right Understanding**

### **CHAPTER 1. How Vital Is This Issue?**

#### **Does It Matter?**

In recent years a number of different interpretations of the book of Revelation have been offered to the Christadelphian community as “alternatives” to the traditional understanding set out in standard works such as Brother John Thomas’ Eureka. There are some brethren who feel that this constitutes a serious departure from the Faith, whilst others believe that resistance to the new theories is unwarranted dogmatism over non-essentials.

This situation prompts many to ask about the importance of the Revelation. Does it matter which interpretation we accept?

When considering this question we must be careful to avoid jumping to conclusions that are based upon sentiment rather than revealed truth: The Bible must surely be our guide.

As to the question of the importance of Revelation, it is helpful to first be clear in our minds just what it is we are talking about. What is the book of Revelation? It is a portion of God’s word (for “God gave” it - Chap. 1: 1). It is “The Revelation of Jesus Christ;” it is “what the Spirit saith unto the ecclesias” (2:7,11,17,29; 3:6,13,22). It is the “testimony of Jesus” (Chap. 1:2; 19: 10; c/p Diaglott). It is what “I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you ... in the ecclesias” (Chap. 22:16).

With this scriptural definition now in mind, we ask: Is it important for us to correctly understand what the Spirit is saying to the ecclesias? DOES IT MATTER whether or not ecclesias rightly interpret Jesus’ testimony to them? How could anyone possibly say that it doesn’t matter what the Spirit is saying to us?

The book of Revelation is a message specifically given to ecclesias in the Gentile world. We appeal to the reader to consider the following reasons for its importance and why we claim that a right understanding of its message is essential.

#### **The Power Of Prophecy**

Let us first appreciate the power of the prophetic word. In Hebrews 11:7 it is written:

“By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house...”

As we know from the Genesis record, Noah was warned by God about the coming judgment upon that guilty world - he was warned in advance about the flood, much as we today are warned in the book of

Revelation about the coming of Armageddon. Note Noah's response to the prophecy he received: he was "moved" says the scripture. There was power in that message; there was a force which moved Noah to make preparation. Seeing the reality of the future and having faith in that prophecy, he took action.

The book of Revelation provides a similar motivating power for Christ's brethren and sisters today - if they have faith in it. The vision of those things which are shortly coming to pass will MOVE them; it will form an attitude which is in harmony with the mind of the Spirit - like Noah of old they will condemn the world (Heb. 11:7), so becoming heirs of that righteousness which is by a faith based upon understanding. In this way they "take heed" to the "sure word of prophecy" (2 Peter 1: 19) and are moved to keep "the sayings of the prophecy of this book" (Rev. 22:7).

### **We Must "Hear" and "Keep"**

Jesus has said "My sheep hear my voice" (John 10:27), and they will surely hear his testimony in the book of Revelation. "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the ecclesias" - this we read many times. So we should ask ourselves whether we really do have an ear for the voice of Christ in the Apocalypse? Are we interested in what he has to say to us?

Jesus links hearing with doing: "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me." And so in the Apocalypse he says, "Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things that are written therein . . ." (Chap. 1:3).

The book of Revelation, as well as showing things to come, has certain specific commandments which should be obeyed. Only where there is understanding can a person be among those "which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Rev. 12:17).

### **Commandments of Christ**

The commands of Christ, as they appear in the Apocalypse, bear a significant relationship to one another. The message always concerns the maintenance of doctrines and values. Let us remember that these commands are as much directed to Christ's servants today as they were to the seven original ecclesias; they are prophetic:

"REMEMBER therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works . . ."

"Be thou FAITHFUL (unto death) . . ."

To those tolerating the doctrines of the Nicolaitanes: "Repent."

"... that which ye have already hold fast till I come . . ."

"Be watchful, and strengthen the things that remain . . ."

"REMEMBER therefore how thou hast received, and heard, and hold fast, and repent . . ."

“hold that fast which thou hast . . .”

These are commands of Christ — and they are just as much commands as those which we find in the Sermon on the Mount.

## **Another Apocalyptic Commandment**

Revelation 14:9-10 is worthy of our thoughtful attention:

“And the third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, the same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb:”

Here is a command which, if disobeyed, carries a severe penalty. In view of this, where is the argument which suggests that it is not essential for us to identify this beast, his image, or his mark? It must be obvious, surely, that the servants of Jesus Christ have to be able to identify beast, image, and mark, if they are to avoid transgression. This is emphasized for us in Chapter 20:4, where those who witness for Christ and for the word of God, “which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands” are said to live and reign with Christ for a thousand years (i.e.: they will be accepted into the Kingdom).

There is also the commandment - which does have application for us, c/p 2 Cor. 6:17,18 - to maintain a separation from a system which is called “Babylon”:

“Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues . . .” Rev. 18:4.

If we are to maintain a separation from this system we must be able to identify it.

Now, whether the beast is Roman (as Christadelphians have believed for over 100 years), or whether it is Israelitish (as some are now claiming); whether it represents a system already in evidence, or one that is yet to arise, become questions of considerable importance if we seriously intend to keep the sayings of the prophecy of this book (Chap. 22:7). A correct interpretation of these things becomes essential.

## **The Blessing**

In Revelation 1:3 we are introduced to the fact that there is a blessing upon those who read, hear, and keep those things written in the Apocalypse. What is this blessing? Is it something that we can afford to be without?

The blessing is in-built into the true interpretation of the book of Revelation so that only those who “know accurately” (Greek: ana-ginosko) and keep (or watch) can receive it. As in Chapter 16:15 where

we find it written “Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments . . .” Only those who understand correctly, or accurately, can watch; the blessing is limited to them.

