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Suffering and Theodicy in the Apocalypse A Pentecostal Exploration

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Suffering and Theodicy in the Apocalypse:
A Pentecostal Exploration

By

Christopher M. Palmer

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
School of History, Philosophy, and Social Sciences
College of Arts, Education, and Humanities
Bangor University

2024

DECLARATION

'I hereby declare that this thesis is the results of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. All other sources are acknowledged by bibliographic references. This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree unless, as agreed by the University, for approved dual awards.

I confirm that I am submitting this work with the agreement of my Supervisor(s).'

'Yr wyf drwy hyn yn datgan mai canlyniad fy ymchwil fy hun yw'r thesis hwn, ac eithrio lle nodir yn wahanol. Caiff ffynonellau eraill eu cydnabod gan droednodiadau yn rhoi cyfeiriadau eglur. Nid yw sylwedd y gwaith hwn wedi cael ei dderbyn o'r blaen ar gyfer unrhyw radd, ac nid yw'n cael ei gyflwyno ar yr un pryd mewn ymgeisiaeth am unrhyw radd oni bai ei fod, fel y cytunwyd gan y Brifysgol, am gymwysterau deuol cymeradwy.

Rwy'n cadarnhau fy mod yn cyflwyno'r gwaith hwn gyda chytundeb fy Ngoruchwyliwr (Goruchwylwyr)

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the themes of suffering and theodicy in the Apocalypse by means of a Pentecostal reading strategy that employs *Wirkungsgeschichte* and narrative analysis. The purpose of this reading strategy is to negotiate meaning between Spirit, Scripture, and Community as I read texts relevant to suffering and theodicy in the Apocalypse. I use the observations I negotiate from the Apocalypse to make overtures toward a theodicy that is apropos for Pentecostals.

The thesis begins by surveying scholarly literature relevant to suffering and theodicy in the Apocalypse from the mid-20th century to present. Following this, I present my reading strategy along with an overview of the early North American Pentecostal movement that represents my Pentecostal context.

The thesis examines early North American Pentecostal periodical literature from 1906-1919 in order to hear the voices of the early Pentecostal community during the heart of its movement and during WWI and the Flu pandemic.

The thesis moves forward into a narrative reading of the Apocalypse focusing on texts that are germane to suffering and theodicy while considering how John's implied hearers would encounter the text.

The thesis works toward a theology of suffering and theodicy in light of the Apocalypse while offering overtures toward the construction of a Pentecostal theodicy.

The thesis makes a number of contributions: (1) it is currently the most comprehensive exploration of the most recent research of suffering and theodicy in the Apocalypse, (2) it presents a Pentecostal reading strategy that engages the most current and up-to-date advances in Pentecostal hermeneutics, (3) it offers the first reception history of how early North American Pentecostals understood suffering and theodicy from the Apocalypse, (4) it provides the most comprehensive narrative/literary approach to the themes of suffering and theodicy in the Apocalypse, (5) it contributes to the ongoing studies in the Apocalypse by offering approaches to suffering and theodicy that have emerged from my narrative reading, and (6) it makes overtures toward a Pentecostal theodicy.

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To my family: For your prayers and support and for being there when I needed someone to listen. This thesis has been most challenging. Thank you for your compassion and understanding during the many instances in which my capacity was stretched.

Finally, this work is dedicated to my mother, Susan Palmer, who became critically ill during the writing of this thesis. It was in the late-night hours beside her bed in the ICU that I became acquainted with the Spirit in whom this work speaks.

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ABBREVIATIONS

Early Pentecostal Periodicals

<i>AE</i>	<i>The Apostolic Evangel</i> (J.H. King, Falcon, NC)
<i>AF</i>	<i>The Apostolic Faith</i> (Los Angeles, CA)
<i>AFBS</i>	<i>The Apostolic Faith</i> (Baxter Springs, KS)
<i>AFT</i>	<i>The Apostolic Faith</i> (Topeka, KS)
<i>CE</i>	<i>The Christian Evangel</i>
<i>COGE</i>	<i>Church of God Evangel</i>
<i>IPHA</i>	<i>The International Pentecostal Holiness Advocate</i>
<i>LC</i>	<i>Live Coals</i>
<i>LRE</i>	<i>The Latter Rain Evangel</i>
<i>PE</i>	<i>The Pentecostal Evangel</i>
<i>PHA</i>	<i>Pentecostal Holiness Advocate</i>
<i>TBM</i>	<i>The Bridegroom's Messenger</i>
<i>TP</i>	<i>The Pentecost</i>
<i>WE</i>	<i>The Weekly Evangel</i>
<i>WW</i>	<i>Word and Witness</i>

Other Abbreviations

ABC	Anchor Bible Commentary
ABR	<i>Australian Biblical Review</i>
ABYC	Anchor Bible Yale Commentary
ACTS	<i>ACTS Theological Journal</i>
AJBT	<i>American Journal of Biblical Theology</i>
AOG	Assemblies of God
AUSS	<i>Andrews University Seminary Studies</i>
BBC	Blackwell Bible Commentaries
BCE	Before Common Era
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
BI	<i>Biblical Interpretation</i>
Bib	<i>Biblica</i>
<i>BibThBul</i>	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>
BNTC	Black's New Testament Commentary
BVC	<i>Bible et vie Chretienne</i>
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CBR	<i>Currents in Biblical Research</i>
CID	<i>Clinical Infectious Diseases</i>
CNCs	Central Narrative Convictions
COG	Church of God
COGIC	Church of God in Christ
<i>Contagion</i>	<i>Contagion: Journal of Violence, Mimesis, and Culture</i>
<i>CovQ</i>	<i>The Covenant Quarterly</i>
CPT	Centre for Pentecostal Theology

<i>CTJ</i>	<i>Calvin Theological Journal</i>
EBC	The Expositor's Bible Commentary
EDNT	Balz, H., and G. Schneider (eds.), <i>Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament</i> (3 vols.; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990-1993).
<i>EQ</i>	<i>Evangelical Quarterly</i>
<i>EUSST</i>	<i>European University Studies</i>
FG	Fourth Gospel
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>HTS</i>	<i>HTS Theological Studies</i>
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
ITC	The International Theological Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments
ICC	International Critical Commentary
<i>IRM</i>	<i>International Review of Mission</i>
<i>JATS</i>	<i>Journal of the Adventist Theological Society</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JBTM</i>	<i>Journal for Baptist Theology & Ministry</i>
<i>JECH</i>	<i>Journal of Early Christian History</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
<i>JPT</i>	<i>Journal of Pentecostal Theology</i>
JPTSup	Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplement Series
<i>JRDH</i>	<i>Journal of Religion, Disability & Health</i>
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series
<i>JTI</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Interpretation</i>
LNTS	Library of New Testament Studies
<i>LP</i>	<i>The Living Pulpit</i>
LXX	Septuagint
MNTC	Moffat New Testament Commentary
NAC	New American Commentary
NCCS	New Covenant Commentary Series
<i>Neot</i>	<i>Neotestamentica</i>
NICNT	The New International Commentary on the New Testament
NICOT	The New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NIVAC	NIV Application Commentary
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NT	New Testament
NTL	The New Testament Library
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
OT	Old Testament
PHC	Pentecostal Holiness Church
PHP	Pentecostal Hermeneutics Project
PNTC	Pillar New Testament Commentary Series
<i>Pneuma</i>	<i>Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies</i>
<i>RvExp</i>	<i>Review and Expositor</i>

<i>SBJT</i>	<i>The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology</i>
<i>SCJ</i>	<i>Stone-Campbell Journal</i>
<i>Scriptura</i>	<i>Scriptura: Journal for Biblical, Theological and Contextual Hermeneutics</i>
SHBC	Smyth and Helwys Bible Commentary
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SPS	Society for Pentecostal Studies
TDNT	Kittel, G., and G. Friedrich (eds.), <i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> (trans. G.W. Bromiley; 10 vols.; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-1976).
THC	Two Horizons Commentary
TPONTC	The Pentecostal Old and New Testament Commentaries
<i>TrinJ</i>	<i>Trinity Journal</i>
<i>TS</i>	<i>Theological Studies</i>
<i>TynB</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
UBC	Understanding the Bible Commentary Series
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
ZECNT	Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
<i>ZNW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche</i>
<i>ZThK</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche</i>

INTRODUCTION

I became fascinated with the Apocalypse in January 2003. I was a freshman at North Central University in Minneapolis, MN and spent the dark, cold nights in the frigid Minnesota tundra tucked away in the basement of the T.J. Jones library reading Part IV in Finis Dake's *God's Plan for Man: 'God's Future Dealings with Man'*.¹ On top of 21 credits, I was studying the 'End Times' for two hours each night. Developing a proficiency in dispensational eschatology was a standard part of the educational pedigree for a Pentecostal pastor, and I was no slouch. In a journal I still have, I wrote: 'part of my ministry is teaching the Book of Revelation'.

Fast forward 15 years, and I am standing in the killing fields of Pol Pot in Phnom Penh, Cambodia glaring at a 200-foot wall of human skulls. These skulls were innocent lives before becoming the victims of the Khmer Rouge genocide which took place between 1975-1979. The problem of evil confronted me. My theology was at a stand-still. I was asking questions about the goodness and benevolence of God that I could no longer back away from. There was a word for this, as I recalled: theodicy.

Later, while browsing theological journals for articles on theodicy, I came across a piece by G.R. Osborne wherein he states that he had yet to find a major monograph on the issue of theodicy in the Book of Revelation.² A special thing took place in that moment: the commitment I had made to the Book of Revelation a decade and a half prior converged with the questions about suffering and theodicy I had recently become dedicated to exploring. The idea of a Pentecostal exploration of suffering and theodicy in the Apocalypse emerged. This thesis is that exploration and investigates the role of suffering in the Apocalypse, utilizing a Pentecostal reading strategy.

In this thesis I will engage the Apocalypse as a Pentecostal. I will hear how early Pentecostals engaged suffering and theodicy from the Apocalypse. Then I will explore the Apocalypse using a narrative reading that is apropos to my Pentecostal context. The results of my narrative reading will be put into conversation with my findings from early Pentecostal literature and I will attempt to use such conversation to make overtures toward a Pentecostal theodicy.

¹ F.J. Dake, *God's Plan for Man* (Lawrenceville, GA: Dake Bible Sales, 1949), pp. 724-1009.

² G.R. Osborne, 'Theodicy in the Apocalypse', *TrinJ* 14.1 (1993), p. 64.

Outline and Structure of the Thesis

Chapter one provides a review of scholarly literature pertaining to suffering and theodicy in the Apocalypse from the mid-20th century to the present. It is divided into three parts. Part one concentrates on works devoted exclusively to suffering and theodicy in the Apocalypse. Part two concentrates on works devoted to individual texts in the Apocalypse that are important to suffering and theodicy. Part three concentrates on works on themes related to suffering and theodicy in the Apocalypse.

Chapter two is devoted to the articulation of a Pentecostal reading strategy. First, I offer a brief overview of the early Pentecostal movement in North America. Next, I offer a brief overview of Pentecostal hermeneutics leading up to the Pentecostal Hermeneutics Project (PHP) and the Pentecostal hermeneutical triad. I offer summaries of *Wirkungsgeschichte* and narrative analysis, both of which I employ in my Pentecostal reading strategy. Finally, I explain how my reading strategy is useful in making overtures toward the construction of a Pentecostal theodicy from the Apocalypse.

Chapter three is an exploration of early North American Pentecostal periodical literature for the purpose of understanding how early Pentecostals were influenced by the Apocalypse in their understanding of suffering and theodicy. I examine publications from both the Wesleyan-Holiness and Finished Work traditions. My exploration spans the years of 1906-1919 to account for the beginning of the Pentecostal movement and to give attention to the unique engagement that Pentecostals gave to suffering and theodicy during the years of WWI and the Flu pandemic.

Chapter four offers a narrative reading of the Apocalypse that focuses on texts that engage suffering and theodicy from the standpoint of human suffering, most particularly the suffering of the people of God. I offer a close reading of the narrative, giving specific attention to John's implied hearers and how they would hear the text.

Chapter five offers overtures toward the construction of a Pentecostal theodicy from the observations I make in my narrative reading of the Apocalypse. These observations are put into conversation with the early Pentecostal periodical literature I have explored, as well as other relevant scholarship.

Chapter six offers a compilation of the contributions of this thesis and suggestions for further research.

SUFFERING AND THEODICY IN THE APOCALYPSE: A REVIEW OF SCHOLARLY LITERATURE FROM THE MID-20th CENTURY TO THE PRESENT

1.1 Introduction

'Theodicy', a term created by Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz in 1710, is generally defined as the justification of God's goodness despite the existence of evil and suffering.¹ David Hume, another eighteenth century thinker who is known for his association with the problem of evil, popularized language that has come to define the task of theodicy by reraising Epicurus' question concerning a Deity: 'Is he willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is omnipotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Whence then is evil?'² From the classical sense, theodicy is an enterprise which seeks to make sense of suffering. To do this, one must wrestle with two seemingly irresolvable propositions:

- (1) God is good and all powerful
- (2) There is evil in the world³

How one wrestles with these two propositions is how one does theodicy.

As theodicean studies have developed, theodicists have noted that the field of theodicy seems to operate within an 'amorphous zone' between philosophy and theology.⁴ From a philosophical standpoint, theodicy analyzes and seeks to unravel the reality of evil. From a theological

¹ See G.W. Leibniz, *Theodicy Essays on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man, and the Origin of Evil* (Peru, IL: Open Court, 1985). Osborne, 'Theodicy in the Apocalypse', p. 63, defines theodicy similarly.

² D. Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1907), p. 134.

³ D. Castelo, *Theological Theodicy* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012), p. 3.

⁴ M.S.M. Scott, *Pathways in Theodicy: An Introduction to the Problem of Evil* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015), p. 54.

standpoint,⁵ theodicy attempts to place evil within a proper theological matrix.⁶ I've had numerous discussions with my own academic peers regarding whether or not theodicy is strictly philosophical, or if it can be theological. If my own limited experience attests to anything, it is that 'amorphous' is a fitting descriptor for the field of theodicy.

The development of the field of theodicy has led to a broader definition of theodicy. While the classical definition of theodicy maintains philosophical overtones, R. Rice suggests that, based on where theodicean studies are today, theodicy can be 'any thoughtful interpretation of suffering'.⁷ In following Rice, I define theodicy in this exploration as any significant engagement with the problem of suffering.⁸ Such engagement comprises a variety of approaches to theodicy, some of which are not strictly philosophical. This variety of approaches includes: (1) Perfect Plan Theodicy, (2) Free Will Defense, (3) Soul-Making Theodicy, (4) Cosmic Conflict Theodicy, (5) Openness to God Theodicy, (6) Finite God Theodicy, (7) Protest Theodicy, (8) Process Theodicy, (9) Cruciform Theodicy, (10) Antitheodicy, (11) Practical Theodicy, and (12) Compassionate Theodicy.⁹

Over the years, when theodicy has been considered in the Apocalypse, scholars have differed as to how it emerges. This study maintains that if the Apocalypse were a theodicy in the classical sense, it would seek to answer why people suffer because of evil and what it means for people to

⁵ K. Surin, *Theology and the Problem of Evil* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2002), p. 4, posits his dissatisfaction with discussions of contemporary theodicy in that they are premised on an understanding of God that comes from seventeenth- and eighteenth-century theism – a theism which he calls both 'profoundly unchristian' and 'conceptually confused'. W. Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury, 2012), p. 294, in whom Surin follows in offering his critique of this modern-age theism, voices his concern regarding theism and suggests that theism must be engaged from the theological standpoint as a 'heresy' because he sees it projecting God as an 'otherworldly' counterpart of humankind which eventually leads to atheism. In consideration of this, Castelo, *Theological Theodicy*, pp. 19-21, suggests that theodicy fails as a philosophical endeavor because terms such as 'God' and 'evil' have no 'theologically substantiating context' in-and-of-themselves and, therefore, are often insufficiently nuanced and developed. Castelo makes the case that theodicean studies require more robust theological development in order for the project to advance. Without such theological development, there will continue to be confusion pertaining to what 'god' is under discussion and whose account of evil is in play.

⁶ Scott, *Pathways in Theodicy*, p. 54.

⁷ R. Rice, *Suffering and the Search for Meaning* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), pp. 20-22.

⁸ By the 'problem of suffering', I am referring to the reality of suffering, often caused by evil, and its existence alongside the reality of the goodness and omnipotence of God. This work does not seek to explore the ontology of evil, but presupposes evil is that which is in opposition to God. Moreover, this work defines suffering as any experience with pain. Furthermore, this work is most concerned with suffering caused by that which is in opposition to God (suffering caused by evil).

⁹ For extended discussions on these approaches to theodicy see R. Rice, *Suffering and the Search for Meaning*; M.S.M. Scott, *Pathways in Theodicy*. See also B.N. Sollereider, 'Compassionate Theodicy: Suggested Truce Between Intellectual and Practical Theodicy', *Modern Theology* 37.2 (2021), pp. 382-95. Rice, Scott, and Sollereider's work show that there is ongoing interest in broadening how theodicy is explored and that innovation within the enterprise is growing.

suffer at the hands of God. But it does not. It never seeks to explain where evil and suffering come from or why the sovereign and benevolent Creator has made a world in which good and evil can coincide.¹⁰ Therefore, Revelation cannot be a theodicy in the classical sense.¹¹ When the question of suffering and evil is placed in front of Revelation, Revelation answers it by teaching hearers to retain their faithfulness to Christ. It exhorts them to maintain that God is just despite their experience with evil and suffering.¹² This manner of theodicy is practical, not theoretical.¹³

At the present time, theodicy has been engaged by scholars at two significant places in the text within the Apocalypse (6.9-11; 11.1-14) and such engagement overlaps with a number of relevant themes (i.e., wrath, vengeance, faithful witness, protest, prophetic fulfillment, judgment/justice, hope, violence, and Christ's faithfulness).

I have organized this literature review by placing the most significant data first. Part one concentrates on works devoted exclusively to suffering and theodicy in the Apocalypse. Part two concentrates on works devoted to individual texts in the Apocalypse that are important to suffering and theodicy. Part three concentrates on works on themes related to suffering and theodicy in the Apocalypse. Within each part, the works are organized chronologically.¹⁴

¹⁰ After a brief survey of biblical statements about Satan and demons, including Rev. 12.4 and Rev. 19.20, J.P. Newport asserts, 'It should be remembered that biblical thought is not primarily concerned with philosophical difficulties. Rather, the Bible is concerned with a realistic description of human existence and its bondage. It does not give us a fully developed theodicy or a theoretical justification of God and the place of evil in his world. Instead, it tells us of God's action in history to bind and ultimately completely defeat Satan.' See J.P. Newport, 'Satan and Demons: A Theological Perspective', in J.W. Montgomery (ed.), *Demon Possession: A Medical, Historical, Anthropological and Theological Symposium* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany Fellowship, Inc., 1975), p. 331.

¹¹ G.M. Stevenson points out that the general definition of theodicy comes from the seventeenth century Enlightenment and that Revelation does not offer a theoretical theodicy. See G.M. Stevenson, *A Slaughtered Lamb: Revelation and the Apocalyptic Response to Evil and Suffering* (Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 2013), p. 42.

¹² This study is limited to an exploration of human suffering. For more on how suffering pertains to the earth in the Apocalypse, see B.R. Rossing, *The Rapture Exposed: The Message of Hope in the Book of Revelation* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2004); R. Waddell, 'Apocalyptic Sustainability: The Future of Pentecostal Ecology', in P. Althouse and R. Waddell (eds.), *Perspectives in Pentecostal Eschatologies: World Without End* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2010), pp. 95-110; M.D. Kiel, *Apocalyptic Ecology: The Book of Revelation, the Earth, and the Future* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2017); B.R. Rossing and J. Buitendag, 'Life in its Fulness: Ecology, Eschatology, and Ecodomy in a Time of Climate Change', *HTS* 76.1 (2020), pp. 1-9.