The blessing of Chapter 1:3 is repeated in Chapter 22:7.

“Behold, I come quickly: blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book.”

We have already seen what some of the “sayings” or commandments are in the prophecy. What is the blessing that results from keeping them?

The blessing that results from being able to identify “Babylon”, the beast, his image, and his mark, is clear enough. There is a blessing now, as well as when the Lord returns. The brother or sister who knows accurately what is revealed in the Apocalypse and who “keeps” the sayings of the prophecy, is protected from the deceptive influence of the terrible systems revealed therein. What a blessing!

Such was Brother John Thomas’ understanding of this blessing. In Eureka vol. 1, page 116, under the section entitled The Blessed he writes:

“The Apocalypse was given to this end - that the servants of the Deity, who are keeping their garments, might be able to discern the signs of the times preceding the Apocalypse of Christ; and the real nature of things extant in their several generations. No believer understanding this prophecy could be seduced into fellowship with the clerical institutions of the world; because he would see them all in their native deformity and sin.”

Such is the blessing attendant upon those who hear the voice of the Spirit speaking to the ecclesias. They are protected against the deceptive power of the adversary. This is in harmony with what Jesus says elsewhere:

“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.” John 10:27,28.

Why is it that no man can pluck these sheep out of their master’s hand? It is because “the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers.”

## CHAPTER 2. A Strong Delusion

### Making The Word Of None Effect

The apostle Peter has warned against “scoffers” (mockers - R.V.) who would arise in the last days. Their challenge to the Truth would be one which fomented doubt and scepticism: “Where is the promise of his coming?” (2 Peter 3:3,4).

The “sure word of prophecy” (Chap. 1: 19) was in this way to be undermined and neutralized by these “false teachers” (Chap. 2:1). But Peter assures his readers that “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise” and that “the day of the Lord will come as a thief” (3:9, 10). Any apparent delay was due, not to slackness, but because God “is longsuffering to us-ward.”

Jesus also makes reference to evil servants who will say in their hearts “My Lord delayeth his coming” (Matt. 24:48). The context would strongly suggest that this spirit would find expression immediately prior to the call to judgment. It is quite likely that both Jesus and Peter refer to the same thing.

“Where is the promise of his coming . . . The Lord delayeth his coming” are sentiments which are reminiscent of Israel’s attitude during the time of Ezekiel:

“The days are prolonged, and every vision faileth . . . The vision that he seeth is for many days to come, and he prophesieth of the times that are far off.” Ezekiel 12:22,27.

In Ezekiel’s day there was an attempt to divorce the prophetic vision from the contemporary scene by giving it a Futuristic interpretation. This tactic made the word of none effect in that it removed the need for obedience - thus the people were able to avoid taking courses of action which might evoke the hostility of the world.

The Futuristic interpretations of the Apocalypse which are being offered today have this same effect. The beast, the false prophet, the image etc., are all seen as systems not yet fully developed. We are being “coaxed” to forsake the old view (says Bro. Harry Whittaker in his book Revelation: A Biblical Approach, page 215, para. 2) - coaxed to forsake the old view which identifies European political and ecclesiastical bodies with the symbols of Revelation. We are thus relieved of the responsibility of having to stand as witnesses against principalities, powers, and rulers of the darkness of this world - against the spiritual wickedness that exists in high places (Eph. 6:12). We are told that instead, our witnessing against the Beast is to take place during a period of 3-1/2 years which is yet future (Exploring The Apocalypse by P. Watkins, page 123, items 8 and 10; Apocalypse For Everyman by A. D. Norris, part xi, page 100 etc). Thus, the relevance of the prophecy for Christadelphians today is neutralized - and the word of God is made of none effect.

### Prophecy Not “A Fundamental”?

It is sometimes suggested that we should tolerate alternative interpretations of the Apocalypse because prophecy has not been included in the Statement of Faith (or B.A.S.F.).

This assumption is not strictly accurate. Whilst there was no substantial threat to the Faith in the area of prophetic interpretation at the time our Statement of Faith was being framed, item No. 33 under Doctrines To Be Rejected does concern prophecy. It concerns the British-Israelite theory - a view still promoted among some sects (e.g.: The Plain Truth). This was a fairly prominent issue before the minds of the brethren and sisters following the Roberts/Hine Debate in Exeter Hall, London, in 1879. The doctrine of the Millennium (Christ's 1000 year reign on earth), which is based mainly upon the book of Revelation, also forms Article 26 of the B.A.S.F.

But any doubt as to the mind of Brother Robert Roberts on this point can be cleared by reference to what he wrote in The Christadelphian magazine in 1897 (page 467) under the heading THE APOCALYPSE ON THE QUESTION OF FELLOWSHIP: The piece is reproduced in full.

“The question is raised by dissensions in some quarters leading to division. An ecclesia tolerates wrong teaching: a few men of understanding cannot bear it, and retire. Those who remain think the matter unimportant and are inclined to find fault with the others as sticklers. How stands the matter?”