¹³ Stevenson notes, 'Revelation's engagement with the topics of evil and suffering is specific and situational rather than abstract and theoretical.' He suggests that, unlike the Enlightenment thinkers, John was not concerned with a theoretical explanation of why evil happens. Rather, John was concerned with enduring suffering in the face of evil. See Stevenson, *A Slaughtered Lamb*, p. 47.

¹⁴ In part three, the works are placed in categories. These categories have been arranged chronologically by order of the earliest work under each category.

1.2 Works Devoted Exclusively to Suffering and Theodicy

Grant Osborne (1993)

In 1993, G.R. Osborne, former Professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (Deerfield, IL), published an article in the *Trinity Journal* entitled ‘Theodicy in the Apocalypse’.¹⁵ He wrote this article ‘to fill an important gap in understanding the Apocalypse’.¹⁶ Osborne believes theodicy is a major theme within the Apocalypse.¹⁷ He suggests the ‘primary exhortation’ of the Apocalypse is given to encourage the faithful to persevere in times of suffering, trusting that God will vindicate their cause.¹⁸

Osborne begins by defining theodicy as meaning ‘to justify/defend God’.¹⁹ It is the justification of God in the midst of the seeming triumph of the wicked and the suffering of the innocent.²⁰ He traces theodicy back to the OT and suggests that it emerges from the wisdom and prophetic/apocalyptic literature.²¹

To unpack theodicy in the Apocalypse, Osborne explains that he uses a ‘complex hermeneutic’ to meet Revelation’s ‘complex interplay’.²² This interplay is a chemistry of prophetic, apocalyptic,²³ and epistolary material within a tight intertextual narrative that combines both an interlinear and cyclical structure. He approaches the text thematically and his hermeneutical approach is informed by the historicist, idealist, and futurist methods of interpretation. From these, Osborne finds four theodicean themes that arise: (1) God’s judgment

¹⁵ G.R. Osborne, ‘Theodicy in the Apocalypse’. At the time of writing his article, Osborne had not been able to find a major article or monograph on theodicy in the Apocalypse. Since then, Gregory Stevenson has published a full-length monograph that considers suffering and theodicy in the Apocalypse. See Stevenson, *A Slaughtered Lamb: Revelation and the Apocalyptic Response to Evil and Suffering*.

¹⁶ Osborne, ‘Theodicy in the Apocalypse’, p. 64.

¹⁷ Osborne, ‘Theodicy in the Apocalypse’, p. 64, notes that he finds theodicy occurring in every section of Revelation.

¹⁸ Osborne, ‘Theodicy in the Apocalypse’, p. 77.

¹⁹ Osborne, ‘Theodicy in the Apocalypse’, p. 63.

²⁰ Osborne, ‘Theodicy in the Apocalypse’, p. 63.

²¹ Osborne, ‘Theodicy in the Apocalypse’, p. 64, notes that the wisdom literature is creation literature. Wisdom is accepting humankind’s place in God’s created order, an order within God’s control. The idea of God’s control in his own created order eventually becomes problematic because suffering within the order of God’s control is experienced by the just. To answer the conundrum, wisdom literature points toward God’s retributive justice as well as humankind’s inability to understand the divine order as it is in this life. Prophetic and apocalyptic literature expounded upon this notion by suggesting that the vindication and restoration of the just is an eschatological hope that arrives in the coming of God’s Kingdom. The just are to place their faith in this future event.

²² Osborne, ‘Theodicy in the Apocalypse’, p. 65.

²³ Important to Osborne’s understanding of theodicy is his definition of apocalyptic. He defines apocalyptic as heavenly secrets that are given to a seer (who communicates them later to his audience) in vision form regarding a transcendent reality that supersedes the present situation. This depicts the current distress as temporal and encourages perseverance.

is a revelation of his righteous character,²⁴ (2) God's judgment is necessary in light of humanity's depravity and final rejection of him and his call to repent,²⁵ (3) God's judgment is execution of his righteous punishment,²⁶ and (4) God's judgment is vindication of his righteous ones who are martyred.²⁷

After positing each of these themes, Osborne suggests that the vindication of the righteous is based on the vindication of the Lamb who was slain. The Lamb's martyrdom secured his victory and also secured the victory of the righteous as well. He is pictured sitting 'at the center of the throne' together with God (7.10). He overcomes the armies of the earth (17.14) and functions as the eschatological judge (14.10).

Osborne concludes by noting that theodicy encapsulates God's love, mercy, righteous wrath, and sovereignty. The apparent triumph of evil in the wicked world, though indeed an illusion,

²⁴ Osborne, 'Theodicy in the Apocalypse', pp. 66-67, notes that in 1.12-14, Christ is portrayed as high priest, judge, and sovereign over the church as well as over all of history (cf. Daniel 7 and 10). The images in chapter one are not lost on the hearers in the letters to the seven churches but repeat to portray Christ to his church as a judge/vindicator. Unlike the church, he is faithful, and he brings retribution to the righteous and unrighteous. The theme of Christ as judge continues into chapter four where John sees the sovereign Lord seated upon the cosmic throne, an image that Osborne calls the 'turning point of the book'. The enthroned God becomes the saving God in chapter five, as the Lion becomes the eschatological Lamb (cf. Isaiah 53:7). In chapter six, the sovereign – who became the saving Lamb – becomes the judge as he opens the first seal. Such imagery is a full circle of imagery as the one who is sovereign becomes both redeemer and judge.

²⁵ Osborne says that human depravity inevitably leads toward a righteous God's righteous judgment. Amidst the wicked's own depravity, God calls them to repent but they are stubborn and refuse. Osborne says that this happens so frequently throughout Revelation that it, in and of itself, 'alerted' him to the theme of theodicy in the Apocalypse. Osborne, 'Theodicy in the Apocalypse', p. 69.

²⁶ Osborne, 'Theodicy in the Apocalypse', p. 71 says, 'the basic ethical principle of the NT for believer and unbeliever: "What we do to others, we actually do to Christ, since they are made in the image of God. And he will return those deeds upon our heads."' This is the Roman legal principle of *lex talionis*. Osborne finds *lex talionis* in the situation of the Thyatirian church (2.23b) and in the horsemen of the first four seals (6.1-8). The actions of the first two horsemen (lust for war) results in the consequences of the seals (pestilence, famine, death, etc.). Osborne corroborates this in his interpretation of John's use of the passive voice. A 'divine passive' is used when judgment takes place upon the earth. In these instances, God is sovereignly presiding over the judgment to execute his divine justice. Osborne notes that the divine passive is used in connection with the four horsemen of the first four seals (6.1-8); the four angels with power over the land and sea (7.2); the angels with seven trumpets and golden censor (8.2, 3), the fifth angel (9.1, 3, 5), and the beast (13).

²⁷ Osborne quotes J.R. Michaels, 'Within John's horizons, "martyr" is not a technical term for those unfortunate individuals who happen to be killed. Rather, it defines the very nature and existence of the church ... Victory comes through suffering and death.' See J.R. Michaels, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation: Guides to New Testament Exegesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1992), pp. 134-37 cited in Osborne, 'Theodicy in the Apocalypse', pp. 73-74. Osborne, 'Theodicy in the Apocalypse', p. 75, points to three instances of apocalyptic irony which reinforce this idea. (1) In the fifth seal, the earth-dwellers who killed the faithful were actually producing an offering to God. (2) Satan is overcome by the 'blood of the Lamb' and the 'testimony' of the saints who did not love their lives so much that they shrunk in the face of death. (3) The authority of the dragon and beast, who lose their kingdom, is seized by the martyrs of Christ. Osborne notes that the prayers of the saints play a significant role in the saints' vindication. These prayers for vindication form heavenly worship. God answers these prayers in 8.3-5 through the trumpet judgments. The trumpet judgments are not redemptive but punitive, as punitive judgment is a part of theodicy. God's wrath, however, is not out of bitterness but comes from his obligation to vindicate his people.

has a very real power to inflict suffering on God's people. Osborne suggests that saints are to endure this suffering, in faith, until the final vindication is wrought through the theodicy put forth in the Apocalypse.

C. Cory (2013)

In 2013, C. Cory, Professor at the University of St. Thomas (St. Paul, MN), published an article entitled, “‘Just and true are your ways, O king of the nations’ (Rev 15:3): Theodicy in the Book of Revelation’”.²⁸ In this article, Cory proposes that theodicy is a ‘more beneficial lens’ for interpreting Revelation than end time prophecy. To set up her case, Cory classifies the Book of Revelation as apocalyptic and suggests that the genre has three purposes apropos to the idea of theodicy: (1) to console persecuted people, (2) to interpret historical events in light of the justice and sovereignty of God and the triumph of good over evil, and (3) to exhort hearers to live in a way that will ensure that they are the elect. Cory uses these three purposes of the genre to read the text and contends that whatever John says about the problem of evil will be grounded in both the justice and sovereignty of God. From here she offers a series of three theodicean questions she believes are pervasive in the Apocalypse. The first question is ‘does God care about us?’. Her reading of the ‘overlooked’ visions of the three angels (14.7) suggests that it is a ‘consolation’ for those who suffer for their witness. The second question she believes is pervasive in the text is ‘where is God’s justice for the holy ones?’ Cory notes this question is asked by the souls under the altar in 6.9-11, to whom God gives white robes as a promise of victory. The final question she thinks is pervasive in the text is what does Revelation say about ‘God’s judgment against evil and those who are seduced by it?’ Cory determines that God’s victory against evil is not only decisive but also ‘tempered with mercy’. In light of the theodicean ideas that these questions raise, Cory suggests that the text exhorts hearers to repentance and patient endurance. The New Jerusalem, which Cory calls the ‘crowning element’²⁹ of John’s theodicy, awaits those who maintain their steadfastness. She concludes by urging her readers to follow the patient endurance of the saints in Revelation.

²⁸ C. Cory, “‘Just and true are your ways, O king of the nations’ (Rev 15:3): Theodicy in the Book of Revelation’, *TBT* 51.1 (2013), pp. 24-29.

²⁹ Cory posits that there are three images which describe the New Jerusalem and make it ‘a beautiful and hopeful message of peace, safety, and security for God’s beloved people’. These images are: (1) a bride who has prepared herself for her husband, (2) the new city Jerusalem that has no need for a temple because God and the Lamb will dwell directly with the people, and (3) a new creation where God will provide all his people need for nourishment and well-being. See Cory, “‘Just and true are your ways, O king of the nations’ (Rev 15:3): Theodicy in the Book of Revelation’, p. 29.

G.M. Stevenson (2013)

In 2013, G.M. Stevenson, Professor of New Testament at Rochester College (Rochester, MI), published a monograph entitled *A Slaughtered Lamb: Revelation and the Apocalyptic Response to Evil and Suffering*.³⁰ It is a thorough work on the topic of suffering and theodicy in Revelation.

Stevenson uses a historical critical hermeneutic and engages theodicy from a theological approach. His work consists of two parts. In part one, he orients the reader to evil and suffering by supplying his definitions of suffering, evil, and theodicy. He shows how evil fits into the historical and social situation of Revelation and shows why an apocalypse helps to make sense of evil that is in the world. Part two is divided into eight chapters wherein Stevenson uses what he has posited in part one to read the Revelation of John.

In part one, Stevenson provides a chapter entitled, 'Faith and the "Problem" of Evil and Suffering'.³¹ In this chapter, he makes it clear that his definitions of evil and suffering are not the same.³² He suggests that evil is violation of the *imago dei* while suffering is pain (and resists a moral evaluation).³³ The result is that suffering *can* be good, evil cannot (though there is some suffering that 'assaults our sense of justice' and makes it difficult to draw any distinction between evil and suffering). Stevenson argues that the classic definition of theodicy is 'an attempt to reconcile the existence of evil with belief in a benevolent and omnipotent God, essentially a response to the problem of evil'.³⁴ Within this definition, Stevenson notes that most theodacists broadly define evil. Doing so means that they include all forms of suffering, such as natural disasters. As such, theodicy is not *just* the problem of evil but the problem of evil *and* suffering. Stevenson offers five modern sorts of theodicies and says that they are seventeenth

³⁰ G.M. Stevenson, *A Slaughtered Lamb: Revelation and the Apocalyptic Response to Evil and Suffering*.

³¹ Chapter two.

³² Stevenson suggests that his definition of evil derives from his analysis of the text. See Stevenson, *A Slaughtered Lamb*, p. 19.

³³ Stevenson limits suffering in Revelation to suffering that mostly comes from opposition to God and to his will. In view of this, Stevenson uses the terminology 'oppositional culture', which speaks to a narrow perception of affliction throughout Revelation that assumes suffering comes through the avenue of persecution. He suggests that affliction/suffering is not just the result of imperial persecution that may have been more sporadic than systematic during the time of Revelation. Affliction came through other avenues as seen in the letters to the seven churches. 'Oppositional culture' accounts for every avenue in which believers experienced suffering whether it be through the temptation to compromise with the culture, the tendency to become complacent in comfortable living, or slander and imprisonment. The message of Revelation speaks to this 'oppositional culture' and provokes appropriate action through its apocalyptic nature.

³⁴ See Osborne, 'Theodicy in the Apocalypse', p. 63.

century developments from the Enlightenment.³⁵ He provides four critiques for these modern theodicies: (1) theodicies differ in what evil is considered to be, (2) early Christians did not view evil and suffering as a problem to be solved but considered evil and suffering to be a part of life, (3) theodicy is an attempt to explain the unexplainable, and (4) theodicies deal in abstracts rather than specifics.³⁶ Thus, Stevenson does not align with the classic definition. He does not think evil is rational, nor does he think it can be quantified. It defies rational explanation. As such, Revelation *is* and *is not* a theodicy. It *is* a theodicy in the sense that it shows the relationship between faith and those faithful who suffer while affirming God is just. But it is *not* a theodicy in the modern sense (it does not try to answer why evil happens because the early Christians never looked at why evil happens as a problem to be solved). ‘The modern approach to theodicy, then, as an attempt to defend God by demonstrating the rationality of faith in the face of evil/suffering, is largely a recent enterprise.’³⁷ Revelation does not offer a post-Enlightenment sort of theodicy.³⁸ ‘It betrays no interest in the “problem of evil” as classically rendered; it attempts no systematic explanation for all evil and suffering; and it is specific and contextual in its treatment rather than abstract and theoretical.’³⁹ Stevenson argues that there is no explanation for the origin of evil nor is there any defense of God’s omnipotence in Revelation.⁴⁰ He believes evil is not a problem to be solved. It is a reality to be countered by faithful witness to Christ. In the conclusion of chapter two, Stevenson posits theodicy in Revelation as situational – it presents how to endure in faith amidst evil rather than justifying divine goodness amidst evil. Therefore, Stevenson suggests that John writes to the seven churches to comfort and challenge the churches to be faithful in spite of suffering and evil rather than to provide a systematic statement about the nature of evil.

³⁵ Stevenson lists these theodicies as (1) Soul-Making Theodicy, (2) Free Will Theodicy, (3) Warfare Theodicy, (4) Process Theodicy, and (5) Protest Theodicy. See Stevenson, *A Slaughtered Lamb*, pp. 38-40.

³⁶ Stevenson, *A Slaughtered Lamb*, pp. 40-45.

³⁷ Stevenson, *A Slaughtered Lamb*, p. 42.

³⁸ Stevenson, *A Slaughtered Lamb*, pp. 46-47, notes that it is not human reason that shapes John’s perspective, but rather divine revelation.

³⁹ Stevenson, *A Slaughtered Lamb*, p. 46.

⁴⁰ In his monograph, *The Book of Revelation in Christological Focus*, D. Liroy suggests that there is no explanation for the origin of evil in the Apocalypse. Liroy explores the Christological focus of the Apocalypse and notes that the Apocalypse of John, similar to other apocalypses, deals with the problem of evil. Yet, Liroy maintains that the Apocalypse does not try to answer why evil exists from a philosophical standpoint. Instead, it emphasizes the sovereignty of God, the inevitable demise of evil, and the fact that justice will one day prevail. See D. Liroy, *The Book of Revelation in Christological Focus* (New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing, 2003).

Within the second part of his book, Stevenson provides eight chapters (chapters 6-13) based upon what he has offered about suffering, evil, and theodicy in Revelation. In chapter six (Revelation 1-3), Stevenson shows a pattern for sufferers.⁴¹ In chapter seven (Revelation 4-5), Stevenson shows how evil and suffering fall under God's reign.⁴² In chapter eight (Rev. 6.1-8.1), Stevenson uses the seals to show that the suffering of this world is under God's control. In chapter nine (Rev. 8.2-11.19), Stevenson uses the throne room scene to confront what he believes are two faulty Christian assumptions about suffering: (1) suffering must make sense and (2) God's plan of suffering must be concerned, first and foremost, with the alleviation of the sufferer.⁴³ In chapter ten (Revelation 12-13), Stevenson uses the two witnesses of Revelation 11 to show how victory over suffering is achieved. He then uses the cosmic battle in Revelation 12 to show that the way to overcome the enemy is through following Christ's pattern of suffering through faithful witness.⁴⁴ In chapter 11 (Revelation 14-20), Stevenson suggests that Revelation presents a series of visions that portray God restoring order to creation as a result of his justice.⁴⁵ In chapter 12 (Revelation 21-22), Stevenson points out that suffering culminates in a new creation where suffering and injustice no longer exist (21.3-4).

In his conclusion, Stevenson posits that there is an essential message in Revelation for the sufferer in seven parts: (1) God is faithful and sovereign over his creation. (2) Evil and suffering are an unavoidable component of life. (3) God does not exercise his sovereignty by doing away with suffering and evil in this life, but he does respond to it 'loud and clear'. (4) God meets us in our suffering as the Slaughtered Lamb, joining us in it. (5) Life is more than our body and the

⁴¹ The pattern Stevenson identifies for sufferers begins with faithful witness ('the faithful witness') is followed by suffering ('the firstborn from the dead') and ends with vindication ('the ruler of the kings of the earth'). According to Stevenson, Revelation exhorts believers to follow this pattern. The seven letters to the seven churches (2-3) illustrate this pattern.

⁴² In 4.8, Stevenson points out that God is called the 'Almighty', which implies he is sovereign and in control. The sovereignty of God raises the question of how evil and suffering can fall under his reign as evil and suffering are always a possibility in this world. Stevenson suggests that trying to explain why God created the world in this way only leads to conjecture, and it is unhelpful. The point of Revelation 4 is to demonstrate that God is trustworthy, and his rule is just despite the evil that is in the world.

⁴³ Stevenson believes that the throne is the starting point for understanding suffering. The throne demonstrates that God is sovereign and all suffering falls under his control. He notes that the seven trumpet judgments show creation under God's control (8.2-11.19). These judgments inflict suffering on humanity which is an act of mercy. Because suffering is not inherently evil, the suffering that happens under the trumpet judgments plays a positive role, summoning humanity to repentance.

⁴⁴ Stevenson suggests that John has used pastiche to bring forward the idea of suffering and evil in Revelation – John has drawn from Jewish, Greek, Roman, and Ancient Near Eastern traditions. He also suggests that readers can find Combat Myth, Gigantomachy, the Exodus tradition, and the Genesis 3 tradition in chapter 12.