When a professed brother avows the belief that the visions of the Apocalypse have no application to the accomplished history of Europe but are of a future significance, he raises a question of more serious moment than may at first sight be apparent. A man confessing ignorance of the meaning of the Apocalypse is a man who might grow in knowledge, and therefore a man to be borne with and helped; but a man denying its meaning is a man to be antagonized on the following serious grounds:

Over a dozen times, it is written in the Apocalypse: “He that hath ears, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.” Jesus says, “My sheep hear my voice.” He identifies the Apocalypse with his voice in saying in it: “I, Jesus, have sent mine angel to testify these things in the churches” (Rev. xxii. 16). Thus the Apocalypse is an important part of the Shepherd's voice which Jesus says the sheep will hear. He goes further than this. He says “If any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life” (verse 19). On the other hand, he says “Blessed is he that readeth and they that hear the words of this prophecy and keep those things that are written therein.”

Among the “words of the book of this prophecy” is a heavy warning against participation with a system described under the symbol of a beast and his image: “If any man worship the beast and his image and receive his mark on his forehead, or on his hand, the same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation.”

Now, if these things relate to institutions now current among men (which they undoubtedly do, as can be and has been many times shown), how serious is the doctrine which would say they do not relate to anything now upon earth, but to something in some future age with which we have nothing to do. Such a doctrine, where received, would prevent a man from “hearing what the Spirit saith unto the churches”: it would prevent

him from “keeping those things which are written in this book”; and worse than all, it would practically cause him to “take away from the words of the book of this prophecy,” since to take away the meaning is to take away the words in making them of none effect. It is impossible, therefore, to agree with those who would make light of the subject and it is impossible not to sympathize with faithful men who cannot remain in any community where such nullifying doctrines are tolerated.”

Brother Roberts wrote in similar vein on this subject in *The Christadelphian* for 1872, page 380. Suffice it to say that brethren who are today teaching false interpretations of the Apocalypse would not have been able to enjoy the fellowship of the Christadelphian community in Brother Roberts’ day.

### **Where Alternatives Are Leading**

As difficult and unpleasant as it might be, it is important for us to recognize where today’s alternative interpretations of prophecy are leading. It is right for us to show understanding and patience with those who experience difficulties (“For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again” - Matt. 7:2), nonetheless there has to be a responsible attitude towards the precious truths with which we have been entrusted and which constitute the Lord’s message to the ecclesias.

Interpretations which deny the true identity of the Beast, of the image of the Beast, of the Great Whore and her harlot daughters, and of the False Prophet, cause brethren and sisters to drop their guard against the great Deceiver, of whom Jesus said: “if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect” (Matt. 24:24). Can we accept that the Scriptures have foretold dangers of this kind?

The principles which separate Christadelphians from apostate Christendom (the Beast system) are becoming more and more hazy - and this is because the true nature of contemporary political and ecclesiastical bodies are not perceived. It is surely incredible that a Christadelphian writer can comment: “Does the Pope speak great words against the most High? At least, he honours Christ, after a fashion . . .” (H. A. Whittaker, *The Time Of The End*, page 40). Such a statement indicates that the true Christ is being confused with “another Jesus,” and that Satan himself is being taken for an angel of light! (2 Cor. 11:4, and verses 13 - 15). Any Christadelphian should know that the Christ recognized by Rome is not the Jewish Messiah; the second person of the Roman triune god is not “the man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 2:5). Or has this become a mere technicality?

The new interpretations correspond to the general pattern of those which are current in the ecclesiastical world. They are not Christadelphian in character. *Revelation: A Biblical Approach*, *Apocalypse For Everyman*, and *Exploring The Apocalypse* (three prominent “alternatives”) all teach the Future Antichrist theory in common with both Rome and her harlot-daughters. Indeed, Peter Watkins and A. D. Norris have both identified this future Antichrist as being Israelitish. They describe the circumstances of Antichrist’s appearance in the Middle East in much the same way as Brother Thomas describes those of Christ’s coming! (compare the bottom 3 paragraphs on page 93 of *Exploring The Apocalypse*, with *Eureka* Vol. 3, page 602). We must find the courage to recognize what is happening to the Christadelphian community today (or to a certain section of it), and not be afraid to recognize that perilous times are overtaking us. Because

some do not recognize the harlotdaughters of the mother, they are slowly being drawn towards the Evangelical movement - literature by Evangelical writers is being read on an ever-increasing scale by brethren and sisters; Evangelical films are being used by some ecclesias for preaching the Truth (!); their music is being sung by our young people and their ways are being found attractive and novel; Christadelphians are using badges, bumper-stickers, wall plaques, and all the trinkery with which the Apostasy makes her merchandise. Our separation (and separation means holiness) is being eroded. As a correspondent in The Christadelphian magazine recently put it (Sept., 1981, page 346) "Very few nowadays would assert that only Christadelphians will be saved . . ." This expresses an approach that strikes at the very roots of the Truth - the original reasons for preserving our independent identity have been lost by people who think in harmony with such statements.

This is where "alternatives" to the Truth are leading, and the responsibility to contend for the Faith now falls heavily upon those few who remember how our community has received and heard (Rev. 3:3). Christadelphia is in a state of crisis; the Truth that we have known and loved is in danger of being submerged under a mass of sentimentalism and shallow reasoning.

## **CHAPTER 3. Unshakeable Foundations Of The Truth**

### **The Unique Position of Bro. John Thomas**

When brethren and sisters are sometimes heard questioning the worth of traditional Christadelphian values and beliefs we should note the voice of the Spirit which exhorts us: "Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent." (Rev. 3:3).

The Christadelphian community has "received and heard" as a result of the work done by Brother John Thomas over 100 years ago. This is a fact of our history, and as such, introduces a principle that we do well to recognize.

Brother Thomas was the chosen instrument through which the apostolic faith was to be revived in the last days. Consider the Bible principle:

"Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain." - Psalm 127:1.