⁴⁵ In this chapter, Stevenson shows that eschatology is vital to theodicy because it cannot be known what God will do in the future without eschatology.

suffering we face in it does not cancel God's love for us or make him unfaithful. (6) The Slaughtered Lamb teaches us that suffering concludes with resurrection. (7) The end of the story is only the beginning.⁴⁶

1.3 Works Devoted to Individual Texts

Revelation 6.9-11

P. Van den Eynde (1967)

In 1967, P. Van den Eynde published a journal article in *Bible et vie chretienne* entitled 'Le Dieu du désordre: commentaire synthétique d'Apocalypse 6,9-11'⁴⁷ where he posits a theological examination of the fifth seal and the cries of those under the altar (6.9-11). Van den Eynde calls their cry 'une reaction d'impatience en face d'un Dieu dont on ne comprend pas la conduite.'⁴⁸ He goes on to say, 'Cri primitif, farouche peut-être, imparfait et provisoire, jailli de la fierté de la foi plutôt que de l'amour, jailli de la douleur plutôt que de la raison'.⁴⁹ But it evolves later into patience. This comes by understanding what Van den Eynde calls, 'le cycle du sang'.⁵⁰ This is the story of how Christ's blood and the blood of the martyrs plays out. It is shed for the testimony of the word, it redeems, and eventually it is vindicated. God requires patience for vindication because 'Le Seigneur est longanime par respect pour le monde: il est patient au sens qu'il prend son temps, patient au sens qu'il supporte le désordre'.⁵¹ By 'supporte le désordre',⁵² Van den Eynde means that God takes his time rooting out evil and suffering. In fact, according to Van den Eynde, Christ entered into the disorder and offered his blood. The martyrs do the same. Following Christ's example of offering blood in the midst of disorder forms a vital communion with Christ. In time, God vindicates their blood shed as he will the blood of Christ. Yet, God patiently waits for the conversion of sinners until the time of retribution comes. Hence, the cry of

⁴⁶ Stevenson, *A Slaughtered Lamb*, pp. 227-28.

⁴⁷ P. Van den Eynde, 'Le Dieu du désordre: commentaire synthétique d'Apocalypse 6,9-11', *BVC* 74 (1967), pp. 39-51. English translation: 'The God of Disorder: A Synthetic Commentary on Revelation 6.9-11'.

⁴⁸ Van den Eynde, 'Le Dieu du désordre', p. 40. English translation: 'An impatient reaction towards a God whose conduct one does not understand.'

⁴⁹ Van den Eynde, 'Le Dieu du désordre', p. 42. English translation: 'Primitive cry, perhaps fierce, imperfect and provisional, springing from the pride of faith rather than love, springing from pain rather than reason.'

⁵⁰ English translation: 'the cycle of blood'.

⁵¹ Van den Eynde, 'Le Dieu du désordre', p. 47. English translation: 'The Lord is longsuffering out of respect for the world: he is patient in the sense that he takes his time, patient in the sense that he endures disorder.'

⁵² English translation: 'endures disorder'.

the souls under the altar is a cry for order, an order that will come only after patient waiting, as Van den Eynde suggests.

J.P. Heil (1993)

In 1993, J.P. Heil, Professor of New Testament at Catholic University of America (Washington, D.C.), published a piece entitled ‘The Fifth Seal (Rev 6,9-11) as a Key to the Book of Revelation’ in *Biblica*.⁵³ Heil examines Revelation as a consistent literary unity and uses verbal repetitions and conceptual correlations to compare Rev. 6.9-11 with the rest of the text. Heil makes seven points about the fifth seal that posit it as key for understanding the whole of Revelation: (1) it comes as a result of the first four seals (6.1-8), (2) it exemplifies the sort of prayers that take place in heavenly worship (5.1-14), (3) it expresses the struggle of the seven churches (2-3), (4) it encourages fellow servants to endure and to take their place in heavenly worship (7.9-17), (5) the ascension of the two witnesses are an answer to the souls’ prayer for vindication (11.1-4), (6) those encouraged to worship God instead of the beast are told they will join the souls in their rest (13-14), (7) the souls’ prayer for judgment is answered in the fall of Babylon (18), and (8) the souls’ fellow servants enter the New Jerusalem and wear white robes (20-22).

J.A. du Rand (2014)

In 2014, J.A. du Rand, emeritus Professor in New Testament Studies at the University of Johannesburg and Extraordinary Professor at the North-West University Potchefstroom, published a journal article entitled ‘To Adore God’s Identity through Theodicy: Reading Revelation 6:9-11 in Theological Coherence with a Remarkable Classical Example, 4 Ezra’ in *The Covenant Quarterly* in 2014.⁵⁴ In this article, du Rand applies 4 Ezra and its content to the cry of the martyrs in Rev. 6.9-11 by using a framework of OT examples of theodicy.⁵⁵

Du Rand calls the cry of the martyrs in Rev. 6.9-11 ‘a dramatization of the rhetorical question attributed to Jesus in Luke 18:7 within the context of theodicy’.⁵⁶ This cry is theodicy,⁵⁷

⁵³ J.P. Heil, ‘The Fifth Seal (Rev 6,9-11) as a Key to the Book of Revelation’, *Bib* 74.2 (1993), pp. 220-43.

⁵⁴ J.A. du Rand, ‘To Adore God’s Identity through Theodicy: Reading Revelation 6:9-11 in Theological Coherence with a Remarkable Classical Example, 4 Ezra’, *CovQ* 72.3 (2014), pp. 110-23.

⁵⁵ Du Rand’s OT examples of theodicy include Job’s account, wisdom literature’s statements on retribution (Prov. 3.33-34; 10.27), the origin of sin as explained in Genesis 3 and 6, the untimely death of Josiah (2 Chron. 35.20-24), disciplinary procedure under the Law (Lev. 26.14-18), future retribution (Isaiah 24), and theophany (Ps. 73.28).

⁵⁶ Du Rand, ‘To Adore God’s Identity’, p. 111.

⁵⁷ Du Rand, ‘To Adore God’s Identity’, p. 112, suggests theodicy is an ‘effort to understand and explain the problem of evil and death’.

not revenge.⁵⁸ (He also states theodicy is directly and indirectly heard in Rev. 12.10-12; 16.5-7; 19.1-2; 20.3-4 because, within these passages, God's people deal with the reality of evil in the world.)⁵⁹

Du Rand concludes that, when his OT framework is applied to 4 Ezra and then applied to Revelation 6, the righteous receive their eschatological rewards in heaven because of the mercy of God. Though they will not understand the present evils, they should continue to hope and believe.

P. Allet (2016)

In 2016, P. Allet published his dissertation for Andrews University (Berrin Springs, MI) entitled 'Revelation 6.9-11: An Exegesis of the Fifth Seal in Light of the Problem of Eschatological Delay'.⁶⁰ Akin to what Osborne said in 1993 about theodicy in Revelation,⁶¹ Allet says that he has been unable to find any major article or monograph of theodicy and end-time significance of the fifth seal. Hence, he suggests that his work closes a gap in this area.⁶² Methodologically, Allet uses a hermeneutic suggested by R. Lucas,⁶³ including historical and literary analysis⁶⁴ and a tradition-motif analysis of the fifth seal.

Allet's work is divided into six chapters. In chapter one, the introduction, he provides a definition of his relevant terms including theodicy. He adapts P. Berger's definition of theodicy which is 'any attempt to explain evil and death in terms of religious legitimations, of whatever degree of sophistication or rationality as a theodicy'.⁶⁵ In chapter two, Allet offers a history of interpretation of the fifth seal before offering an exegetical analysis of Rev. 6.9 in chapter three.

⁵⁸ Du Rand's understanding of theodicy and the souls under the altar is similar to Osborne's understanding of theodicy and the souls under the altar. Osborne explains that the souls' cry places natural feelings of bitterness and revenge into God's hands. See Osborne, 'Theodicy in the Apocalypse', p. 75.

⁵⁹ Du Rand, 'To Adore God's Identity', p. 112.

⁶⁰ P. Allet, 'Revelation 6:9-11: An Exegesis of the Fifth Seal in Light of the Problem of Eschatological Delay' (PhD dissertation, Andrews University, 2015).

⁶¹ 'In perusing literature, I have been unable to find a major article or monograph on the issue of theodicy in Revelation.' See Osborne, 'Theodicy in the Apocalypse', p. 64.

⁶² Allet, 'Revelation 6:9-11: An Exegesis of the Fifth Seal in Light of the Problem of Eschatological Delay', p. 88.

⁶³ See R. Lucas, 'Time of the Reign of Christ in 1 Corinthians 15:20-28 in Light of Early Christian Session Theology' (PhD dissertation, Andrews University, 1997), pp. 15-16.

⁶⁴ Allet's historical and literary analysis includes historical analysis of the background and times of Revelation, grammatical analysis of key words, literary analysis of form and function, and intertextual analysis of parallels, allusions, and echoes.

⁶⁵ Allet, 'Revelation 6:9-11: An Exegesis of the Fifth Seal in Light of the Problem of Eschatological Delay', p. 14. See P.L. Berger, *Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967), pp. 54-55.

In chapter four, Allet examines the ‘how long’ motif in the OT, as well as in Jewish and early Christian apocalyptic tradition, in order to see how it intersects with Rev. 6.9-11. Within this chapter, Allet also does a theological analysis of the fifth seal with attention given to imminence and delay. This analysis includes an examination of: (1) white robes, (2) the exhortation to wait/rest for a little while, and (3) God’s justification for the delay. Allet concludes:

Everything from the depiction of the souls under the altar, the cause of their death, the way God is addressed in the content of the outcry, and to the resolution points clearly to an eschatological theodicy of persecution ... By delaying the final judgment, the theodicy in the fifth seal appears to be founded in the mercy of God in favor of the inhabitants of the world.⁶⁶

Revelation 11.1-14

D.E. Holwerda (2006)

In 2006, D.E. Holwerda, Professor of New Testament emeritus at Calvin Theological Seminary (Grand Rapids, MI), published a sermon in the *Calvin Theological Journal* entitled ‘Suffering Witnesses – To What End? A Sermon on Revelation 11:1-14’.⁶⁷ This sermon asks if there is evidence of God in human suffering. To address this question, Holwerda takes special interest in Christian suffering in Revelation. Holwerda treats Rev. 11.1-14 as a narrative parable that demonstrates the suffering of the witnessing church and the outcome it produces for the nations. Holwerda suggests that the two witnesses represent the witnessing church. God protects his witnesses, but they are eventually overcome by the beast and killed. Thus, they share in Christ’s suffering. Yet, the witnesses also share in Christ’s triumph and are resurrected. Holwerda interprets this to mean that the church will rise as kings and priests despite its martyrdom. Following the witnesses’ resurrection, an earthquake occurs which causes the nations to give glory to God (11.13). Holwerda understands this earthquake to mean that martyrdom is used by God to show mercy to the nations and cause their conversion. In his conclusion, Holwerda puts this model into historical perspective and shows how persecution and martyrdom can be understood in light of Russian communism. Martyrdom overcomes ideologies opposed to Christ

⁶⁶ Allet, ‘Revelation 6:9-11: An Exegesis of the Fifth Seal in Light of the Problem of Eschatological Delay’, pp. 322-23.

⁶⁷ D.E. Holwerda, ‘Suffering Witnesses – To What End? A Sermon on Revelation 11:1-14’, *CTJ* 41.1 (2006), pp. 127-32.

and ‘is God’s gift of grace to a violent world and it prepares the way for the coming of God’s kingdom and city in which all nations will worship him’.⁶⁸

1.4 Works on Themes Related to Suffering and Theodicy

Wrath

A.T. Hanson (1957)

In 1957, A.T. Hanson, former Professor of Theology at the University of Hull, first published a monograph entitled *The Wrath of the Lamb*.⁶⁹ Hanson takes a canonical look at wrath in eight chapters. He handles wrath in the Apocalypse in chapter seven, admitting that wrath is more prominent in Revelation than in any other NT book.⁷⁰ Hanson challenges the notion that John’s use of wrath in Revelation is the same as the apocalypticists in the OT and intertestamental period. Instead, he posits:

John, far from being a sort of throw-back to the Old Testament in his treatment of wrath, presents us in fact with a more carefully thought out conception of the divine wrath even than Paul, one which is more closely related to the central message of Christianity, and which forms a completion and crown of all that is said about the wrath in the rest of the Bible.⁷¹

To make this conclusion, Hanson investigates John’s wrath vocabulary⁷² and his use of anecdotes from the OT. He goes on to explore John’s concept of victory,⁷³ which connects wrath to the cross, by offering a grammatical analysis of a number of pertinent passages.⁷⁴ Hanson concludes this analysis by suggesting that divine victory is achieved by death and suffering. Wrath is connected to the cross and the Messiah judges by dying. Because of this, Hanson says that wrath is more ‘Christian’ in Revelation than in any other book of the NT.

Vengeance

W. Klassen (1966)

In 1966, W. Klassen, former Professor of New Testament at Mennonite Biblical Seminary (Elkhart, IN), published an article in *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* entitled ‘Vengeance in the

⁶⁸ Holwerda, ‘Suffering Witnesses – To What End? A Sermon on Revelation 11:1-14’, p. 130.

⁶⁹ A.T. Hanson, *The Wrath of the Lamb* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010), pp. 159-80.

⁷⁰ A.T. Hanson, *The Wrath of the Lamb*, p. 159.

⁷¹ Hanson, *The Wrath of the Lamb*, p. 159.

⁷² ὀργή and θυμός.

⁷³ νικᾶν and its cognates.

⁷⁴ Revelation 1.16; 2.22; 5.5-6; 6.15-17; 11.16-19; 13; 14.14-20; 19.11-16; 22.18-19.

Apocalypse of John'.⁷⁵ Klassen sees the Apocalypse as an intertext.⁷⁶ He interprets these intertextual influences to counter the claims of those who suggest the Apocalypse is a departure from the Christian ethic of non-retaliation.⁷⁷

Klassen notes that followers of Christ never participate in battle. They conquer the inflictors of their suffering through faithfulness to Christ. This differs from other apocalyptic literature, where the sufferers are permitted to take vengeance.⁷⁸ The Apocalypse moves the idea of vengeance forward from the OT and other Apocalyptic material. Klassen quotes A.T. Hanson to pinpoint that what emerges from the text is a 'more carefully thought-out conception of the Divine wrath even than Paul ... which forms a completion and crown of all that is said about the wrath in the rest of the Bible ... In the OT God judges by inflicting suffering; in the Apocalypse he judges by accepting suffering.'⁷⁹ Klassen suggests that Satan inflicts suffering and God accepts it to overcome. Hence, John's position on suffering and vengeance does not contradict the Christian ethic of non-retaliation, but all the more supports it.

J.N. Musvosvi (1986)

In 1986, J.N. Musvosvi published a PhD dissertation for Andrews University (Berrien Springs, MI), entitled 'The Concept of Vengeance in the Book of Revelation in its Old Testament and Near Eastern Context.'⁸⁰

Musvosvi's dissertation has five chapters. In his first chapter, his introduction, he provides a literature review wherein is a section entitled 'Literature on Vengeance in the Apocalypse'. Musvosvi provides a thorough review of scholars who have done scholarly work on vengeance in the Apocalypse, concluding that there is 'great need' to read Revelation thematically and engage various subjects.⁸¹ Musvosvi engages the motif of vengeance in Revelation with its OT setting in chapters two and three before he proceeds to engage with vengeance in Revelation

⁷⁵ W. Klassen, 'Vengeance in the Apocalypse of John', *CBQ* 28.3 (1966), pp. 300-11.

⁷⁶ Klassen notes that the Apocalypse is influenced by apocalyptic material such as 1 Enoch and 4 Esdras, as well as texts from the OT.

⁷⁷ Klassen quotes Walter Bauer, 'The apocalypticist breathes a glowing hatred against all enemies ... and assuages himself with the thoughts about the terrible sufferings which await them'. See W. Bauer, 'Das Gebot der Feindesliebe und die alten Christen', *ZThK* 27 (1917), p. 40, cited in Klassen, 'Vengeance in the Apocalypse of John', p. 301.

⁷⁸ See 1 Enoch 90; Apocalypse of Abraham 29; Book of Jubilees 23, 29.

⁷⁹ See Hanson, *The Wrath of the Lamb*, p. 159, cited in Klassen, 'Vengeance in the Apocalypse of John', p. 310.

⁸⁰ J.N. Musvosvi, 'The Concept of Vengeance in the Book of Revelation in its Old Testament and Near Eastern Context' (PhD dissertation, Andrews University, 1986).

⁸¹ Musvosvi, 'The Concept of Vengeance in the Book of Revelation', p. 34.

from a thematic perspective in chapter four. Here, he traces the theme of vengeance to see how its backgrounds in the OT have affected its interpretation. Before Musvosvi handles the cry of the martyrs in 6.9-11, he shows how a judicial process is involved in dealing with the persecution of the saints. This judicial process is important for Musvosvi because he suggests that the martyrs face unjust 'legal charges'.⁸² Musvosvi gives special attention to judicial language in 6.9-11, κρίνω and ἐκδικέω, which he suggests depicts a court setting for the martyrs.⁸³ In chapter five, his conclusion, Musvosvi concludes:

Inasmuch as Revelation is a document to bring hope and encouragement to God's people in all ages, its vengeance motif has implications for all who must suffer for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. To all such, Revelation declares that their covenant protector and Lord has not forgotten them. He will vindicate them and reverse the unjust judgments of the enemy; he will clear his own name and restore unity and the kingdom to the rightful heirs.⁸⁴

Faithful Witness

J.P.M. Sweet (1981)

In 1981, J.P.M. Sweet, former Professor at Selwyn College in Cambridge and author of a notable commentary on Revelation,⁸⁵ wrote a chapter entitled 'Maintaining the Testimony of Jesus: The Suffering of Christians in the Revelation of John' in the book *Suffering and Martyrdom in the New Testament Church*.⁸⁶

Sweet maintains that Rev. 12.11 contains two stories that form a single narration. Sweet explores this in relation to the sufferings and victory of Christ and Christians. He suggests: (1) Christian suffering is the result of the witness of Jesus, (2) witness does not consist in suffering itself but from speaking up for God in word and behavior, (3) victory does not come from a moral valuation of suffering but from the vindication God gives, and (4) the victory of witness brings about a conversion of the nations.⁸⁷ To make his case for these points, Sweet takes into consideration Revelation as an integrated whole, uses historical analysis to suggest that

⁸² Musvosvi, 'The Concept of Vengeance in the Book of Revelation', p. 206.

⁸³ Musvosvi also examines 12.7-12 and 18.20 and concludes they reveal a courtroom setting important for understanding the vengeance motif in Revelation.

⁸⁴ Musvosvi, 'The Concept of Vengeance in the Book of Revelation', pp. 279-80.

⁸⁵ J.P.M. Sweet, *Revelation* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1979).

⁸⁶ J.P.M. Sweet, 'Maintaining the Testimony of Jesus: The Suffering of Christians in the Revelation of John', in W. Horbury and B. McNeal (eds.), *Suffering and Martyrdom in the New Testament Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 101-17.

⁸⁷ Similar ideas are put forward by Graeme Goldsworthy, *The Lion & the Lamb: The Gospel in Revelation* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984). Goldsworthy posits that the Lion and Lamb motif from Revelation 5 illustrates the Christian experience. The motif suggests that Christians live between two realities: suffering (the suffering Lamb) and the kingdom (the conquest of the Lion).

persecution was local and selective, and takes for granted that the purpose of Revelation is to call saints to faithful witness over idolatry and immorality.

Sweet divides his chapter into three divisions: (1) ‘Maintaining the Testimony of Jesus’,⁸⁸ (2) ‘Victory – Maccabean or Christian?’,⁸⁹ and (3) ‘Victory and Sacrifice’.⁹⁰ These three divisions form Sweet’s argument that the Slaughtered Lamb and those who are slaughtered because of the Lamb are two separate stories in Revelation, though ultimately one.

R. Bauckham (1993)

In 1993, R. Bauckham, former Professor of New Testament Studies at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland, made significant contributions to the study of the Apocalypse, namely in his works *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*⁹¹ and *The Climax of Prophecy*.⁹² Within these, Bauckham uses literary and theological analysis to examine the Apocalypse, while also bringing apocalyptic tradition into his exploration. He stands behind the notion that the Apocalypse is resistance literature and a political critique of the first century Roman Empire. He maintains that the faithful saints are not only engaged in a cosmic battle with evil but are engaged in a battle against the Roman Empire which is influenced by cosmic evils. Disassociation from the Empire and its evils will cause persecution and suffering.