Brother Thomas's work was not in vain; it has borne fruit for over a century in leading men and women to embrace the Hope of Israel. Brother Robert Roberts once wrote:

"I have said with sincerity and will say, perhaps, many times over again, because they are the words of sober truth - that God has revived the Truth in our age by Dr. Thomas and that the best work a man can put his hand to, in this age, is to defend that work against all the assaults, whether the open antagonism of those who call the Truth "blasphemy", or the insidious attacks involved in theories that make the Word of God of none effect". (Quoted from "Christadelphian Treasury", page 246, by Bro. F. G. Jannaway).

To deny these facts of our history is not only a refusal to submit to the Spirit's voice in Revelation 3:3, but it is also tantamount to saying that the Truth's existence today is the mere product of chance. No true Christadelphian could possibly accept such absurdity as that!

### **Christ's Servants in Darkness?**

The Truth which God has revived in this age through Bro. Thomas's instrumentality, includes a detailed understanding of the book of Revelation. Certainly, it would seem incongruous that if Christadelphians have held the Truth for over a century, that these "servants" have not properly understood the meaning of the Apocalypse - for it was given to show them the things that were coming to pass!

Consider just how many Christadelphians must have studied, tried, and tested Brother Thomas's exposition during the past 100 years - has it really taken until now to realise that these conclusions are fundamentally wrong? Do we really think that God has kept his people in ignorance about Jesus' testimony to the ecclesias for over 100 years? Such a view is both unreasonable and unscriptural: "Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants . . ." Amos. 3:7.

That Brother Thomas correctly understood the Apocalypse over a century ago is borne out by the fulfillment of what we find predicted throughout his exposition. His anticipations have been well justified. It is sad - nay, a tragedy - that a generation of Christadelphians is now rising which is almost totally ignorant of what he actually wrote.

### **The Right Method of Interpretation**

Many of those who now advance their own theories as being suitable replacements for Eureka, claim that they are seeking truth, and that they desire "A Biblical Approach" (Such is the title chosen by Bro. H. A. Whittaker for his ideas). Bro. Peter Watkins has claimed that "the Bible is indeed its' own interpreter" (page 27 of his book), and Bro. A. D. Norris through correspondence in The Christadelphian magazine (May, 1981, page 189) appeals for a "careful analysis of the teaching of Scripture" in place of what he sees as "emotional appeals".

This is mere assertion and proves nothing. It does not seem to occur to them that Bro. Whittaker's "Biblical Approach" produces a somewhat different result from Bro. Watkins' use of the Bible as it's own interpreter - or that both of these arrive at different conclusions from those produced by Bro. Norris's "careful analysis of the teaching of Scripture."

The reason why these witnesses do not agree is because they do not make use of the basic principle involved in interpreting the book of Revelation. It must be obvious that their approach ("Let scripture interpret scripture" is the frequent plea) cannot guarantee an arrival at truth - Evangelicals, Jehovah's Witnesses and Roman Catholics all claim a scriptural approach - and they produce numerous cross-references in proof thereof. Each of these produce different results from one another.

When Paul wrote to Timothy of the "workman that needeth not to be ashamed" (2nd Epistle, Chap. 2:15), he did not merely counsel study. Nor did he simply advise study of the word. He taught that the word of God should be rightly divided. Anything else is "profane and vain babblings."

So with the book of Revelation, we must rightly divide the word of Truth. In other words, there must be a perfect harmony maintained with other parts of the Bible and consequently with the doctrines and spirit of the Truth (“the Scripture cannot be broken” - John 10:35; c/p Isa. 8:20).

## **CHAPTER 4. A Look At Some Prominent Alternatives**

### **1. “Revelation: A Biblical Approach,” by H. A. Whittaker**

In his book “Revelation: A Biblical Approach”, Bro. H. A. Whittaker makes it clear that the date when the Apocalypse was written is crucial to his interpretation. On page 53 he writes:

“The date of the writing of Revelation is a matter of fundamental importance vitally affecting the interpretation of the book.”

In contrast to this statement, Brother John Thomas writes in Eureka Vol. 1; page 39:

“... it really matters not whether it be assumed to be written before or after that event (i.e.: of A.D. 70), the interpretation is in no way affected.”

What then is Bro. Whittaker’s evidence for the date he insists upon for the writing of the Apocalypse? Briefly, it rests upon two main arguments. First he claims that there is ancient documentary evidence for the so-called Nerionic date of A.D. 66, and secondly he claims to have a “Biblical argument” for the date. Let us consider the documentary evidence first:

### **Evidence For The Nerionic Date Examined**

Whilst most of us may wonder why the date of the Apocalypse is not clearly stated in the text, if it is vital to the understanding of the message, Brother Whittaker believes that it is - in the obscure text of the ancient Syriac Version. He claims that the heading of this version says that the Revelation was given to John during the reign of Emperor Nero (A.D. 54 - 68).

The heading to which Bro. Whittaker makes reference however, is hardly a solid foundation upon which to build such a radical exposition. The heading was added during the revision of the Syriac Bible (the Philoxenian Revision) in approximately A.D. 508. This is far too late to be of any consequence. In fact the Apocalypse was not even included in the original Syriac Version (known as The Peshitta)!

Further investigation reveals that the title Nero was sometimes given to Emperor Domitian. Tertullian for example, in his Apologies, Chap. 5, speaks of Dornitanus Portio Neronis, so that even the Philoxenian reviser was probably referring to Domitian by this title.