In chapter three of *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, entitled ‘The Lamb and the Throne’, Bauckham deals with how Christ establishes God’s kingdom on the earth. In this chapter he posits the principle ‘What Christ does, God does’.⁹³ Bauckham suggests that Christ’s death is the way that God rules the world. Though God is portrayed in heaven as ‘the One who sits on the throne’ in Revelation 4-5, Bauckham shows God is still present in the earth as the Lamb who conquers by suffering. ‘Christ’s suffering witness and sacrificial death are, in fact, the key event in God’s conquest of evil and establishment of his kingdom on earth.’⁹⁴ Bauckham

⁸⁸ In this chapter division, Sweet offers a grammatical analysis of the word *μαρτυρία* to show that the testimony of Jesus is the witness of Jesus within the martyrs that inspires them to bear witness. This testimony brings suffering and death. Yet, suffering is not the content of the witness. The kerygma is the content of the witness and is what brings humankind to repentance.

⁸⁹ Sweet examines the structure of Revelation, the use of Zechariah, and the rebirth of images to show that God’s victory in Revelation liberates and heals.

⁹⁰ Sweet shows that the witness of the saints does not bring a final victory. Finally victory is accomplished by God’s vindication.

⁹¹ R. Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

⁹² R. Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy* (New York, NY: T&T Clark, 1993).

⁹³ Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, p. 63.

⁹⁴ Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, p. 64.

believes that saints are expected to suffer for their witness just the same. He elaborates on this expectation in chapter four of *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, entitled ‘The Victory of the Lamb and His Followers’. Here, Bauckham identifies faithful witness as one of three major symbolic themes of the Apocalypse. Though ‘witness’ did not yet carry the meaning of one who dies for the faith, ‘it strongly implied that faithful witness will incur opposition and lead to death’.⁹⁵

Later in chapter four, Bauckham goes on to show that the Lamb’s death was a victory over evil (5.9-11) and Christians actively participate in this victory by bearing witness to the Lamb, even to the point of giving up their lives.⁹⁶ Bauckham refers to this as a ‘working out’ of the Lamb’s victory by the saints, which comes through much suffering.⁹⁷ In the same chapter, Bauckham notes that after the suffering of the witnesses has accomplished its purpose of bringing an end to the rule of evil, God vindicates the martyrs who suffered evil, as seen in the one thousand years. Bauckham determines that the period of one thousand years is not a literal period of time. Rather, it demonstrates the triumph of the martyrs. Those who suffered at the hands of the beast truly live and will rule, universally. Hence, this period of one thousand years shows that the faithful witnesses who suffer will be vindicated (though it does not show how).⁹⁸

Unique to Bauckham’s understanding of faithful witness and suffering is chapter eight of *The Climax of Prophecy*, entitled ‘The Apocalypse as Christian War Scroll’. In this chapter, Bauckham explores other apocalyptic traditions and compares the Apocalypse of John to a Jewish understanding of holy war by examining the text as a ‘War Scroll’. John removes the Jewish expectation of armed violence in order to win a holy war and replaces it with faithful witness which includes suffering. Bauckham suggests that this displays the Apocalypse’s central message, that God’s purpose (the coming of the Kingdom and the doing away of evil) occurs through the faithful disciples’ participation with the Lamb’s sufferings which will be followed by later vindication.⁹⁹

⁹⁵ Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, p. 72.

⁹⁶ Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, p. 75, notes that the blood of the Lamb in 12.11 does not only refer to Christ’s death but also to the death of Christ’s faithful disciples.

⁹⁷ Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, p. 93, does not suggest that every faithful witness has to be put to death or will be put to death, but they must be prepared to be put to death.

⁹⁸ Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, p. 108.

⁹⁹ See Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, p. xvi.

M. Bredin (2003)

In 2003, M. Bredin, associate lecturer at Cambridge University, published a monograph entitled *Jesus, Revolutionary of Peace*.¹⁰⁰ Bredin aims to show that Jesus was a nonviolent revolutionary of peace, similar to Gandhi. To do so, Bredin uses historical biblical exegesis and intertextuality to approach Revelation. Bredin's work is divided into three parts. In part one, he gives his definition of nonviolence and shows the similarities between Jesus and Gandhi. In chapter four in this part, he makes a unique contribution to scholarship by dividing the ways in which Revelation has been understood in terms of violence and vengeance into two responses. Response one suggests that, though Revelation does not call believers to use violence, God will use violence against his enemies.¹⁰¹ Response number two, which Bredin argues in favor of, emphasizes the Slaughtered Lamb.¹⁰² He notes, 'The war metaphor is rebirthed in light of suffering witness'.¹⁰³

In part two, Bredin examines Revelation's literary and social contexts, giving special attention to the OT and later Jewish traditions. In chapter seven in this part, Bredin includes a section entitled 'Witnesses who Suffer'.¹⁰⁴ Bredin selects seven witnesses based upon their willingness to suffer for others vicariously. He sums up this section with seven key points about the witnesses: (1) they proclaim God's word to all opposed to God, (2) they suffer, (3) they are willing to die for their beliefs, (4) they take upon themselves another's suffering or death, (5) they will be justified by God, (6) they benefit their own people, and (7) they benefit the nations.¹⁰⁵ Bredin suggests these ideas reappear in Revelation.

In part three, Bredin presents a nonviolent Christology of the Book of Revelation. In chapter 12 in this part, he examines Christ as the Pierced Servant and concludes that Jesus suffered as a faithful witness. This is similar to Gandhi's vision of *satyagraha*.¹⁰⁶ In chapter 13 in this part,

¹⁰⁰ M. Bredin, *Jesus, Revolutionary of Peace* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2003).

¹⁰¹ See Bredin, *Jesus, Revolutionary of Peace*, pp. 26-27. Here he engages with A. Yarbro Collins, *The Apocalypse* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1979); E. Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1991); J.L. Coker, 'Peace and the Apocalypse: Stanley Hauerwas and Miroslav Volf on the Eschatological Basis for Christian Nonviolence', *EQ* 71.3 (1999), pp. 261-68.

¹⁰² See Bredin, *Jesus, Revolutionary of Peace*, pp. 28-33. Here he engages with Klassen, 'Vengeance in the Apocalypse of John'; J.P.M. Sweet, *Revelation*; Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*.

¹⁰³ Bredin, *Jesus, Revolutionary of Peace*, p. 34.

¹⁰⁴ These witnesses include Moses, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 40-55, the suffering servants in Daniel, the Pierced One in Zechariah 12.10, and the suffering witnesses in the Psalms.

¹⁰⁵ Bredin, *Jesus, Revolutionary of Peace*, p. 76.

¹⁰⁶ Bredin, *Jesus, Revolutionary of Peace*, p. 175.

Bredin examines Christ as the Son of Man, noting that that Son of Man depicts Christ as a humanlike figure and suffering servant who gives witness.¹⁰⁷ In chapter 14 in this part, Bredin examines Jesus as the Lamb, suggesting that Christ is ‘not presented here as a vindictive, vengeful figure. He is the one who suffered the violence of the world and was rejected because he represented the truth.’¹⁰⁸ In chapter 15 in this part, Bredin examines Jesus as the rider on the white horse and proposes how Christ can be both the rider and the Lamb. Bredin concludes that John ‘subverts and mocks certain readings and interpretation of the tradition to which he is an heir in presenting Jesus as a nonviolent, faithful witness whose message is for all the nations’.¹⁰⁹

S. Pattemore (2004)

In 2004, S. Pattemore, a translation consultant with the United Bible Society, produced a monograph entitled *The People of God in the Apocalypse: Discourse, Structure, and Exegesis*,¹¹⁰ where he frames God’s people as actors in an apocalyptic drama. Pattemore uses relevance theory to sharpen other existing hermeneutical strategies and appreciate the structure of the text. In doing so, Pattemore seeks to show how the audience of the Apocalypse identified with its characters.

In chapter four, entitled ‘Souls Under the Altar – a martyr ecclesiology’, Pattemore points to 6.9-11, the plea of the martyrs. Within this plea, Pattemore believes that John has set up a ‘tension’ that dominates the rest of the Apocalypse and plays an important part in the literary structure. ‘The death of God’s people ... and their cry for judgment and vindication, is clearly a major part of the design of John’s literary tapestry, with the threads originating at 6:9-11 crossing and re-crossing in many ways, and at certain important points forming more clearly visible patterns.’¹¹¹ He suggests that, from this, the audience would understand suffering as affecting the whole of humanity of which they, as followers of Christ, are a part. As faithful Christians, they will experience a unique part of that suffering in the form of persecution, to which the souls under the altar of the fifth seal (6.9-11) point.¹¹² Pattemore forms three conclusions to end

¹⁰⁷ Bredin, *Jesus, Revolutionary of Peace*, p. 180.

¹⁰⁸ Bredin, *Jesus, Revolutionary of Peace*, pp. 195-96.

¹⁰⁹ Bredin, *Jesus, Revolutionary of Peace*, p. 215.

¹¹⁰ S. Pattemore, *The People of God in the Apocalypse: Discourse, Structure, and Exegesis* (SNTSMS 128; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

¹¹¹ Pattemore, *The People of God in the Apocalypse*, p. 91. Pattemore examines four ‘focal passages that re-echo’ the themes of 6.9-11. These passages are Rev. 12.10-12; 16.5-7; 19.1-2; 20.3-4.

¹¹² The souls under the altar are people who have died. Yet, the audience would understand from reading the Apocalypse that suffering is not just limited to death. Other forms of suffering precede death.

chapter four: (1) the church is a martyr church which is willing to sacrifice their lives,¹¹³ (2) the martyred model Christ, and (3) the audience of the Apocalypse is constantly challenged to identify with the martyr church.

In chapter five, entitled ‘Companions of the Lamb – a messianic ecclesiology’, Pattemore shows how OT military imagery is used by John to frame the people of God as an army in the Apocalypse. Yet, Pattemore makes it clear that the army in the Apocalypse does not take the offensive. He suggests that their victory comes through (1) the sovereignty of God in choosing and protecting them, (2) the effectiveness of the Lamb as their salvation and victory, and (3) their participation in the Lamb’s suffering. ‘In the face of this cosmic drama with its bleak and wonderful outlook, three words sum up the response called for from the audience. Obedience, faithfulness, and endurance are implicitly and explicitly encouraged.’¹¹⁴

B.K. Blount (2005)

In 2005, B.K. Blount, former Richard J. Dean Professor of New Testament Interpretation at Princeton Theological Seminary (Princeton, NJ) and President of Union Presbyterian Seminary (Richmond, VA), published a monograph entitled *Can I Get a Witness? Reading Revelation Through African American Culture*.¹¹⁵

Blount brings his perspective as an African American Christian to the text and argues from his ‘cultural lens’ that God ‘deploys the violently Slaughtered Lamb as a homeopathic cure for the very violence that slaughtered him and now threatens those who follow him’.¹¹⁶ To accomplish this task, Blount develops a methodology centered around cultural studies. This methodology takes into account what Blount calls readings ‘from below’ or subcultures and their indigenous materials.

In chapter three, entitled ‘Can I Get a Witness’, Blount contributes a section called ‘6:9-11 Tortured Witness’ where he examines the slaughtered souls under the altar. Blount asks why John depicts the souls as ‘slaughtered’, noting that John’s emphasis on the martyrs’ ‘slaughter’ is similar to ‘black folk huddled before pictures and stories of mutilated runaways or lynched relatives’. He goes on to say, ‘The horror was not remembered so as to be found redemptive; it

¹¹³ Pattemore admits that John did not think all Christians would be martyred and there is a thread in the structural tapestry which indicates this notion in 19.1-2.

¹¹⁴ Pattemore, *The People of God in the Apocalypse*, p. 195.

¹¹⁵ B.K. Blount, *Can I Get a Witness? Reading Revelation Through African American Culture* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005).

¹¹⁶ Blount, *Can I Get a Witness*, p. x.

was remembered so as to provoke action, perhaps that kind of action that might, before it brought transformation, well result in even more of the slaughter'.¹¹⁷ Blount suggests that by 'showcasing' the 'slaughter', John was producing more witness. But this witness is not without victory. In chapter three, under the sections '20:4 Triumphant Witness' and '12:10-12 Victorious Witness', Blount shows that the death of the souls under the altar leads to triumph. Hence, Rev. 6.9-11 is what 'did' happen and 12.10-12 is what 'will' happen.¹¹⁸ In light of this, Blount also suggests that slaughter equals power. Christians follow this example of slaughter as their way of discipleship. However, Blount does not see this as passive suffering. 'The problem is that slaves came to believe through white teaching and their own internalization of white supremacy that *their* unmerited suffering was God's chosen tactic for effective removal [of evil].'¹¹⁹

To follow the Lamb, Blount suggests that believers are not to accept suffering passively in an attempt to valorize it. He takes Martin Luther King Jr's words, 'But we must go forth with the faith that unearned suffering is redemptive' to suggest that redemptive suffering is not just passive acceptance. 'Unearned suffering' means, on the one hand, the slaughtered received suffering they did not deserve, yet on the other hand, the slaughtered did earn this suffering through nonviolent, active (not passive) witness. This is the same way Antipas (2.14) and Christ's followers earned their death and John earned his exile – through active witnessing for Christ (not just passively accepting suffering). As Blount says, 'Undeserved suffering is often well "earned"'.¹²⁰

T.B. Slater (2019)

In 2019, T.B. Slater, professor of New Testament language and literature at the McAfee School of Theology at Mercer University (Atlanta, GA), produced a monograph entitled *Revelation as Civil Disobedience*.¹²¹ Christian victory over evil that comes through suffering¹²² is a prevalent theme that runs through this work. Slater does not fail to mention it at least a dozen times. Methodologically, Slater warns against approaching Revelation using 'narrow exegesis'.¹²³ Instead, Slater provides a reading of Revelation relevant to the topic of suffering. He says,

¹¹⁷ Blount, *Can I Get a Witness*, p. 53.

¹¹⁸ Blount, *Can I Get a Witness*, p. 65.

¹¹⁹ Blount, *Can I Get a Witness*, p. 72.

¹²⁰ Blount, *Can I Get a Witness*, p. 85.

¹²¹ T.B. Slater, *Revelation as Civil Disobedience* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2019).

¹²² Slater, *Revelation as Civil Disobedience*, p. xi.

¹²³ Slater, *Revelation as Civil Disobedience*, pp. 96-103, gives several examples of narrow exegesis: (1) 'the prosperity gospel' which decries violence in Revelation because it does not seem to fit in with the rest of the NT, (2)

This reading of Revelation provides a needed corrective to the assumption that since there was no empire-wide persecution that there was no suffering. Further, this position relates John's Apocalypse to first- and early second-century CE Christian and Roman writers who describe the low social statuses of Christians. Christians suffered not because of their criminality but often merely because of what people thought of them.¹²⁴

In chapter one, 'Apocalypse Defined', Slater points out three examples of Christian suffering in Revelation 2-3: (1) the slander and impending imprisonment the church at Smyrna faced (2.8-11), (2) the death of Antipas in Pergamum (2.13), and (3) the pressures the church in Philadelphia felt to conform to traditional Judaism (3.8-10).¹²⁵ Slater challenges those who think that Revelation 2-3 was not written as a response to Christian suffering. He calls for a 'nuanced and culturally informed reading'¹²⁶ in order to see that these chapters were indeed a response to social suffering. On this view, Revelation 2-3 fits the rest of Revelation, which is about nonviolent resistance to a hostile Roman Empire. Slater goes on to point out that Revelation develops a Christological rationale for Christian distress. 'The crucifixion and the resurrection have powerfully reshaped the Christology of the Book of Revelation by redefining victory as victory through suffering ...'¹²⁷ In chapter two, 'Worthy is the Lamb', Slater expands upon this rationale by presenting five Christological truths from Revelation: (1) Christ is the Lord of the cosmos and God shares his divine honors with him (1.8, 17-18; 19.11; 21.5; 22.6),¹²⁸ (2) Christ is God's divine agent and judge to defeat the enemies of God (19.11-21),¹²⁹ (3) Christ leads an eschatological community of priest-kings to the New Jerusalem (1.6; 7.1-17; 14.1-5; 19.1-10),¹³⁰ (4) victory comes through suffering,¹³¹ and (5) the work of Christ in Revelation is multifaceted, both pastorally and judicially. Christ gives, guides, and comforts his people, but he also vindicates them.¹³²

reading Revelation through the lens of Manifest Destiny, (3) using Revelation as a guide to determine when Christ will return, and (4) using Revelation to convict people of their sinful state before Christ returns.

¹²⁴ Slater, *Revelation as Civil Disobedience*, p. 30.

¹²⁵ Slater, *Revelation as Civil Disobedience*, pp. 18-19.

¹²⁶ Slater, *Revelation as Civil Disobedience*, p. 22.

¹²⁷ Slater, *Revelation as Civil Disobedience*, p. 30.

¹²⁸ Slater suggests that Christ is worthy of the divine honor because he remained faithful to God. If Christians emulate Christ's faithfulness, they will overcome like Christ.

¹²⁹ Slater notes that Christ redefined victory by using faithfulness, instead expediency, to defeat God's enemies.

¹³⁰ Slater suggests that the eschatological community's participation in Christ's return is vindication for their faithfulness.

¹³¹ Slater posits that the images of Christ in 1.5-6; 5.9-10; and 19.13 are interlocked. John uses these images to turn the believer's suffering into salvation and coping.

¹³² Slater, *Revelation as Civil Disobedience*, p. 30.

Central to Slater's work is the motif of Christ the Slain Lamb which appears throughout Revelation. In chapter two, 'Worthy is the Lamb', Slater shows five functions the Slain Lamb performs for the Christian community. (1) The Lamb leads the eschatological community to the New Jerusalem and protects it along the way. (2) The Lamb is concerned for the community. (3) The Lamb's determinism assures God's people of victory and encourages them to keep the faith. (4) The Lamb makes war against God's enemies and defeats them (12.10-12; 17.14). (5) The Lamb brings about a unity consisting of himself (the Lamb), God Almighty, and the Christian martyrs. Concerning these functions, Slater says, 'The Lamb is the ruler of the cosmos through suffering (17.14; 19.16) and those who follow his example will be redeemed ... This messianic image would have enabled the original audience to identify with Christ in a way that would have strengthened them during their own trials.'¹³³

In chapter three, 'Bearing Witness', Slater shows how John redefines victory to mean victory through suffering. To do this, Slater suggests John transformed the meanings of the words *νικάω* and *μάρτυς*.¹³⁴ John 'transformed *nikao* and its cognates from a political, athletic, or legal victory to victory through suffering'.¹³⁵ Because of this, Slater points out that the followers of Christ are victors and conquer through faithfulness that leads to their own death. He notes that John demonstrates this in the letters to the seven churches (2-3) and calls this sort of conquering through suffering the 'Christian *modus vivendi*' as portrayed in Christ (1.5; 3.14). Slater also notes that John transforms the word 'martyr' (which meant 'legal testimony') into a word that means 'dying for one's faith'.¹³⁶

Protest

A.A. Boesak (1987)

In 1987 A.A. Boesak published his monograph, *Comfort and Protest: The Apocalypse of John from a South African Perspective*.¹³⁷ A South African clergyman and former President of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, he was one of the foremost outspoken voices against apartheid. While in prison in 1985, Boesak asserts he had an angelic visitation like unto John the

¹³³ Slater, *Revelation as Civil Disobedience*, p. 68.

¹³⁴ See Rossing, *The Rapture Exposed*, p. 122.

¹³⁵ Slater, *Revelation as Civil Disobedience*, p. 68.

¹³⁶ Slater, *Revelation as Civil Disobedience*, p. 94.