It is also worth pointing out here that there is no real evidence to suggest that Nero ever punished by banishment. The persecution during his reign did not extend far beyond Rome itself. On the other hand, we do know that Domitian carried out this form of punishment, for the contemporary historian Suetonius makes several references to banishment being carried out during the period A.D. 81 to 96 in his surviving book, The Two Caesars.

## The “Biblical Argument” For The Nerionic Date

This consists of several allusions which are drawn between the Apocalypse and the Epistle to the Hebrews and between the Apocalypse and Peter’s Epistles. Brother Whittaker claims that ideas present in the epistles are borrowed from the Apocalypse, which he thinks was written first.

On pages 56 and 57 of his book, Bro. Whittaker gives details by giving a block of allusions. This looks pretty impressive until it dawns upon the student that the ideas which are presented as having come from the Apocalypse, could just as easily have been taken from the Old Testament!

For the benefit of those who would like to check this for themselves, Bro. Whittaker’s allusions (No’s. 8 to 21) are reproduced below. The column on the right is added by this present writer to show possible Old Testament sources for the same ideas.

<b>ALLUSIONS MADE BY H.A. WHITTAKER</b>		<b>POSSIBLE O.T. SOURCES</b>
<b>Hebrews Chapter 12</b> 8. MOUNT ZION	<b>Revelation.</b> 8. The Lamb on Mount Zion (14:1)	Psalm 125:1 Isa. 51:11
9. THE HEAVENLY JERUSALEM, THE CITY OF GOD	9. New Jerusalem coming down from God out of heaven (21:2)	Isa. 65:17-19 c/p Gal. 4:25,26
10. THE LIVING GOD	10. The God of the Living Creatures (4:6) c/p also The angel having the seal of the Living God (7:2)	Ezek. 48:35 Psalm 87:3
11. AN INNUMERABLE COMPANY OF ANGELS	11. The voice of many angels round about the throne... Ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands (5:11)	Daniel 7:10 Psalm 68:17
12. THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY	12. The hundred and forty and four thousand sealed out of the twelve tribes of Israel (Israel is my firstborn) (Chap. 7 & 14)	Psalm 107:32 Deut. 18:16
13. THE CHURCH (ECCLESIA) OF THE FIRSTBORN	13. Twenty four elders (4:4, “The Levites instead of the first born of the children of Israel” (Num. 8:16)	Num. 8:16 c/p Rom. 8:29 • Col. 1:18
14. WRITTEN IN HEAVEN	14. Written in the Lambs book of life (13:8; 21:27)	See Luke 10:20 Dan. 12:1 • Mal. 3:16
15. GOD THE JUDGE OF ALL	15. The dead standing before God ... and were judged (20:12)	Psa. 94:1,2
16. SPIRITS OF	16. ?	Psa. 51:10
17. JUST MEN MADE PERFECT	17. ?	See James 2:21, 22
18. JESUS THE MEDIATOR OF A NEW COVENANT	18. A lamb as it had been slain (5:6)	Isa. 53:7 Jer. 31:31
19. THE BLOOD OF SPRINKLING	19. Thou hast redeemed us to God by thy blood (5:9)	such an obvious O.T. concept
20. HIM THAT SPAKE FROM HEAVEN	19. Thou hast redeemed us to God by thy blood (5:9)	such an obvious O.T. concept
21. LET US SERVE GOD	21. They serve Him day and night in His temple (7:15)	Mal. 3:18

The evidence which Bro. H. A. Whittaker advances for the date of the writing of the Apocalypse is thus lacking in any real substance. Such evidence as does exist favours the view that the book of Revelation was written later than A.D. 70 (about A.D. 96) so undermining the very foundation upon which brother Whittaker has constructed his exposition. The celebrated 11th edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica says:

“The main body of early Christian tradition attests the date of its composition in the closing years of Domitian . . . the evidence for the Domitian date outweighs that for any other.”

The following additional points are worth considering:

1. If the events of A.D. 70 are foretold in the Apocalypse (as Brother Whittaker suggests), how is it that we find no message for the ecclesia in Jerusalem to whom it would have had very special and even urgent relevance? The fact that only Gentile ecclesias are addressed is itself indicative that those in Judea had already ceased to exist.
2. The city of Laodicea was destroyed by earthquake in approx. A.D. 64 (see Young's Concordance). The ecclesia would hardly have been rich and increased in goods just two years after so complete a disaster. In the light of this, Brother Whittaker's date appears most unrealistic.
3. The ecclesia at Laodicea was founded about A.D. 55/58 (Acts 19, verses 10 and 26). It is not likely that an ecclesia would have become so apostate within only ten years of its beginning.

## **2. “Apocalypse For Everyman” by A. D. Norris**

Although Bro. A. D. Norris would refuse the name “Futurist” as being a suitable description of his exposition of the Apocalypse, he does believe that all of the book applies to the future beyond the sixth chapter and the tenth verse. In his 18-part study entitled Apocalypse For Everyman put out a few years ago (and presumably in his book which is now in process of being published), we are told that all history since the gospel was first preached, is contained in Seals one to four. He says that the words of the souls speaking from beneath the altar (Chapter 6:10) together with the reply of verse 11 “that they should rest yet for a little season” means that the end must be near. The reply means “it will not be long now” says Brother Norris, so that we to day are about - if not in - this 5th seal period. The remainder of the Revelation is yet future.

We should note that according to the Old Testament “a little while” can mean many centuries - see Haggai 2:6,7.

But the language of the Sixth Seal does not have to mean that “the end” has arrived; it merely describes a change in the political rulership. If Rev. 6: 10 be read carefully, we find that the question “How long” relates to the avenging of “our blood on them that dwell on the earth.” Certainly the blood of those brethren slain by the Pagan Roman world was avenged during the Constantinian revolution A.D. 312. This is the subject of the next seal (Chap. 6:12) which shows a political earthquake taking place, removing the Pagan order and establishing a new one.

Bro. Norris has refused this understanding of the prophecy however. “It is impossible” he claims, “to limit the language to the fear that some men might have felt at the advance of a human conqueror in bygone ages” (Apocalypse For Everyman; Part 6, page 54).

But is the traditional Christadelphian interpretation as “impossible” as Bro. Norris has demanded? Almost identical language was used to describe “the advance of a human conqueror” against Babylon in Isaiah Chapter 13. Here it is the advance of the Medes which is referred to (verse 17). Compare the language of Revelation with that of Isaiah:

### **Revelation 6:12-17.**

And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood;

And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind.

And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places . . . For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?

### **Isaiah 13:9-13.**

Behold, the day of the Lord cometh, cruel both with wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate: and he shall destroy the sinners thereof out of it.

For the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light: the sun shall be darkened in his going forth, and the moon shall not cause her light to shine.

And I will punish the world for their evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; and I will cause the arrogance of the proud to cease, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible . . . Therefore I will shake the heavens, and the earth shall remove out of her place, in the wrath of the Lord of hosts, and in the day of his fierce anger.

In Jeremiah, Chapter 4, the prophet foresees the destruction of the cities of Judah: “I beheld the earth, and, lo, it was without form, and void; and the heavens, and they had no light. I beheld the mountains, and, lo, they trembled, and all the hills moved lightly.” (verses 23-24).

So it is not “impossible” to limit the language to the advance of a human conqueror. Brother Norris is wrong, and his reason for rejecting the traditional interpretation of the sixth seal is unjustified.

In seeking to find an alternative for the traditional view, Bro. Norris has some difficulty in making his exposition fit the requirements. On page 55 of his work we are told that “it is the return of Jesus to which this Sixth Seal points”, and that this is “absolutely beyond question”. On page 56 however, this certainty wanes, and the Sixth Seal draws a picture only of “the portents heralding the Lord’s return.” It would be most inconvenient for Bro. Norris if the Lord actually returned in the Sixth Seal - he has to fit in the rest of the Revelation yet!

## Similar Theories Rejected 100 Years Ago

Brethren and sisters should be aware that Brother Thomas encountered similar ideas to those found in *Apocalypse For Everyman* over 100 years ago, and that he saw fit to dismiss them. In *The Christadelphian* for 1871, page 90-91, he wrote:

“What! a person pretend to be a Christadelphian, and not to know whether the seals have been opened! For shame! The same ecclesia could also hear (as I am informed) one of its own affirm that the scene exhibited in Rev. 4 and 5 has its counterpart in heaven above, in John’s past and present (compare A.D.N. Part 5. - P.B.) What is the use in writing an exposition of the Apocalypse, if the author’s professed brethren manifest such gross darkness as this? Let such know that we are now living under the Seventh Seal which was opened A.D. 324, and the opening characterized by ‘silence in heaven for half-an-hour’.”

Are we now expected to accept theories which Brother Thomas found necessary to reject over 100 years ago? The failure of Bro. Norris in his attempt to eliminate the validity of the Eureka interpretation, his ambiguous treatment of so many parts of the Revelation, together with the fact that he subscribes to the Future Antichrist theory (*Apocalypse For Everyman*, Part 12, page 116) will be enough to convince most Christadelphians that his exposition is not according to truth. Ecclesias that permit such wrong teaching may well receive the Master’s rebuke; it would appear so from the Apocalyptic epistles.

### 3. “Exploring The Apocalypse by Peter Watkins

This exposition has received considerable attention in the correspondence section of *The Christadelphian*, and for this reason we mention it. The review of Bro. Watkins’ book (*The Christadelphian*, June, 1981, page 210) by Bro. Fred Pearce sums up the experience of the present writer:

“... serious students of the Apocalypse will find such evidences as these quite unsatisfactory. Every one is debatable. The author seems to have concluded that Israel is the beast and then cast around for his evidence . . .”

What are Christadelphians to think of an exposition which sternly warns them to be on their guard against a great deceptive act - one which many may regard as “proof positive that the Lord is in the land of Israel” (page 185). What are Christadelphians to think when they are told that “Unwary saints would be easy victims” (page 93), and that they could be deceived into believing that their returned Lord was head of an Islamic confederacy! What are true Christadelphians to think of such incredible suggestions!

The programme of events which is enumerated on page 123 of this book reveals just how many events the late author expected before Christ’s return. Israel (he says) is to suffer an onslaught from many nations, including Arabs, and defeat them. The Arabs are seen as accepting Israel’s leadership in the Middle East (though Israel accepts the religion of Islam!!! page 22). Then there is to be a witnessing mission by spirit-powered mortals (? Christadelphians who have not been deceived by the Israeli

beast), and a repentance is effected in a remnant of Israel. Then the Israeli beast is to suppress these witnesses but they are finally vindicated. It is only after all these amazing things have happened that Christ comes (the 12th item on the list of events).

Anyone who is “grounded and settled” in the Faith (Col. 1:23), is unlikely to be moved by such fantastic speculations as these.

We do better to move on to a more positive approach.