¹³⁷ A.A. Boesak, *Comfort and Protest: The Apocalypse of John from a South African Perspective* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2017).

Seers' experience on Patmos. In this moment he sensed the 'comfort and protest' of the Lord had come alive in him.

Boesak provides a narrative, contemporary-historical reading of the text as a South African under apartheid. The idea of suffering permeates this reading. He even admits that for one to interpret the Apocalypse as it is meant to be understood, one has to have suffered. Boesak goes as far to say that the suffering of Christians under political oppression is the 'explicit theme' of the Apocalypse.¹³⁸ The genre of apocalyptic begs this conclusion as Boesak believes that apocalyptic is always 'against a backdrop of persecution and suffering'.¹³⁹ Its symbols and other elements explore humankind's deepest questions, namely suffering and how God intervenes and brings about a just world.

Boesak engages Revelation as 'protest literature'.¹⁴⁰ In his introduction, Boesak notes that suffering shapes this sort of engagement with the text:

This is the key. Those who do not know this suffering through oppression, who do not struggle together with God's people for the sake of the gospel, and who do not feel in their own bodies the meaning of oppression and the freedom and joy of fighting against it shall have grave difficulty understanding this letter from Patmos.¹⁴¹

Boesak divides his work into seven chapters based on seven motifs in Revelation: (1) the blessing, (2) the scroll, (3) the seven seals, (4) the woman and the dragon, (5) the beast from the sea and the beast from the earth, (6) the fall of Babylon, and (7) the Beginning and the End.

In chapter one, Boesak designates the term 'suffering little people of God' to refer to Christians. Boesak suggests that the blessing they receive in 1.4-6 reminds of the Exodus and Israel's liberation from slavery. In chapter two, 'The Scroll', Boesak says that the scroll needs to be opened to explain why the world has suffered so much. 'If the scroll is not opened, those tormenting riddles will remain unsolved.'¹⁴² Yet, the Lamb is worthy to open the scroll because of his willingness to give himself for his people. The liberation of the suffering little people of God is in this sacrifice.

¹³⁸ Boesak, *Comfort and Protest*, p. 33. Boesak suggests that the theme of suffering develops in the NT and culminates in Revelation. Paul speaks of suffering, and political oppression under his time was only heightening. Peter's tone suggests suffering had escalated further, and such escalation comes to a head in Revelation.

¹³⁹ Boesak, *Comfort and Protest*, p. 15.

¹⁴⁰ Boesak, *Comfort and Protest*, p. 38.

¹⁴¹ Boesak, *Comfort and Protest*, p. 38.

¹⁴² Boesak, *Comfort and Protest*, p. 54.

In chapter three, 'The Seven Opened Seals', Boesak addresses the souls under the altar (6.9-11) and calls their prayer 'a cry of pain and anguish ... a cry of protest'.¹⁴³ Boesak counters those who call this prayer antichristian, suggesting those who call it such do not know what suffering and oppression are.¹⁴⁴ In chapter four, 'The Woman and the Dragon', Boesak uses Revelation 12 to show how God becomes passionately involved in the earth when God's people protest. In chapter five, 'The Beast from the Sea and the Beast from the Earth', Boesak suggests that Revelation 13 shows the cycle of human history that continues to repeat. The first beast represents a demonized state, and the second beast represents that which provides the theological justification for the state to be oppressive. In chapter six, 'The Fall of Babylon', Boesak uses Revelation 17-19 to show how God brings judgment upon the nations which leads Boesak to chapter seven, 'The End and the Beginning', where Boesak uses Revelation 21-22 to conclude that there must be a new heaven and a new earth because this earth is home to the suffering of God's people. This earth is 'where little children die untimely because they eat shreds of newspaper mixed with scraps of food ... it cannot simply be called home for the children of God's heart'.¹⁴⁵ Boesak suggests that the new world is the reward for the oppressed – 'for their faithfulness, their willingness to suffer for the cause of Christ'.¹⁴⁶

Prophetic Fulfillment

G.E. Ladd (1988)

In 1988, G.E. Ladd, former Professor of New Testament exegesis and theology at Fuller Theological Seminary, contributes an entry entitled 'Revelation' in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*.¹⁴⁷ Ladd suggests that 'the basic problem of Jewish eschatology is theodicy'.¹⁴⁸ He says Jewish apocalypses are 'tracts for bad times' that 'offer a theological solution to the enigma of suffering of a righteous people'.¹⁴⁹ Ladd contrasts these to Revelation, which he suggests is not 'a tract for bad times'. Instead it is a 'denouement of redemptive history' which shows the struggle of the kingdom of God and the evils of Satan under the ministry of Jesus.

¹⁴³ Boesak, *Comfort and Protest*, p. 69.

¹⁴⁴ Boesak, *Comfort and Protest*, p. 72.

¹⁴⁵ Boesak, *Comfort and Protest*, p. 131.

¹⁴⁶ Boesak, *Comfort and Protest*, p. 133.

¹⁴⁷ G.E. Ladd, 'Revelation', in G.W. Bromiley (ed.), *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), pp. 171-76.

¹⁴⁸ Ladd, 'Revelation', p. 173.

¹⁴⁹ Ladd, 'Revelation', p.173.

According to Ladd, John believes that suffering believers are sharing in the suffering of Christ.¹⁵⁰ This suffering is caused by cosmic evil. Yet, God has not abandoned his people. God is active in redemptive history. The Lion who conquers is the Lamb who has been slain. Hence, this evil is a defeated enemy, and the martyrdom of the saints is their victory. Ladd makes the point that the theology of the early church was not so much as to explain evil any further than what the Apocalypse offered, which is supported by the notion that there are no other Christian apocalypses in the NT canon after the Apocalypse of John.¹⁵¹

J.M. Hamilton, Jr. (2013)

In 2013, J.M. Hamilton Jr., Associate Professor of Biblical Theology at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, KY, contributed a journal article entitled ‘Suffering in Revelation: The Fulfillment of the Messianic Woes’ in *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*.¹⁵² Hamilton understands Revelation as an apocalyptic and prophetic letter that encourages the Christian faithful amidst their suffering and exhorts their perseverance to the end. He approaches the text by examining its literary structure and its symbolic timeline. Unlike many dispensationalists, Hamilton does not believe that the church will be raptured before or even during the seventieth week. Instead, the church ‘will be preserved through the persecution of one three and a half year period (Rev. 11.2-3; 12.6,14) then given over to the beast’s persecution in the second three and a half year period (13.5-8)’.¹⁵³ Hamilton proposes that the afflictions seen in Revelation are ‘the outworking’ of the Messianic Woes that must be fulfilled before the fulfillment of all things.¹⁵⁴

Hamilton examines a number of chiastic arrangements that unpack John’s idea of suffering in Revelation. The first arrangement he sees is the opening and closing section (1.1-8; 22.8-21). This arrangement highlights that the consummation of all things is near and encourages the

¹⁵⁰ Donald Guthrie makes the point that suffering saints are sharing in Christ’s suffering in a section entitled ‘the suffering of God’s people’ under a section on Revelation in his *New Testament Theology*. See D. Guthrie, *New Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1981), pp. 814-15.

¹⁵¹ Ladd, ‘Revelation’, p.173.

¹⁵² J.M. Hamilton Jr., ‘Suffering in Revelation: The Fulfillment of the Messianic Woes’, *SBJT* 17.4 (2013), pp. 34-47.

¹⁵³ See Hamilton, ‘Suffering in Revelation’, p. 37.

¹⁵⁴ According to Hamilton, the ‘Messianic Woes’ refer to the persecution of the saints and the times of the Gentiles found in Daniel 7-9; Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 21; Jn 16.33; Acts 14.22; 2 Cor. 4.17; 1 Thess. 3.3-4; 2 Thess. 2.3-4; 1 Tim. 4.1-3; 2 Tim. 1.8-12; 2.3, 8-10; Heb. 10.32-38; Jas. 1.2; Rev. 1.9; 2.10; 6.11; 7.14; 11.4-11. See J.M. Hamilton Jr., *God’s Glory in Salvation Through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), p. 493.

church to persevere. The next arrangement is the church on earth and the church in the glory of the new heaven and new earth (1.1-8; 22.8-21). This arrangement suggests that their persecution will culminate in eternal bliss. The third arrangement is the throne room scene paired with the return of Christ, his thousand-year reign, and the great white throne judgment (4-6; 19.11-21.15). This arrangement points to God's righteous judgment and the mercy believers will receive. The fourth arrangement is the sealing of the 144,000 and the blowing of the trumpets paired with the redemption of the 144,000 and the pouring out the bowls of wrath (7.1-9.21; 14.1-19.10). This arrangement speaks of protection from God's wrath and judgment. The fifth arrangement is John who eats the scroll Christ as a true prophet paired with the rise of the false beast (10.1-11; 13.11-18). This distinguishes between the true and the false. The sixth arrangement is a matching section that shows the faithful testimony of believers amidst satanic attack (11.1-14; 12.1-13.10). Despite all that Satan does to the church to make them suffer, the church's faithfulness spares them from God's wrath. Finally, Hamilton points out that at the center of the chiasmic arrangements in Revelation, there is an announcement that Christ is the king. He will conquer and judge and bring reward to those who endure (11.15-19).

Justice/Judgment

E. Schüssler Fiorenza (1991)

In 1991, E. Schüssler Fiorenza, Krister Stendahl Professor of Divinity at Harvard Divinity School in Cambridge, MA, published *Revelation: Vision of a Just World*.¹⁵⁵ Methodologically, Schüssler Fiorenza employs a feminist strategy of rhetorical reading¹⁵⁶ by (1) reading the grammatically masculine language as generic language, (2) reading the sexual language and female images as conventional language that should be understood in its traditional and present contexts, and (3) reading Revelation with reference to sex/gender as well as with reference to the Western patriarchy, racism, classism, colonialism, and sexism. According to Schüssler Fiorenza, this approach is important for a critical feminist-liberationist interpretation of Revelation.¹⁵⁷

Schüssler Fiorenza's work is divided into three parts. Part one is the introduction. Part two is her hermeneutical commentary where she provides a historical-literary-critical reading of

¹⁵⁵ E. Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World*. See also E. Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgment* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1998).

¹⁵⁶ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World*, p. 20, notes that she uses this method to 'explore the persuasive power of Revelation's symbolic language within the book's overall structure of meaning as well as within the rhetorical situation that is inscribed in the text and rooted in a particular sociohistorical matrix'.

¹⁵⁷ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World*, p. 14.

Revelation. In part three, she reflects on what she sees as Revelation's central problem and topic, power and justice, using a theo-ethical model of praxis.¹⁵⁸

In the part two, Schüssler Fiorenza suggests that the suffering experienced by everyday Christians in Asia Minor would have posed deep theological questions for them. They would wonder why they have to suffer if Christ is the true ruler of the world.¹⁵⁹ With this thought in mind, Schüssler Fiorenza considers the cry of the souls under the altar in (6.9-11). 'They ask the centuries old question of those who suffer for God's cause and justice.'¹⁶⁰ Schüssler Fiorenza suggests that this is plea for those who have been slaughtered as well as 'a plea for vindication for God in the eyes of those who have placed their trust in God'.¹⁶¹ She critiques those who see a problem with the martyrs' cries for justice as being irreconcilable with NT Christian doctrine. Until one feels the anguish caused by tumultuous suffering and injustice, they cannot correctly adjudicate the matter precisely.

In part three, Schüssler Fiorenza reflects on her interpretation of Revelation. Her liberationist reading of Revelation subordinates cosmic destruction to the desire Revelation expresses for justice. She suggests that this justice is not realized through the destruction of the world (rhetoric which is dangerous in a time when human beings have the technology to destroy themselves) but rather in seeing our present sufferings as a part of the struggle we face as we vie for a world free of oppression.¹⁶²

J.S. Duvall (2016)

In 2016, J.S. Duvall, Professor of New Testament and the J.C. and Mae Fuller Chair of Biblical Studies at Ouachita Baptist University, published a book entitled *The Heart of Revelation: Understanding the 10 Essential Themes of the Bible's Final Book*.¹⁶³

Methodologically, Duvall uses a theological approach to see the big picture, while treating Revelation as a prophetic apocalyptic letter that comforts and assures the suffering. He divides Revelation into ten main themes, each of which is a chapter. Chapter seven is entitled 'Judgment: *How Long Sovereign, Lord*'. Within it, Duvall posits that the one thing that is worse than evil is a

¹⁵⁸ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World*, p. 117.

¹⁵⁹ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World*, p. 55.

¹⁶⁰ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World*, p. 64.

¹⁶¹ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World*, p. 64.

¹⁶² Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World*, p. 122.

¹⁶³ J.S. Duvall, *The Heart of Revelation: Understanding the 10 Essential Themes of the Bible's Final Book* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2016).

God who refuses to condemn it. ‘Revelation’s strong and steady answer is, “No, evil will not win, because God Almighty will defeat and destroy evil.”’¹⁶⁴ Duvall examines Rev. 6.9-10 and suggests that God’s judgment on evil connects to the prayers of those who suffer. He notes that this is seen further in Rev. 8.3-5 where an angel receives incense and the prayers of God’s people to offer on the altar. This indicates that the faithful who are suffering are heard by God. Hence, Revelation is encouraging those who suffer to cry out for justice. Duvall goes on to show that Revelation 18-19 teaches readers to rejoice in this justice.¹⁶⁵ According to Duvall, the downfall of Babylon ‘does not mean delighting in the suffering of sinners, but instead it means celebrating God’s justice’.¹⁶⁶ Finally, Duvall notes the Hallelujah chorus in Revelation 19 suggests that God is aware of the suffering of those who suffer and is doing something about it, answering the question of the souls under the altar in Rev. 6.10.¹⁶⁷

Hope

J.C. Beker (1994)

In 1994, J.C. Beker, former Professor of Biblical Theology at Princeton Theological Seminary, offered an important and substantial biblical theology of suffering in *Suffering & Hope: The Biblical Vision and the Human Predicament*.¹⁶⁸ Beker experienced suffering first hand as a young man in WWII doing forced labor for the German military machine as a Nazi slave.

In his monograph, Beker takes a theological approach to suffering from both the OT and NT. In the introduction, Beker evaluates his culture in light of the term ‘apocalyptic’. He notes that the culture’s use of ‘apocalyptic’ and the Scriptural definition differ. In Scripture, ‘apocalyptic’ refers to ‘a drama of increasing evil in history which, within God’s overarching control and purpose, will be reversed and transformed by what the Bible calls the *Apocalypse*, that is, by the final revelation of God’.¹⁶⁹ In contrast, he points out that contemporary culture only sees the first half as being true of apocalyptic. Apocalyptic is ‘the drama of the chaotic increase of evil in

¹⁶⁴ Duvall, *The Heart of Revelation*, p. 138.

¹⁶⁵ See C.S. Keener, ‘Suffering and Exploitation in Revelation’, <https://www.craigkeener.com/suffering-and-exploitation-in-revelation/> (accessed June 12, 2020). Keener considers suffering caused by the exploitation of peasants in the importing of goods from Egypt to Rome (Rev. 18.12-13).

¹⁶⁶ Duvall, *The Heart of Revelation*, p. 147.

¹⁶⁷ See R. Dalrymple, *Follow the Lamb* (Wooster, OH: Weaver Book Company, 2017), pp. 161-69, who concludes his monograph with a chapter entitled ‘Revelation and Justice’. Within this chapter, he engages judgment in Revelation as a means to encourage those who suffer to remain faithful.

¹⁶⁸ J.C. Beker, *Suffering & Hope: The Biblical Vision and the Human Predicament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994).

¹⁶⁹ Beker, *Suffering & Hope*, p. 23.

history which leads inevitably to the destruction and extinction of the life of the created order (now)!¹⁷⁰ Beker points out the contrast between the two views:

Whereas biblical apocalyptic talks of human life as a pilgrimage from and through suffering to glory, the vulgar use of apocalyptic speaks of human life as a pilgrimage from glory – whether interpreted as nostalgia or ‘the good ol days’ – to suffering, meaninglessness, and death in terms of a giant regression.¹⁷¹

Beker goes on to note that the contemporary understanding of suffering destroys any notion of hope. ‘Social interpersonal confusion and psychic intrapersonal disorder about the meaning of suffering join to increase the apocalyptic sense of doom and drive us from expectations of hopelessness into despair.’¹⁷² From this, Beker moves into his next chapters which attempt to find authentic Christian hope in light of suffering.

Beker provides his methodology in chapter one in order to bring Scriptural answers in relation to human suffering and hope. He calls this method ‘a catalytic reading of Scripture’.¹⁷³ Such an approach distinguishes between ‘coherence’ and ‘contingency’ and ‘opens up a dialogical relation between the text and our concerns’.¹⁷⁴

Beker engages the Book of Revelation in chapter three, which is entitled ‘Early Christian Life between Suffering and Hope’. He uses Revelation as one of his NT engagements because he sees suffering as one of its dominant themes and suggests that hope in the coming vindication of God lies at the heart of John’s reflections on suffering. These reflections held the first century church together despite the persecution they experienced under Domitian and gave them a unique response to suffering that was different from the ‘escape routes’ of the Gnostics and pluralistic religions of the time.

Within this chapter, Beker compares and contrasts Revelation’s suffering theology to suffering theology in 1 Peter and Pauline thought. He suggests that there are four ways in which their theologies match: (1) they share a pragmatic view of suffering, (2) they refrain from philosophical abstractions, (3) pragmatism is found within the context of actual, experienced

¹⁷⁰ Beker, *Suffering & Hope*, p. 23.

¹⁷¹ Beker, *Suffering & Hope*, p. 23.

¹⁷² Beker, *Suffering & Hope*, p. 27.

¹⁷³ According to Beker, *Suffering & Hope*, p. 32, this approach will ‘listen to the claim of the text on us, but it resists a literalistic and anachronistic transfer’.

¹⁷⁴ Beker, *Suffering & Hope*, p. 33.

suffering, and (4) suffering and hope go hand-in-hand and cannot be divorced from one another.¹⁷⁵

Despite their similarities, Beker believes Revelation is also acutely different. It is highly dualistic, contains an unusual vengeance motif, and is candid about the bloody punishments that God's enemies experience. The situation for the church in Revelation is so desperate that John can only curse Rome. Heavenly dramas and symbolism are used to intensify the picture of suffering in Revelation and point toward the cosmic conflict between good and evil that is felt upon the earth through suffering. Because the suffering is so intense, there is no room for hope in this world. Eschatological triumph is all that can be hoped for. Hence, suffering is passively endured.

Beker concludes chapter three with three important lessons about suffering in Revelation. (1) Acute suffering can harm Christian hope. (2) During acute suffering, hope can be infected with hostility and elitism that creates a dualism between the church and the world. (3) There are times when suffering is a mark of commitment to Christ.¹⁷⁶

Violence

R.A. Spencer (2001)

In 2001, R.A. Spencer, former Professor of Philosophy, Religion, Foreign Languages, and Literatures at Appalachian State University in North Carolina, published a journal article entitled 'Violence and Vengeance in Revelation' in *Review & Expositor*.¹⁷⁷ Spencer acknowledges that violence is often nuanced with negativity and unethical action. He asks if what we see in the Apocalypse is who God really is or if is an expression of what the Johannine community wanted God to be.¹⁷⁸

Spencer uses narrative patterns to explore this. He notes that the Apocalypse (1) is framed with chiasmus,¹⁷⁹ (2) utilizes metaphor to convey violent overtures¹⁸⁰ that demonstrate that

¹⁷⁵ Beker, *Suffering & Hope*, p. 76.

¹⁷⁶ Beker uses Germany in WWII and the apartheid in South Africa as examples.

¹⁷⁷ R.A. Spencer, 'Violence and Vengeance in Revelation', *RevExp* 98.1 (2001), pp. 59-75.