## **CHAPTER 5. A Vision That Spans Centuries**

### **The Blue-print Of History**

We are familiar with the way Nebuchadnezzar’s image (Daniel 2) described the history of the world in advance. The interpretation, provided in the chapter itself, is a continuous historic sequence depicting the rise and fall of human kingdoms. The vision of the beasts in Daniel’s prophecy follows the same pattern and thus sets a valuable precedent for the understanding of the book of Revelation - especially in view of the close similarity in the symbology.

The traditional Christadelphian interpretation of the Apocalypse carries this same sequential construction - the epochs follow on from each other. The seals in chapter six are not all opened at once, but one after the other. Some have suggested that these seals run concurrently, but to say so is not being faithful to the text. First one seal is opened and the contents described, then the next, and so on through the seven. In fact the idea that these seals are in any way simultaneous is really forbidden by the very imagery used: this is a scroll which one unrolls after breaking a seal, breaks the next seal and unrolls further - and so on through the seven seals of the scroll. The epochs that are here represented as seals are quite definitely set out in a consecutive order and are even numbered one to seven.

The connection between seals and trumpets can be seen easily from Chapter 8:1,2. The trumpets form part of the seventh seal and follow one another in a consecutive pattern throughout chapters 8 and 9. The last trumpet itself is first mentioned in Chapter 10:7. The whole idea presented to our minds is one of various epochs following one another in succession.

This of course involves the construction of the book of Revelation, but if we simply accept the picture presented in the word (we are always asked to do that!), it is not difficult to see that a succession of epochs continue from the first seal to the last vial.

These epochs in the book of Revelation describe Christ’s work in preparing the world for Divine rule and can be outlined in the following four parts:

- The Seals:* The removal of the Pagan system and the establishment of the Bible in European or Gentile civilization.
- Trumpets:* Judgments poured out on Apostate Christendom; the Testimony of Jesus Christ is carried before the nations.
- Vials:* The break-up of the dominion of the Apostasy in preparation for Christ's rule.
- New Heavens:* Visions of Heaven's Kingdom established on earth are given at various points in the prophecy, and at the end.

Some details, and the date of each epoch, are given in Brother Thomas's chart. [entitled: The Seven-Sealed Scroll]

### **The Times Understood**

One of the most convincing features in the Eureka interpretation is the amazing 'historical fit' - a point that most readily concede. But that this 'fit' is not just something which has been engineered after the passing of history is seen in the fact that early Bible students foresaw the fulfilment. Many understood the Apocalyptic epoch with which they were contemporary and because of the sequential development of the prophecy, students were allowed to foresee events. A few examples will perhaps demonstrate the strength of this.

Irenaeus, a contemporary of the apostle John, has left on record his understanding of the apocalyptic number of the beast which, he said, referred to The Latin Kingdom. But the expectation of the rise of an apostate "Christian" system in Rome is well documented. Bro. Alan Eyre refers to the writings of Tertullian (A.D. 162-240) on page 13 of *The Protestors*:

“... he (Tertullian) makes quite a remarkable prediction stating that on the basis of Scripture he expected an apostate church with temporal power to grow up in Rome, rising from the fragmented ruins of Imperial Rome. Hippolytus (died 236) wrote similarly of a revived Roman Empire under a new guise and governing by Roman law.”

This expectation came to pass with the rise of Constantine (A.D. 312) and signalled the completion of the six seals of the book of Revelation.

Both Pagan and Papal Rome waged war against the witnesses of the Truth and consequently few written testimonies have survived the devouring flames of Antichrist's censorship. History conceals much until the day of Christ. However, we do know that some understood the structure of the Apocalypse and that they could accurately identify their own time. Among these was Thomas Newton who wrote in 1754. If the reader will study Brother Thomas's chart reproduced on page 20, he will see from that that Thomas Newton lived just before the termination of the sixth trumpet period in 1789, he wrote:

“These seven last plagues must necessarily fall under the seventh and last trumpet, or the third and last woe-trumpet; so that as the seventh seal contained the seven trumpets, the seventh trumpet comprehends the seven vials . . .

If then these seven last plagues synchronize with the seventh and last trumpet, they are all yet to come; for the sixth trumpet is not yet past, nor the woe of the Turkish or Ottoman empire yet ended.”  
‘Dissertations On The Prophecies’ pages 630-631

Another writer, living in a different epoch - George Stanley Faber, writing in 1806 (see Brother Thomas’s chart, the 4th vial) says in his A Dissertation On The Prophecies, Volume 2, page 408:

“At present we are living under the fourth vial...”

This demonstrates a remarkable awareness of the times, and shows that the ‘historical fit’ which Brother Thomas explains is of ancient origin. Brother Thomas himself refers to the instance of Peter Juricue who recognized the fulfilment of prophecy in the political death of the witnesses in France (1572); and correctly forecast the resurrection of the witnesses in the French Revolution approximately 105 years later. In Herald Of The Future Age for 1848, page 23, Brother Thomas wrote:

“Peter Juricue, a Huguenot Minister, whose works were translated from the French into English in 1687, in commenting upon Rev. XI: 12, 13, says, more than a hundred years before the prediction was fulfilled, ‘The Tenth part of the City which here fell, will, at some future time, appear to be the Kingdom of France, where a Revolution will take place about the year 1785, and a separation from the Papacy follow . . .’”

Recognizing contemporary events and times is remarkable enough, but when the writer outlines important events beforehand we must surely take some notice. Take another example. The following quotation is from Robert Fleming’s ‘The Rise and Fall of Rome Papal’ first published in 1701:

“There is no need to give you any conjectures about the conclusion of the sixth vial, or the beginning of the last; only you may observe, that the first of these will probably take up most of the time between the year 1848, and the year 2000 . . .