¹⁷⁸ Spencer quotes Klassen, 'No book in the NT canon poses this question [of divine vengeance] more sharply than the Apocalypse of John'. See Klassen, 'Vengeance in the Apocalypse of John', p. 301.

¹⁷⁹ The blessing for the faithful is pronounced at the beginning of the narrative (1.3) and at the end of the narrative (22.14). There are seven beatitudes (1.3; 14.13; 16.15; 19.9; 20.6; 22.7, 14), which amount is the perfect number. They herald the end of all things and instruct the faithful how they can be blessed as the end approaches. The language used by the beatitudes is a combination of blessing, eschatological warning, and ominous overtones.

¹⁸⁰ An example of a violent overture in the Apocalypse is the blood of Christ that is a cleansing agent (7.9, 13-14).

God's work gets disrupted,¹⁸¹ (3) employs traditional gospel language that urges steadfastness and faithfulness unto the end wherein the saints will rule (2.26-29), (4) offers oxymorons that 'strain the senses' and portray how God's rule will come about,¹⁸² (5) uses bizarre imagery that contradicts experience,¹⁸³ (6) applies numerology to show that not all will escape wrath (7.4-8), (7) adds 'white space' which shows dreadful acts that are too terrible to be interrupted by sound (8.1), and (8) takes advantage of personification and contrast to negate the reader's assumptions of rational truth.¹⁸⁴

Spencer shows that Christ and his followers are avenged after everything unfolds. But Spencer questions if the punishments the wicked receive are deserved. Here Spencer parts with Klassen. Klassen suggests that God's purposes in the punishments are to bring humankind to repentance. Spencer does not agree. He calls this notion a 'spin' on the text and says that there is no place in the Apocalypse where God's heart reaches out to the lost. God is interested in avenging the church and punishing those who are godless.¹⁸⁵ However, Spencer does agree with Klassen that the followers of Christ are never depicted as enjoying the torturing of the wicked nor do they ever, themselves, take part in punishing the wicked.¹⁸⁶

Spencer concludes that the community in Revelation was experiencing something so egregious that, to them, the Day of the Lord was the only appropriate measure of which they could think. The Apocalypse was their avenue of relief. Spencer gives them credit for retaliating using vengeful and violent literature and literary methods instead of resulting to military force and physical violence.

¹⁸¹ Spencer uses the death of the two witnesses as an example of God's work getting disrupted (11.7-8).

¹⁸² Two examples of oxymorons that strain the senses are the 'firstborn of the dead' (1.5) and the 'wrath of the Lamb' (6.16).

¹⁸³ Bizarre imagery that contradicts experience includes a slain lamb with seven horns and seven eyes (5.6); a talking eagle announcing woes (8.13); and locusts that look like horses with gold crowns, men's faces, women's hair, and lion's teeth (9.7-11).

¹⁸⁴ Example of personification are eagles crying aloud about horrors (8:13); a star having a key to the abyss (9:1); the earth serving as an accomplice to help the woman (12:16); and contrasts such as Christ being 'who is and who was and who is to come' (1:8).

¹⁸⁵ Spencer, 'Violence and Vengeance in Revelation', p. 70.

¹⁸⁶ Klassen, 'Vengeance in the Apocalypse of John', pp. 305, 309. R.H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Revelation of St. John* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1920), p. 176, notes that there is a tone of personal vengeance in the prayers of the souls under the altar. Charles suggests that the forerunner of 6.9-11 is 1 Enoch 47.2,4: 'And the hearts of the holy were filled with joy, Because ... the prayer of the righteous had been heard, And the blood of the righteous been required before the Lord of Spirits.' Klassen suggests that the use of 1 Enoch by John does not mean the saints are blood-thirsty or participants, but desire to see their prayer for justice answered. See Klassen, 'Vengeance in the Apocalypse of John', p. 302.

D.L. Barr (2003)

In 2003, D.L. Barr, Professor of Religion at Wright State University in Dayton, OH, contributed a chapter entitled ‘Doing Violence: Moral Issues in Reading John’s Apocalypse’ in a work he edited, *Reading the Book of Revelation: A Resource for Students*.¹⁸⁷ In this chapter, Barr offers an ethical critique of Revelation by examining coercion, delay, John’s own ethical stance, John’s language, and the setting in which John spoke. His reading considers violent images as well as the rejection of violent actions.¹⁸⁸

Barr introduces a dilemma: ‘For if God triumphs over evil only because God has more power than evil, then power – not love of goodness or truth – is the ultimate value of the universe’.¹⁸⁹

Barr expounds on this notion by bringing the souls under the altar into the discussion (Rev. 6.10). Their question, ‘How long?’, shows that John is aware of ethical concerns that come from those who suffer. ‘If God has the power to end suffering and evil, and intends one day to use that power, by what logic can God allow innocent suffering to continue?’¹⁹⁰

Barr suggests that the divine response to this question in 6.11 shows that there is ‘logic at work’. God is allowing evil to accumulate unto chaos and destruction. This logic works because victory comes *through* suffering.¹⁹¹ The Lion being replaced by a Lamb (5.5-6) demonstrates what Barr calls a ‘radical symbolic inversion’.¹⁹² Such an inversion retells the story and reconfigures symbols of violence into symbols that point to a suffering savior, encouraging the faithful to suffer through the evil, like their savior, unto victory.¹⁹³

Barr comes back to the question of why God is allowing evil to accumulate and produce further suffering. Barr points to 16.6, ‘Because they shed the blood of the saints and prophets, you have given them blood to drink. It is what they deserve!’ He says this is retributive justice. Hence, God allows evil to go on so that, through it, unjust societies fall. Through this suffering, God acts in love.

¹⁸⁷ D.L. Barr, ‘Doing Violence: Moral Issues in Reading John’s Apocalypse’, in D.L. Barr (ed.), *Reading the Book of Revelation: A Resource for Students* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), pp. 97-108.

¹⁸⁸ Barr, ‘Doing Violence’, p. 99.

¹⁸⁹ Barr, ‘Doing Violence’, pp. 98-99.

¹⁹⁰ Barr, ‘Doing Violence’, pp. 98-99.

¹⁹¹ Barr uses the image of the Slaughtered Lamb to suggest that victory comes through suffering (5.5-6). In overcoming his suffering, the Lamb became worthy to open the scrolls.

¹⁹² Barr, ‘Doing Violence’, p. 101. Such inversions are seen throughout the narrative, such as in 19.21 where the conquering sword comes from Christ’s mouth and not his arm.

¹⁹³ See D.L. Barr, ‘The Apocalypse as a Symbolic Transformation of the World: Literary Analysis’, *Int* 38.1 (1984), pp. 39-50.

Barr concludes:

John's vision peers behind the violence of this world, offering a glimpse of the cosmic war between good and evil, a war only won through suffering ... What must always be kept in mind, however, is that these images [violent images] of the conquest of evil, however immoral they may appear, always correspond to the innocent suffering of Jesus and of those who hold the testimony of Jesus.¹⁹⁴

P. Middleton (2018)

In 2018, P. Middleton, senior lecturer in New Testament and Early Christianity at the University of Chester (UK), produced a monograph entitled *The Violence of the Lamb: Martyrs as Agents of Divine Judgment in the Book of Revelation*.¹⁹⁵

Middleton is interested in examining John's theology of martyrdom. He begins by reconstructing the social world of the Apocalypse in chapter one and then examines the Christology of Revelation in chapters two-four. In chapter five, Middleton takes a concise look at martyrdom. So pervasive is the idea of suffering within martyrdom that Middleton calls suffering one of the 'key elements' in the Apocalypse.¹⁹⁶

In chapter two, Middleton argues that the Lamb seeks justice. In fact, he criticizes those who see the Lamb as only vulnerable. They come up short in their explanation for the Lamb's conquering might.¹⁹⁷ Middleton thinks that Christ's death is not vulnerability but that which he uses to take revenge on evil. He admits that, though Christ does overcome as a slain Lamb, the Slaughtered Lamb will come to make war on his enemies. He does not believe there is any incongruity between the Lion of Judah and the Slaughtered Lamb. The Lamb/Lion motif of 5.5-6 is 'complementary rather than contradictory'.¹⁹⁸

In chapter three, Middleton offers three distinct but similar Christophanies to show that Christ's suffering goes hand in hand with his glory and vengeance: (1) the Ancient of Days/Son of Man (1.12-20),¹⁹⁹ (2) the Christophany of the Lion/Lamb (6.15-16),²⁰⁰ (3) the Righteous

¹⁹⁴ Barr, 'Doing Violence', p. 107.

¹⁹⁵ P. Middleton, *The Violence of the Lamb: Martyrs as Agents of Divine Judgment in the Book of Revelation* (LNTS 586; New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2018).

¹⁹⁶ Middleton, *The Violence of the Lamb*, p. 27.

¹⁹⁷ Middleton, *The Violence of the Lamb*, p. 93, agrees with Klassen. 'As Klassen argues, the Lamb "is no weakling" but the "strongest weapon he has appears to be his own authority which he has won through suffering."' See also Klassen, 'Vengeance in the Apocalypse of John', p. 305.

¹⁹⁸ Middleton, *The Violence of the Lamb*, p. 15.

¹⁹⁹ The Christophany in 1.12-20 suggests that Christ still claims his glory though he has died. His death is not negated by his resurrection. Rather, his death gives him his glory.

²⁰⁰ The phrase ὀργή τοῦ ἀρνίου is used in the Christophany of 6.15-16 to suggest that the coming of Christ is associated more with judgment than repentance. Hence, the suffering Lamb also takes vengeance and seeks justice.

Judge (19.11-16).²⁰¹ Middleton concludes that Christ's suffering gives him the right to open up the scroll and take vengeance, making him an agent of wrath and violence and a facilitator of judgment.

In chapter five, Middleton finesses the word martyr to mean active participants in God's judgment. Middleton suggests that, for martyrs, taking vengeance with Christ is an incentive to undergo the suffering of being a faithful witness. In the end, the martyrs share in Christ's 'warring judgment'. Middleton points out that God judges the world 'for' the saints to avenge their blood. Though they conquer through suffering like the Lamb, the saints are 'vindicated, glorified, reign, and participate in judging those who persecuted them; martyrs *become* agents of divine judgment'.²⁰² He contrasts his conclusion on violence with Barr's.²⁰³ Middleton believes that John's use of violence is, in fact, coercive.²⁰⁴

Christ's Faithfulness

S.E. Tonstad (2006)

In 2006, S.E. Tonstad, Assistant Professor of Religion and Assistant Professor of Medicine at Loma Linda University (Loma Linda, CA) published a monograph entitled *Saving God's Reputation: The Theological Function of Pistis Iesou in the Cosmic Narratives of Revelation*.²⁰⁵ Tonstad's work seeks to show how the phrase *pistis Iesou* in Revelation demonstrates both Jesus' faithfulness to 'unmask' evil and Jesus' faithful disclosure of God's character.²⁰⁶

Methodologically, Tonstad says Revelation should be read as a theodicy to best understand the term *pistis Iesou*.²⁰⁷ He uses a narrative reading to focus on the cosmic narrative and, what may be most unique to his work, he examines Revelation's story line backwards, from ending to

Suffering and vengeance go hand in hand, and both are portrayed in the image of the Lion/Lamb (5.5-6). Thus, glory and suffering are associated together.

²⁰¹ The Christophany in 19.11-16 portrays Christ as a military warrior whose robes are stained in blood. The one who leads the armies of God is the one who has died.

²⁰² Emphasis mine.

²⁰³ See Barr, 'Doing Violence', p. 107.

²⁰⁴ Barr, 'Doing Violence', p. 100, suggests that John's use of violence is not coercive.

²⁰⁵ S.E. Tonstad, *Saving God's Reputation: The Theological Function of Pistis Iesou in the Cosmic Narratives of Revelation* (LNTS 337; New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2006).

²⁰⁶ Tonstad, *Saving God's Reputation*, p. xv.

²⁰⁷ See Tonstad, *Saving God's Reputation*, p. 3, suggests Revelation is 'a theodicy of God's handling of the reality of evil from its inception to its demise'.

beginning.²⁰⁸ Important to his methodology, is his grammatical handling of *pistis Iesou*, which he takes as a subjective genitive.

Tonstad's work is divided into three parts. In part one he offers his methodology. In part two, he examines the storyline of Revelation from the end, the middle, and the beginning and pays close attention to setting and sequencing as well as characters and plot. Throughout his analysis, Tonstad does not fail to acknowledge the intertextual relationship Revelation has with the OT. In part three Tonstad examines the meaning of *pistis Iesou* in Revelation with regard to literary and structural considerations.

Tonstad's method also offers a non-demythologized view of the narrative which sees the story centered around the main characters of the cosmic battle, Christ and Satan. This supernatural reading of the text is important to Tonstad's work in Revelation. 'Its author has a story to tell that does not make sense without Satan.'²⁰⁹ In chapter three, Tonstad notes that Revelation makes for 'a compelling theodicy' when Satan is read as a literal character in the story'.²¹⁰

In chapter seven, Tonstad goes on to suggest that the 'how long' question of the souls under the altar (6.9-11) echoes the 'quintessential theodicy question of the biblical narrative'.²¹¹ The theodicy dilemma they raise is solved by the Slaughtered Lamb (Rev. 5.3-6).²¹²

Theodicy

A.J. Köstenberger, L.S. Kellum, and C.L. Quarles (2009)

In 2009, A.J. Köstenberger (professor of New Testament and director of Ph.D. Studies at Southeastern Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, NC), L.S. Kellum (associate professor of New Testament and Greek at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary), and C.L. Quarles (vice president for Integration of Faith and Learning, professor of New Testament and Greek, and chair of the division of Christian Studies at Louisiana College in Pineville, LA) published their introduction to the New Testament entitled *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown*.²¹³ This

²⁰⁸ Tonstad examines Revelation's story line backwards in order to see 'startling twists in the narrative to play a decisive role in determining the actual story line of the entire book'. See Tonstad, *Saving God's Reputation*, p. 41.

²⁰⁹ Tonstad, *Saving God's Reputation*, p. 14.

²¹⁰ Tonstad, *Saving God's Reputation*, p. 53.

²¹¹ Tonstad, *Saving God's Reputation*, p. 134.

²¹² Tonstad, *Saving God's Reputation*, p. 141.

²¹³ A.J. Köstenberger, L.S. Kellum, and C.L. Quarles, *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2009).

work surveys the New Testament in five parts. In part four, they survey Revelation and include a sub-section entitled ‘Theodicy’ under the section ‘Theological Themes’.²¹⁴

The authors use G.R. Osborne’s definition of theodicy from his article ‘Theodicy in the Apocalypse’, saying that ‘theodicy pertains to the justification of God concerning “the seeming triumph of the wicked and the suffering of the innocent”’.²¹⁵ They posit that theodicy is seen throughout Revelation, though in particular, in the cry of the martyrs under the throne (6.10) and in the trial and sentencing of Babylon (18:6-7a). In essence, they ascertain that the visions of Revelation show that the suffering innocent will ‘have their day in court’ when God rights their wrongs and reverses the fate they experienced in this world.

The inclusion of theodicy as a major theological theme in Revelation seems to indicate that current Apocalyptic scholarship is interested in the theodicean value within John’s Apocalypse.

Sadomasochism

P-B. Smit (2018)

In 2018, P-B. Smit, Professor of Contextual Biblical Interpretation (Dom Hélder Câmara Chair) at Vrije Universiteit, offered a piece entitled ‘Sadomasochism and the Apocalypse of John: Exegesis, Sensemaking and Pain’.²¹⁶ Smit employs a contextual theological methodology to read the Apocalypse through the ‘lenses’ of sadomasochism and torture. His article explores the dynamics of sadomasochism – wherein he depends on the work of Talal Asad²¹⁷ for a sixfold description of such²¹⁸ – as well as the rituality of torture – where he cites Hannes Kuch²¹⁹ to understand how rituality and torture are related. Smit uses his methodological developments to explore suffering in the Apocalypse, which he recognizes as a main theme within the narrative.²²⁰ He offers a short reading of Christ’s message to the church in Smyrna (Rev. 2.10-

²¹⁴ In 2012, the same authors produced an abridged version to *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown* that also includes ‘theodicy’ as a main theological theme within Revelation. See A.J. Köstenberger, L.S. Kellum, and C. L. Quarles, *The Lion and the Lamb* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2012), pp. 394-95.

²¹⁵ Osborne, ‘Theodicy in the Apocalypse’, p. 63, in Köstenberger, *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown*, p. 866.

²¹⁶ P-B. Smit, ‘Sadomasochism and the Apocalypse of John: Exegesis, Sensemaking and Pain’, *BI* 26.1 (2018), pp. 90-112.

²¹⁷ T. Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003).

²¹⁸ See Smit, ‘Sadomasochism and the Apocalypse of John’, p. 98.

²¹⁹ H. Kuch, ‘The Rituality of Humiliation: Exploring Symbolic Vulnerability’, in Paulus Kaufmann, Hannes Kuch, Christian Neuhäuser, and Elaine Webster (eds.), *Humiliation, Degradation, Dehumanization: Human Dignity Violated* (London, England: Springer, 2011), pp. 37-56.

²²⁰ Smit, ‘Sadomasochism and the Apocalypse of John’, p. 91.

11), suggesting that suffering is a way of relating to God, an ‘instrument’ of relationship as he calls it,²²¹ which is ‘fetishized’ and ‘turned into a performance of a relationship with God ... and thus a source of pleasure.’²²² Smit even goes as far to suggest that, within the Apocalypse, suffering becomes a way of relating to God and is sacramental. His ‘fetishized’ interpretation of pain portrays a relationship between God and the sufferers. Though he is clear that his fetishization of the Apocalypse is different from BDSM play,²²³ he says that Rev. 13.9-10 sounds like ‘the rules of a game’.²²⁴ ‘There is a kind of salvific game of bondage, involving the body as a means of grace – should one even dare to say? – a sacrament.’²²⁵ Smit states that his ‘experimental journey’ of exploring suffering²²⁶ in the Apocalypse through sadomasochism and torture is for heuristic purposes.²²⁷

1.5 Conclusion

The purpose of this literature review has been to provide a review of scholarly literature pertaining to suffering and theodicy in the Apocalypse from the mid-20th century unto present. Part one shows that few works have appeared which are devoted exclusively to suffering and theodicy in the Apocalypse. Those that do appear suggest that Revelation does not seek to explain the origins of evil and suffering. Yet, they do suggest that Revelation posits a just God who is at work restoring divine order. Hearers are exhorted to be faithful to Christ while he works out this restoration. In this sense, these works approach theodicy practically. Part two shows that few works have appeared which are devoted to individual texts that are important to suffering and theodicy within the Apocalypse. Of all the texts that have been worked with in relation to suffering and theodicy, Rev. 6.9-11 has received, overwhelmingly, the most attention. It is suggested that 6.9-11, in relation to theodicy, is a key for understanding Revelation.²²⁸ Part three shows that, though a number of works appear on themes related to suffering and theodicy in the Apocalypse, the majority of these works do not often mention ‘theodicy’ directly, with

²²¹ Smit, ‘Sadomasochism and the Apocalypse of John’, p. 106.

²²² Smit, ‘Sadomasochism and the Apocalypse of John’, p. 106.

²²³ Smit, ‘Sadomasochism and the Apocalypse of John’, p. 100.

²²⁴ Smit, ‘Sadomasochism and the Apocalypse of John’, p. 110.

²²⁵ Smit, ‘Sadomasochism and the Apocalypse of John’, p. 111.

²²⁶ Smit does address the idea of theodicy once, suggesting that he understands suffering and theodicy to be related ideas. See Smit, ‘Sadomasochism and the Apocalypse of John’, pp. 107-108.

²²⁷ Smit, ‘Sadomasochism and the Apocalypse of John’, p. 94.