Supposing then, that the Turkish monarchy should be totally destroyed between 1848 and 1900, we may justly assign seventy or eighty years longer to the end of the sixth vial, and but twenty or thirty, at most, to the last.”

This is truly remarkable for a prediction made over 200 years beforehand, and based on the continuous historical interpretation of Revelation. The Turkish power may be said to have finally fallen in 1917 as one of the results of the First World War (Fleming was just 17 years out). He says that the sixth vial will continue some 70 or 80 years more - which would bring us to the period 1987-1997 if Fleming is right.

Are we to say that such predictions as are referred to above were mere chance?

The writers that we have quoted were all witnesses of the Gentile class; they were of the Wild olive tree and consequently of the outer court (Rev. 11), but they were given sufficient knowledge to make testimony against the beast. Other witnesses also existed, but we do not have their writings on prophecy. However, in our own age we can observe the accurate exposition of Brother John Thomas. Criticism of his writings in recent years have been unbalanced - attention has been focused upon mistakes (with difficulty sometimes), whilst many correct results have been brushed aside. Perhaps more than anything else, it is Brother Thomas's chronology ("dates") that have been used to facilitate attack.

We should be aware that the majority of Brother Thomas's dates were not wrong. Many important expectations were justified. But regards his widely publicised "mistakes" we can best quote from his own pen. In his last work, *The Book Unsealed*, he wrote:

"That this will be the ORDER in which the events of these latter days will develop, we are justified in saying, because it is the order of all God's past relations with Israel. All His purposes and schemes with them have been gradual in development. God is never in a hurry. He has plenty of time at His disposal. He is not bound to do things according to your speculation or mine as to how long He ought to take."

What Brother Thomas only saw written on the prophetic page we have seen written in history books. Let us acknowledge the fact then, that as a servant of Jesus Christ he was shown those things that were coming to pass.

## **IN CONCLUSION:**

The book of Revelation presents its readers with the drama of a conflict. It is essential that we grasp this and recognize the Truth's fight for survival against both civil and ecclesiastical systems which, over the centuries, have endeavoured to trample the Truth into the ground (c/p Daniel 8:12).

This conflict is but a continuation of the age-old struggle that was initiated by God in the beginning:

"And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." Genesis 3:15.

This enmity between the mind of faith, and the mind of unbelief has continued ever since:

"The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." Romans 8:7.

When this "seed of the serpent," or mind of flesh, is organized into a political or ecclesiastical system, it is at enmity with the seed of the woman. Jesus said to those who did not believe on him:

"The world cannot hate you; but me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil." John 7:7.

So the testimony of Jesus Christ in the days of his flesh evoked the hostility of the world. That world crucified (or bruised in the heel) the seed of the woman. Note the reason Jesus gives: “because I testify of it . . . “

The Apocalypse can put the testimony of Jesus Christ into the mouths of his brethren today. It enables the believer to view the contemporary world with enlightened eyes; he perceives the true nature of the systems around him and is moved to testify of them “that the works thereof are evil.” This will not be in a general way, but specific. Just as Jesus singled out religious leaders - Scribes and Pharisees - so today his servants will be able to identify the false prophet, the apocalyptic whore and her harlot-daughters; the beast and its worshippers etc.

The world will hate those who testify against it today just as much as it has hated those witnesses of the past. It will, however, tolerate those who leave it in peace. Brother Thomas, in writing of the letter to Laodicea says:

“Being destitute of those qualities of the true believer, they delighted in the things that perish . . . Being rich, they were influential in the state; and being lukewarm, they were not troublesome in bearing witness for the truth against the superstitions of the world. Hence, the world ceased to persecute them, because the world loves its own, and they had become the world’s, in ceasing to testify against it.” Eureka, Vol. 1, page 409.

Without exception, the “alternative” interpretations of the Apocalypse which are being promoted among Christadelphians today, neutralize our testimony against the contemporary world and reduce it to a generalisation which hurts no one. As we have said earlier, these alternative interpretations make the word of none effect: our witnessing, the world’s hostility and the trial of our faith, are all transported into the mists of an ambiguous future. Such a corruption as this, which destroys our testimony “against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.” (Ephesians 6:12) is to be withstood particularly! The alternative interpretations of the book of Revelation constitute a serious and dangerous departure from the Truth. For this reason we appeal most earnestly for a right understanding of the Apocalypse.

We know of no better aid to this end, than the exposition by Brother Thomas. The “Eureka Class” has helped many brethren and sisters in the past (it was a regular feature of the ecclesial programme a generation ago) and doubtless could do so again where there is humility and a willingness to be taught.

## **In Summary**

We have seen that the meaning of the Revelation is important: it is Christ’s message to his ecclesias; his testimony. We have explained (in as brief a way as possible) that the traditional Eureka interpretation is both true and reliable, whereas there are serious deficiencies in some of the leading “alternatives”. These alternatives neutralize the Christadelphian testimony against wicked systems today by creating doubt and by placing events in the future.

The book of Revelation contains a vision which spans centuries and has been understood all down the ages since it was given. Today, lack of faith in its meaning is robbing the Christadelphian community of

it's vigour and zeal; it renders brethren and sisters vulnerable to the deceptive influences of the ecclesiastical world. To regain faith in the meaning of the book of Revelation brethren and sisters must be prepared to study it (for faith will come by hearing the word of God - Romans, 10: 17). Let us then heed the voice of Jesus Christ, and "Remember therefore" how we have "received and heard" and hold fast, and repent - Revelation 3:3.

Paul Billington