²²⁸ Heil, ‘The Fifth Seal’, pp. 220-43.

only the latest one (Köstenberger, Kellum, and Quarles in 2009), being an exception. Moreover, these works are not in conversation with one another. The need remains for them to be placed into dialogue with one another in relationship to suffering and theodicy.

This literature review has also served to show that a variety of methods and reading strategies have been used to explicate what limited work has been done on suffering and theodicy and its related themes in the Apocalypse. These reading strategies include the historical critical method, thematic analysis, theological analysis, literary analysis, intertextuality, canonical analysis, relevance theory, cultural studies, rhetorical reading, liberationist reading, feminist reading, Christological analysis, narrative reading, and more complex approaches which are a combination of different methods. Despite these efforts, a comprehensive narrative reading of suffering and theodicy in the Apocalypse has yet to be done.

In conclusion, this literature review suggests that suffering and theodicy in Revelation is undertreated and has not received the attention of which it is worthy. Extraordinarily, there has been no concentrated attention given to suffering and theodicy in the Apocalypse by Pentecostal scholars. Given the renaissance in Apocalypse studies amongst Pentecostals and the suffering that has been caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, there is need for more serious interaction with suffering and theodicy in the Apocalypse. This makes this study needed, timely, and appropriate for the Pentecostal movement. In the next chapter of this study, I shall articulate a Pentecostal reading strategy whereby I shall interact with suffering and theodicy in the Apocalypse.

METHODOLOGY: A PENTECOSTAL READING STRATEGY

2.1 Introduction

In this study I will employ a Pentecostal reading strategy to engage suffering and theodicy in the Apocalypse. It is my aim that such a reading will contribute toward a Pentecostal theodicy. I will follow Stevenson's idea of theodicy in Revelation as practical verses theoretical and I will follow Stevenson's definition of suffering, which suggests that suffering is, at the most basic level, 'the experience of pain'. Stevenson differentiates suffering from evil and points out that not all suffering is the result of evil. Categorically, evil and suffering are different. Stevenson posits that suffering can happen without evil. Yet, he also notes that suffering *can* and *does* happen as the result of evil. Suffering that is the result of evil 'assaults our sense of justice' and makes us think 'this is not the way it should be'.¹ This form of suffering that assaults our sense of justice is the form of suffering that I will explore most in my reading of the Apocalypse and in my exploration of early Pentecostal literature. Such suffering is caused by evils that appear in various ways, including persecution and violence, and it leads to disappointment, frustration, and despair.

This exploration of suffering is long-overdue within the Pentecostal movement. K. Warrington notes, 'the recognition of the place of suffering in Pentecostal theology needs to be redeemed as an integral aspect of an authentic spirituality that acknowledges the value of suffering in the life of the believer and does not simply attempt to exclude it or assume that its presence is intrinsically illegitimate.'² This study makes an attempt to 'redeem' this place of suffering within the Pentecostal movement and place it on a trajectory for further development.

¹ See Stevenson, *A Slaughtered Lamb*, pp. 22-23.

² K. Warrington, *Pentecostal Theology: A Theology of Encounter* (New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2008), p. 303.

While work has been done in the area of suffering and theodicy amongst Pentecostals,³ there remains to be seen a full-length monograph on the subject from the Apocalypse.

This chapter articulates my reading strategy which I will use in the succeeding chapters which keeps the suffering of early Pentecostals in the foreground. First, I give a short historical overview of the early American Pentecostal movement which is appropriate for my North American Pentecostal context. Next, I give a concise summary of Pentecostal hermeneutics, which notes contributions of key seminal figures who have added to this emerging field as well as the ‘hermeneutical triad’ – Scripture, Spirit, and Community – which I will be using as part of my methodology to read the Apocalypse. Following, I offer an overview of *Wirkungsgeschichte* (reception history) which I will be using to explore how Pentecostals viewed suffering and theodicy in relation to the Apocalypse in order to serve as a ‘bridge’ between the reader and the text. After, I give a brief overview of narrative analysis and explain why it is well-matched for a Pentecostal reading of Scripture. Lastly, I will make overtures toward the construction of a Pentecostal theodicy in the Apocalypse.

2.2 Origins of Pentecostalism in America

In 2019, an article appeared in the opinion section of *The Guardian* entitled ‘Today’s Pentecostals Aren’t Tongues-Talking Hicks – They Are Slick Australian Exports’. The column juxtaposed (though crudely) the current Pentecostal movement with its American beginning:⁴

³ M.K. Adams, ‘Hope in the Midst of Hurt: Towards a Pentecostal Theology of Suffering’, paper presented at the annual meeting of the SPS (Toronto, Canada: March, 1996); M.L. Dusing, ‘Toward a Pentecostal Theology of Physical Suffering’, paper presented at the annual meeting of the SPS (Toronto, Canada: March, 1996); W.M. Menzies, ‘Reflections on Suffering; A Pentecostal Perspective’, in W. Ma and R.P. Menzies (eds.), *The Spirit and Spirituality: Essays in Honor of Russel P. Spittler* (London, England: T&T Clark, 2004), pp. 141-49; Martin W. Mittelstadt, *The Spirit and Suffering in Luke-Acts* (New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2004); K. Warrington, *Healing and Suffering: Biblical and Pastoral Reflections* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2005); K. Warrington, ‘Healing and Suffering in the Bible’, *IRM* 95.376-77 (January-April 2006), pp. 154-64; K. Warrington, ‘A Spirit Theology of Suffering’, in H. Hunter and C.M. Robeck Jr. (eds.), *The Suffering Body: Responding to the Persecution of Christians* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 2006), pp. 37-61; O. Onylnah, ‘God’s Grace, Healing and Suffering’, *IRM* 95.376-77 (January-April 2006), pp. 117-27; E. Gaudion, *Braving the Storm: Survivor Tactics* (Milton Keynes: Authentic, 2007).

⁴ Though the Pentecostal story that I am telling begins in America, Pentecostalism should not be considered exclusively ‘American’. Different revivals around the world occurred prior to the events in Topeka, KS and at Azusa Street, events which spread the North American Pentecostal movement. These revivals include (but are not limited to) the Irvingite movement of the 1830s in Britain; Holiness revivals in Sweden, Germany, Russia, and Armenia; the Welsh Revival (1904-1905); Pentecostal-like movements in South India, where glossolalia and other manifestations occurred in J. C. Arulappan’s ministry in Western Tamilnadu; the ‘Korean Pentecost’ of 1907-1908 in Pyongyang, North Korea, which was the result of a previous revival in 1903 in Wonsan; as well as other revivals happening other places in the USA. See A.H. Anderson, *An Introduction to Global Pentecostalism* (New York, NY: Cambridge

Today's Pentecostals aren't tongues-talking, snake-handling hicks in rural American outposts. They're Justin Bieber and various Kardashians singing uplifting songs at megachurches in cosmopolitan cities such as Los Angeles, Seoul, São Paulo and Sydney. Fire and brimstone have given way to Spotify playlists, self-help courses, stadium spectacular, and Instagram posts.⁵

Implicit in this is the observation that Pentecostalism has come a long way in its relatively short existence of 120+ years or so. The column correctly points out that Pentecostalism is the fastest growing religious 'denomination'⁶ in the world with over 500 million followers.⁷ From being at the fringes, it has grown into a global movement.⁸ Today, its adherents range from impoverished persons in the lowest class to major political leaders, high profile celebrities, and business tycoons in the highest classes. Pentecostal Christians are found wherever Christianity is thriving, including most of the world's major metropolises. Their influence is prevalent on social media and their churches are amongst the largest in the world. Pentecostals comprise over one fourth

University Press, 2014), pp. 35-39. Of these revivals, W. Vondey says, 'The origins of many of these local manifestations of Pentecostalism cannot easily be traced back to Pentecostals of North America, but are instead the result of unexpected and unpredictable events in a variety of distinct locations'. See W. Vondey, *Pentecostalism: A Guide for the Perplexed* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 12. For an overview of global Pentecostalism, see also W.J. Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism: Origins and Developments Worldwide* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1997); W.J. Hollenweger, *The Pentecostals* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1988); C.M. Robeck, Jr. and A. Young (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Pentecostalism* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

⁵ E. Hardy, 'Today's Pentecostals Aren't Tongues-Talking Hicks – They Are Slick Australian Exports', <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/may/01/todays-pentecostals-arent-tongues-talking-hicks-they-are-slick-australian-exports> (accessed February 27, 2021).

⁶ While Hardy's article refers to Pentecostalism as a denomination, it should be noted that Pentecostalism resists the title of 'denomination' as it incorporates a myriad of denominations. It is better referred to as a 'movement', as it understands itself as a movement from God for the last days. See Vondey, *Pentecostalism: A Guide for the Perplexed*, p. 1. See also V.M. Kärkkäinen, 'Pentecostal Identity', in C. Constantineanu and C.J. Scobie (eds.), *Pentecostals in the 21st Century* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2018), pp. 14-31.

⁷ To arrive at this number, the article directs its readers to research from D.E. Miller, 'Introduction: Pentecostalism as a Global Phenomenon', in D.E. Miller, K.H. Sargeant, and R. Flory (eds.), *Spirit and Power: The Growth and Global Impact of Pentecostalism* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 6-12. Concerning the number of Pentecostals, Miller notes, 'Given the somewhat amorphous character of Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity, it is difficult to know how many people fit this classification, but most estimates put the number of renewalists at more than 500 million. It is widely regarded as the fastest growing element of Christianity.'

⁸ By 'movement' I do not mean what Wolfgang Vondey refers to as 'homogenous globalization'. Vondey notes that speaking of Pentecostalism as a movement can oversimplify it and downplay the importance of its local nature and local representation that account for Pentecostalism's local particularities. Moreover, there are thousands of Pentecostal denominations if one distinguishes between various streams such as Pentecostals, such as classic Pentecostals, those influenced by the Charismatic movements, and neo-charismatic groups. 'The different streams portray the movement as a cross-cultural, cross-denominational movement that seemingly transcends localities, religions, nations, ethnicities, and ideologies.' Vondey goes on to assert, 'What characterizes the identity of the Pentecostal movement is its local roots and global temperament'. See Vondey, *Pentecostalism*, pp. 9-23.

(25%) of Christians around the globe⁹ and are considered a 'fourth force' alongside of Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, and Protestantism.¹⁰

Though American Pentecostalism is a thriving force even among the wealthy and elite today, such was not always the case. The early years were challenging times for the North American Pentecostals. Their movement was forged in the fires of suffering.

⁹ Miller, 'Introduction: Pentecostalism as a Global Phenomenon', p. 9.

¹⁰ Miller, 'Introduction: Pentecostalism as a Global Phenomenon', p. 9.

The Story Begins

Just where the story of American Pentecostalism begins is a matter of dispute.¹¹ I will begin the story of American Pentecostalism in the 20th century, on January 1st, 1901 in Topeka, KS.¹² On

¹¹ Anderson, *Pentecostalism*, p. 43, suggests that ‘one theory of origins cannot be emphasized over the exclusion of others’. He points toward Augustus Cerillo’s work which posits four origins of Pentecostalism: (1) providential – the Pentecostal movement began from heaven in Acts 2, (2) historical – the movement is a continuation of the nineteenth-century Methodist Holiness movements, (3) multicultural – within the movement, the marginalized found equality despite race and class and characterized a revival of faith that would usher in the return of Christ, and (4) functional – a set social context explains the movement’s respective emergence. See A. Cerillo Jr., ‘The Beginnings of American Pentecostalism: A Historiographical Overview’, in E.L. Blumhofer, R.P. Spittler, and G. Wacker (eds.), *Pentecostal Currents in American Protestantism* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1999), pp. 236-39. Anderson explores the multicultural view and emphasizes Seymour and the Azusa Street Mission. Similar to Anderson’s explanation of Cerillo’s multicultural origin is C.M. Robeck Jr.’s association of William J. Seymour and the Azusa Street Mission as the beginning of American Pentecostalism. The first chapter in Robeck’s book *The Azusa Street Mission and Revival* is entitled ‘William J. Seymour and the Beginnings of Pentecostalism’. Robeck centralizes Seymour’s life, giving an account of it prior to Azusa Street which leads up to his meeting with Charles Fox Parham in 1901 and, eventually, the Azusa Street mission and revival. Thus, Robeck starts the story with Seymour. See C.M. Robeck Jr., *The Azusa Street Mission and Revival* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2006), chap. 1, Kindle. Grant Wacker differs and suggests that that American Pentecostalism began at the twilight of the 19th century with ‘holiness folk’ who craved more than a four-fold gospel. At Charles Fox Parham’s school in 1901, ‘tongues’ was experienced and the doctrine that tongues *always* accompanied Spirit baptism was developed and became the Five-Fold Gospel. Wacker shows how Seymour adopted this doctrine and carried it to Los Angeles and the Azusa Street Mission. Thus, Wacker begins the story with late 19th century holiness folk. See G. Wacker, *Heaven Below: Early Pentecostals and American Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), Introduction, Kindle. D.A. Womack takes an altogether different approach and suggests that the North American Pentecostal movement began with Parham on New Year’s Day 1901. After telling the story of what happened on New Year’s Day 1901 at Bethel Bible School, Womack says, ‘From this beginning the Pentecostal movement spread quickly around the world.’ See D.A. Womack, *The Wellsprings of the Pentecostal Movement* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1968), pp. 84-85. F. Bartleman also differs as to where he begins the story. Chapter one of Bartleman’s recollection of the Pentecostal Movement, entitled ‘Beginnings’, frequently references Evan Roberts and the ‘Revival in Wales’ before he talks about the Azusa Street mission. Hence, he starts the story with the Welsh Revival. See F. Bartleman, *Azusa Street* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1982), pp. 7-38. Finally, *The Apostolic Faith* (Azusa Street), in its first publication, gives credit to the events in Topeka, KS in 1901 as being the place where the work at Azusa Street began, saying, ‘This work began about five years ago last January, when a company of people under the leadership of Chas. Parham, who were studying God’s word, tarried for Pentecost in Topeka, Kan. ... Now after five years something like 13,000 people have received this Gospel.’ See *AF* 1.1 (September, 1906), p. 1. Later, the question arose as to who the leader of the Azusa movement was, to which the Azusa saints answered it was Seymour: ‘Some are asking if Dr. Chas. F. Parham is the leader of this movement. We can answer, no he is not the leader of the movement at Azusa. We thought of having him to be our leader and so stated in our paper, before waiting on the Lord ... and we saw that the Lord should be our leader.’ See *AF* 1.4 (December, 1906), p. 1. W.H. Durham affirms this: ‘Now a word concerning Bro. Seymour, who is the leader of the movement under God’. See *AF* 1.6 (February-March, 1907), p. 4. Though they suggested that the Lord was ultimately their leader, they point to Seymour as the ‘overseer’ of the Azusa movement. See *AF* 1.4 (December, 1906), p. 1. What the aforementioned analysis suggests is that the Azusa saints differentiated their movement under Seymour from the events in Topeka. However, they did consider the work at Azusa as beginning with the events in Topeka, KS under Parham. See *AF* 1.1 (September, 1906), p. 1.

¹² I begin the story in Topeka, KS in 1901 though I do not claim that this is where the story of American Pentecostalism *has* to begin or even *does* begin. I am choosing to begin the story here because of Parham’s theological influence on the founder of American Pentecostalism, William J. Seymour. Starting here is for chronological sake and does not suggest that Parham is the founder of the American Pentecostal movement. It was under Parham that Seymour received his theological training which prepared Seymour for Azusa Street. This includes the doctrine of Spirit baptism as evidenced by tongues, which was central to the events at the Azusa Street

this date, Agnes N. Ozman, a student at Bethel Bible College, began speaking in other tongues after midnight during a prayer service the college was having.¹³ Charles Fox Parham,¹⁴ the leader of the school, had laid hands on her and prayed she would receive the Baptism in the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in other tongues.¹⁵ Ozman was unable to speak in English for three days after. Soon after, Parham and the other students had the same experience. It was claimed that, altogether, the students spoke in 21 languages. Parham made tongues as the evidence of Spirit baptism a significant part of his doctrine, which he called ‘the Apostolic Faith’,¹⁶ and for the next four years, preached about it wherever he travelled.

In 1905, Parham moved his headquarters to Houston, TX and opened another Bible school, called ‘The Training School’, to promote the Apostolic Faith. It was here that the person widely

Mission. This is not to say, however, that glossolalia began among evangelicals at Parham’s Bethel Bible School in 1901. To the contrary, many reported having spoken with tongues in the 1880s and 1890s. See B.F. Lawrence, *The Apostolic Faith Restored* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing 1916), chapters 5-7. Parham would have been familiar with tongues prior to Bethel Bible School in 1901. For example, in May 1899 he writes about a periodical entitled the *Everlasting Gospel* wherein he says he read about a woman named Jennie Glassy who received an ‘African Dialect’ in just one night in 1895. He notes, ‘She received the gift while in the Spirit in 1895, but could read and write, translate and sing the language while out of the trance or in a normal condition, and can until now’. See *AFBS* 1.7 (May, 1899), p. 5.

¹³ For an overview of the events and theological underpinnings that led up to the beginning of the Pentecostal movement in America see D.W. Dayton, *Theological Roots of Pentecostalism* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1987); H.V. Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997); R.M. Anderson, *Vision of the Disinherited* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1979).

¹⁴ Though Parham is often supposed by some Pentecostals to be the founder of Pentecostalism, A.H. Anderson suggests that this designation is given to Parham in ‘white Pentecostal mythology’. Anderson points out that Parham has been rejected from such a position by almost the entire North American Pentecostal movement. This is due to a number of Parham’s beliefs and practices inconsistent with the Pentecostal movement. These include: (1) his idea of *xenolalia* being used for the proclamation of the gospel in foreign lands (which proved to be unsuccessful and was rejected by many Pentecostals), (2) his beliefs in Anglo-Israelism and the annihilation of the wicked, (3) the fact that he did not engage in world evangelization, (4) an unproven scandal in 1907 wherein he was accused of homosexuality, and (5) his activity in speaking to gatherings of the Ku Klux Klan whom he thought had ‘high ideals for the betterment of mankind’. Anderson suggests, however, that no one proved more key than Parham in the theological emphasis on glossolalia as the ‘evidence’ of Spirit baptism in early American Pentecostalism. See Anderson, *Pentecostalism*, pp. 35-36.

¹⁵ D.R. Johnson notes that it was claimed these tongues were xenolalia, which is speaking in a known human language. In Ozman’s case, the language was Chinese. Xenolalia is to be differentiated from glossolalia, which is speaking in an unknown language. See D.R. Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment in the Apocalypse: An Intertextual and Pentecostal Exploration* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2018), p. 11.

¹⁶ *The Apostolic Faith* was also the name of Parham’s publication, a bimonthly paper, which Parham began in 1898 in Topeka. Parham later opened his Apostolic Faith headquarters in 1905 in Houston where he began referring to himself as the ‘Projector of the Apostolic Faith Movement’. This movement had an emphasis on divine healing, the Baptism in the Holy Spirit with the ‘Bible evidence’ of speaking in other tongues, and evangelism. With such an emphasis on evangelism, it is no surprise that Parham took his students to bordellos to evangelize to prostitutes. Parham also made it a point to raise money for Jews in order to help restore them to their homeland. See Robeck Jr., *The Azusa Street Mission*, chap. 1, Kindle.

regarded to be the founder¹⁷ of the Pentecostal movement in North America, William J. Seymour, arrived onto the scene.¹⁸ Seymour was a southern-black holiness preacher and the son of liberated slaves. By the time Seymour met Parham in Houston, the man God would use to launch North American Pentecostalism had experienced his fair share of suffering. Growing up in Louisiana during the period of Reconstruction made life difficult for Seymour. When his father died in 1891, the 21-year-old Seymour became the sole provider for his family and, as a result, he and his family lived in poverty. Seymour moved around a bit in search of a better life. In the Fall of 1900, he came to Cincinnati to attend a Bible School. Here Seymour contracted smallpox. Though he survived, the disease caused him to lose an eye.¹⁹

Seymour did not evade suffering when he arrived at Parham's school in Houston in 1905. The Jim Crow laws in the South would not allow blacks to sit in the classroom with whites and this affected Seymour. However, Parham could see that Seymour was a genuine seeker. He

¹⁷ J.R. Goff, Jr. makes the case that Parham is the founder of the Pentecostal movement. This is because Parham provided a theological framework for tongues as the initial evidence for Spirit baptism. See J.R. Goff, *Fields White Unto Harvest: Charles F. Parham and the Missionary Origins of Pentecostalism* (Fayetteville, AR: The University of Arkansas Press, 1988), p. 164. Hollenweger disagrees with the idea that Parham is the founder of the movement based upon his framework for tongues, suggesting that the initial sign of tongues is now questioned. See R.P. Spittler 'Glossolalia', in S.M. Burgess and E.M. Van Der Mas (eds.), *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), pp. 670-76. Hollenweger also points out that Parham's ideas of pacifism, his doctrine of 'destruction of the wicked', his antipathy toward medicine, his Anglo-Israelism, and his sympathy toward the Ku Klux Klan have been contradicted by Pentecostalism. Conversely, 'there is hardly a Pentecostal movement in the world that is not built on Seymour's oral black modes of communication'. See Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism*, pp. 22-23.

¹⁸ Anderson, *Pentecostalism*, p. 45, says, 'It is impossible to understand the origins of American Pentecostalism without reference to Seymour ... Although Parham was influential in the early formation of Pentecostal ideas, Seymour eclipsed him in significance.' Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism*, p. 20, explains why Seymour and the Azusa Street mission was so significant and central for American Pentecostalism:

Seymour and his black brothers and sisters suffered bitterly. During Seymour's adult lifetime 3,436 black persons were known to have been lynched, averaging two a week ... In spite of constant humiliation he developed a spirituality that in 1906 led to a revival in Los Angeles which most Pentecostal historians believe to be the cradle of Pentecostalism. The roots of Seymour's spirituality lay in his past. He affirmed his black heritage by introducing Negro spirituals and Negro music into his liturgy at a time when this music was considered inferior and unfit for Christian worship. At the same time he steadfastly lived out his understanding of Pentecost. For him Pentecost meant more than speaking in tongues. It meant loving in the face of hate – overcoming the hatred of a whole nation by demonstrating that Pentecost is something very different from the success-oriented American way of life.

Suffice to say, much of early Pentecostalism came from African American Christianity wherein Seymour had been profoundly affected. Furthermore, Hollenweger attributes Pentecostalism's growth to its 'black root' (not its doctrine), which he characterizes by (1) oral liturgy, (2) narrative of theology and witness, (3) maximum participation at the levels of reflection, prayer, and decision-making and therefore a form of community that is reconciliatory, (4) inclusion of dreams and visions in personal and public forums of worship, and (5) understanding of the body/mind relationship that is informed by experiences of correspondence between body and mind (such as healing by prayer and liturgical dance). See Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism*, p. 18.

¹⁹ Robeck, *The Azusa Street Mission*, chap. 1, Kindle.

allowed Seymour to sit in the hallway near his lectures and listen through the opened door. Over the course of months, Seymour learned Parham's Pentecostal doctrine and became convinced of most it.²⁰ Seymour became active in ministering to the African American people of Houston and went on to accept a pastorate in Los Angeles²¹ in February 1906. Yet, Seymour immediately experienced another setback. His first sermon went all but well. He preached that speaking in tongues was the 'Bible' evidence of receiving the Spirit but The Southern California Holiness Association thought this teaching was unacceptable. Therefore, they locked him out of the church!

With nowhere to go, Seymour was invited to stay at a home on Bonnie Brae Street. Here, Seymour began to hold meetings and to preach. On April 9, 1906, Seymour, himself, received Spirit baptism and began speaking in other tongues along with several others. The numbers of attendees grew as news got out about what was going on. Soon huge crowds gathered around the home to listen to Seymour preach from the pulpit on the front porch. The meetings had grown so large that Seymour moved them to an old AME church located at 312 Azusa Street.²² Frank Bartleman, a holiness preacher who attended the Azusa revival and recorded the beginnings of the early Pentecostal movement, describes the meetings at Azusa:

The services ran almost continually. Seeking souls could be found under the power almost any hour of the day or night. The place was never closed or empty. The people came to meet God – he was there. Hence a continuous meeting. The meeting did not depend on the human leader. God's presence became more and more wonderful. In that building, with its low rafters and bare floors, God broke strong men and women to pieces, and put them together again for his glory. It was a tremendous overhauling process. Pride and self-assertion, self-importance, and self-esteem could not survive there. The religious ego preached its own funeral sermon quickly ... We had no respect of persons. The rich and educated were the same as the poor and ignorant, although the former found it much harder to die to self. We only recognized God.²³

²⁰ Seymour shared Parham's concern for evangelism, sanctification, Spirit baptism as evidenced by tongues, and healing. However, Seymour did not share Parham's conviction of xenolalia for missionary purposes. See Robeck, *The Azusa Street Mission*, chap. 6, Kindle.

²¹ Los Angeles was a ripe place for a new movement to begin. The area had more than doubled its population between 1900-1906, with 3,000 new residents coming every month full of hope and ambition. 'It was raw, rugged, bawdy, and eclectic – a fertile seedbed for new ideas and new opportunities.' See Robeck, *The Azusa Street Mission*, chap. 2, Kindle. Churches were growing at a quick rate – from 180 in 1905 to 254 in 1907 – with Protestant churches outnumbering Catholic.

²² Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition*, pp. 92-98.

²³ Bartleman, *Azusa Street*, p. 56.

The revival had exploded and continued on for three and a half years,²⁴ affecting social change, theological change, and change in ministry work – yet, only after the moment’s founder had suffered so long. Seymour’s own glory through suffering would prove to typify the Pentecostal movement that he had founded. The Pentecostals would experience glory – shattering social, theological, and ministerial paradigms – but it would come with a price.

Change Comes

First, in relation to social change, Bartleman notes that Azusa Street broke cultural lines and brought together worshippers of different social classes, ages, genders, and ethnicities. As he put it, ‘the “color line” was washed away in the blood’.²⁵ A.H. Anderson suggests that the breaking of human lines of culture was Seymour’s vision of Pentecost. ‘He saw the Pentecostal experience as that which dissolved distinctions of race, class, and gender and created one common family.’²⁶ R.M. Anderson notes:

Initially the Azusa mission had a multi-racial, multi-ethnic character ... One of the Azusa leaders estimated that more than twenty different nationalities were represented at the meetings ... The ethnic minority groups of Los Angeles found themselves welcomed at Azusa, and some would discover there the sense of dignity and community denied them in the larger urban culture.²⁷

The revival at Azusa Street not only broke cultural and social barriers, secondly, it changed theological paradigms. The experience of Spirit baptism changed everything. The Pentecostals ‘literally saw the whole world in a new light. Spirit baptism was not just an initiation rite, it was a mystical encounter.’²⁸ It appealed to Pentecostals because it ‘offered common people a transforming perception of reality that invested life with meaning and promised transcendence of life’s problems.’²⁹ K.J. Archer notes that this mystical experience was in contrast to modernity’s humanistic, positivistic, and naturalistic worldview that pervaded culture at that time.³⁰ He

²⁴ Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition*, pp. 94-97.

²⁵ Bartleman, *Azusa Street*, p. 51.

²⁶ Anderson, *Pentecostalism*, p. 60.

²⁷ Anderson, *Vision of the Disinherited*, p. 69.

²⁸ H. Cox, *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-first Century* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1995), p. 70.

²⁹ E.L. Blumhofer, *Restoring the Faith: The Assemblies of God, Pentecostalism, and American Culture* (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1991), p. 9.

³⁰ K.J. Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic: Spirit, Scripture and Community* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2009), p. 44-45. Archer notes that Pentecostalism, though a protest against modernity, should not be viewed as ‘premodern’ (because it was born in the modern age and relied on modernistic language). It is not ‘antimodern’ because it did not seek to articulate an argument against modernity. Instead, Archer calls early North American Pentecostalism ‘paramodern’, meaning that it came about during modernity. Pentecostalism used aspects of modernity to push forward the movement but, at the same time, existed at the fringes. ‘The Pentecostal movement began as a

suggests this based on Margaret Paloma's sociological study of the Assemblies of God (AOG), which points out the rationalist modernist approach is an 'iron cage' wherein Pentecostals have, 'in emphasizing affective rather than rational action in their religious beliefs ... bent the bars of the cage, providing at least a partial relief from this captivity'.³¹

Spirit baptism became the newest addition to the 'Four-Fold Gospel' – a term that referred to exalting Christ as Savior, Sanctifier, Healer, and Coming King. Thus, the 'Four-Fold Gospel' became the 'Five-Fold Gospel',³² and this was a major turning point in the Pentecostal movement. The Pentecostals saw this Spirit baptism as fulfilment of Joel's prophecy about the last days.³³ As such, they perceived themselves as apocalyptic people³⁴ having a mandate to proclaim the kingdom of God by the power of the Spirit they had received. Spirit baptism 'was a break that signaled God's intervention in and sufficiency for the missionary task of announcing the gospel of the kingdom to all nations before the end ... With one foot in creation and the other in the age to come, the Pentecostals hope for the salvation of the lost and longed for Jesus to come.'³⁵

This apocalyptic outlook³⁶ and new eschatological paradigm³⁷ produced within the Pentecostals an invariable conviction and emphasis on missions.³⁸ It was a shifting away from

paramodern movement protesting modernity and cessationist Christianity.' See Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, pp. 44-45. See also J.D. Johns, 'Pentecostalism and the Postmodern Worldview', *JPT* 7 (1995), pp. 73-96.

³¹ M. Poloma, *The Assemblies of God at the Crossroads* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1989), p. 19.

³² The Pentecostals preached a 'Five-fold Gospel': Jesus as Savior, Sanctifier, Spirit Baptizer, Healer, and Coming King. Prior to the Pentecostal movement, the Holiness movement preached a four-fold gospel expressed in the slogan 'Christ our Savior, Christ our Sanctifier, Christ our Healer, and Christ our Coming Lord'. See Dayton, *Theological Roots of Pentecostalism*, p. 176.

³³ Joel 2.28.

³⁴ Anderson, *Pentecostalism*, p. 60, points out that the term 'Pentecostal' is an apocalyptic term. It contains a 'dispensational' element, suggesting the inauguration of a new era.

³⁵ S.J. Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality: A Passion for the Kingdom* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2010), p. 57. Previously published as S.J. Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality: A Passion for the Kingdom* (JPTSup 1; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993).

³⁶ 'Apocalyptic outlook' refers to the Pentecostals' perspective that the return of Christ was imminent and that the close of the age was drawing near.

³⁷ The Pentecostals' premillennial expectations was responsible for their end-time fervor and was, in a large way, responsible for their emphasis on missions. They viewed the outpouring of the Spirit at Azusa as a precursor to the return of Christ. See M.L. Archer, *I Was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day: A Pentecostal Engagement with Worship in the Apocalypse* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2015), p. 43. Anderson, *Vision of the Disinherited*, p. 79, notes that the phrase 'Jesus is coming soon' was the central theme of the early Pentecostal movement.

³⁸ A.H. Anderson finds a link to Pentecostal's emphasis on missions and their eschatological outlook in a quote by James Hudson Taylor, the founder of China Inland Mission, from the *Bridegroom's Messenger* in 1908, 'the next great series of events on the world's stage of action would be a great war between Russia and Japan in which Russia would be defeated. Then would follow the greatest spiritual revival the world has ever known, and soon after would follow the coming of Jesus.' See *Bridegroom's Messenger* 27 (December 1, 1908), p. 2 cited in A.H. Anderson,

the idea that ministry work could only be done by formal ministry workers. As God's apocalyptic people, they believed that the Spirit empowered the common individual for extraordinary service. Christ was soon to come, and the gospel urgently needed to be proclaimed 'to the end of the earth'.³⁹ The Pentecostals saw themselves as people 'sent by the Spirit' with the 'Missionary Spirit'⁴⁰ to fulfill this mandate. Because there were no prerequisites for receiving Spirit baptism, the Pentecostals did not require formal seminary education for ministry work. This was a change from how mainline denominations were preparing their ministry workers. This approach enabled expatriate Pentecostal missionaries to rely on their indigenous converts for ministry work with little reluctance to ordain them for service. Inevitably, this quickly led to indigenous churches and the rapid spread of Pentecostalism.⁴¹

Also vital to note along the changing horizon of ministry work is that women found opportunities in ministry amongst Pentecostals that they had not often found in other denominations.⁴² The times had begun to change after the Civil War. Women were finding more chances at professional life and women's suffrage was becoming a reality. God's apocalyptic people simply 'pressed these trends' and counted women as capable as men in doing ministry work. Women would go on to serve as church planters, pastors, and co-pastors alongside of their husbands. They wrote tracts and hymns, edited publications, and set up bible schools and orphanages. Interestingly enough, about half of the American Pentecostal evangelists, missionaries, and divine healers were women.⁴³ G. Wacker observes that the Pentecostal movement began with a woman, Agnes Ozman, and relates her experience to Mary Magdalene's

'The Roots of Pentecostal Globalization: Early Pentecostal Missions', in Steven M. Studebaker (ed.), *Pentecostalism and Globalization: The Impact of Globalization on Pentecostal Theology and Ministry* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2010), p. 31.

³⁹ Acts 1.8.

⁴⁰ Concerning the 'Missionary Spirit', J.R. Flower, who went on later to be the first General Secretary of the AOG, said in 1908, 'When the Holy Spirit comes into our hearts, the missionary spirit comes in with it; they are inseparable, as the missionary spirit is but one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit. Carrying the gospel to hungry souls in this and other lands is but a natural result of receiving the baptism of the Holy Ghost. The Gospel is a go-spell'. See *TP* 1.1 (August 1908), p. 4.

⁴¹ Anderson, 'The Roots of Pentecostal Globalization', pp. 31-33.

⁴² See L. Scanzoni and S. Setta, 'Women in Evangelical, Holiness and Pentecostal Traditions', in R. Radford Reuther and R. Skinner Keller (eds.), *Women and Religion in America 1900-1968* (San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row, 1986), pp. 223-65.

⁴³ Wacker, *Heaven Below*, chap. 10, Kindle. Wacker notes that the 1916 *Census of Religious Bodies* showed that women constituted 59% of members of the three Pentecostal groups that participated. This was not much larger than the 56% average for all denominations. Over time, though, the gap widened. In 1926, the seven Pentecostal sects that participated reported an average of 64% female versus 56% for all other denominations. In 1936, eleven Pentecostal sects participated with an average of 65% female membership versus 56% for all other denominations.

experience at the tomb,⁴⁴ suggesting that she was the first to spread an urgent message to a waiting world.⁴⁵ Looking back on Ozman's experience, it may not be going too far to suggest that it served as a prophetic indicator of women's place within the Pentecostal movement.⁴⁶

This shifting in social, theological, and ministerial paradigms soon became a reason for Pentecostal suffering. As the Pentecostal movement grew and its influence spread, it encountered challenges that were anything but comfortable. Like Seymour, the early North American Pentecostals were sufferers. Trials were their norm. These trials were associated with their stances on race, as well as their positions on sanctification, tongues, and the controversy that occurred over the doctrine of the Trinity. They also suffered through eschatological disappointment, internal disputes, and persecution from their critics.⁴⁷ Yet, like Seymour, the Pentecostal Movement pressed on through their trials.

Race

The racial integration was problematic for the detractors of Azusa. Not all were happy to see that the color line had been washed away. Detractors were outraged to hear reports of affection taking place between whites and blacks.⁴⁸ As the movement continued forward, schisms and racial tensions⁴⁹ led the drawing of the color line once again. This eventually led to segregated denominations and racially divided fellowships. Despite the segregation, black and white

⁴⁴ John 21.11-18.

⁴⁵ Wacker, *Heaven Below*, chap. 10, Kindle.

⁴⁶ The importance of women within the Pentecostal movement cannot be overstated. Perhaps this is ironically observed in how the Pentecostal movement symbolically reflects female imagery. Wacker, *Heaven Below*, chap. 10, Kindle, notes: (1) the emphasis on 'surrendered hearts' to the Holy Spirit coincides with women's compliant nature, (2) tongues reflected women's chatty nature, (3) when men committed their hearts to Christ, they gave up brawling and other crass habits and took up characteristics that were stereotypically female, like being peaceable and gentle, and (4) public weeping indicated a successful 'Holy Ghost meeting'.

⁴⁷ See Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment*, pp. 13-15; Anderson, *Pentecostalism*, pp. 61-62.

⁴⁸ For example, it is recorded that Nettie Harwood, a disciple of Alma White and a detractor of the movement, was upset to see a black woman praying for a white man with her arms around him. See Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition*, p. 101.

⁴⁹ These tensions were exacerbated by Parham's writings which were racially charged. He shared his opinion of Azusa Street saying, 'If you have not seen an old-fashioned darky camp meeting in the south, you have missed half your life ... what makes my soul sick, and makes me sick at my stomach, is to see white people imitating unintelligent, crude negroism of the Southland, and laying it on the Holy Ghost. I am sorry for the Holy Ghost for the things that are blamed on him.' See *AFT* 1.3 (April, 1925), pp. 9-10. Furthermore, Parham wrote about a Ku Klux Klan meeting he had been part of in Saginaw, MI, referring to them as 'splendid men' who were using their money to 'make the world better on lines of reform and moral suasion.' He wanted to see them saved so that they could truly 'realize their high ideals for the betterment of mankind'. See *AFT* 3.3 (March, 1927), p. 5.

Pentecostal denominations remained friendly toward one another, combined meetings being one way they maintained their affability.⁵⁰

Sanctification

The doctrine of sanctification became a major theological dividing point for Pentecostals in 1910. On one side of the issue were those who maintained the Wesleyan view of entire sanctification.⁵¹ But as the movement grew, those with non-Wesleyan backgrounds began entering the movement and challenged this accepted norm. The second side of the issue became known as ‘the Finished Work’ doctrine, with William H. Durham, a pastor from Chicago, leading the charge.⁵² Though Seymour banned Durham from Azusa street for this doctrine, Durham continued to preach it. After Durham’s death in 1912, the controversy strengthened until it became the dominant view on sanctification amongst Pentecostals. Eventually, the Assemblies of God accepted it as their view of sanctification.⁵³ Meanwhile, the Church of God, the Pentecostal Holiness Church, and the Church of God in Christ maintained their position on entire sanctification. Consequently, the schism often caused both sides to take extreme positions on sanctification which in turn resulted in even more polarization.

Tongues

The practice of speaking in tongues became a major point of contention that caused quite a stir during the early days of the Pentecostal movement. As God’s eschatological people with a mandate to take the gospel to the world, tongues were understood by some of the saints at Azusa to be a supernatural endowment to preach the gospel in an unlearned foreign language (‘missionary tongues’).⁵⁴ The Azusa saints implemented a hasty four-step process⁵⁵ for those who had supposedly received missionary tongues which sent unprepared missionary workers

⁵⁰ Anderson, *Vision of the Disinherited*, p. 193.

⁵¹ For more on the Wesleyan view of sanctification see Dayton, *Theological Roots of Pentecostalism*, pp. 45-51. Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition*, p. 148, points out that entire sanctification was the dominant view of sanctification at the outset of the Pentecostal movement.

⁵² For more on the ‘Finished Work’ doctrine see Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition*, p. 150; R.M. Riss, ‘Finished Work Controversy’, in S.M. Burgess and E. M. Van Der Maas (eds.), *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal Charismatic Movement* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), pp. 638-39.

⁵³ The move toward this position began at the 1914 Assemblies of God convention in Hot Springs, AR.

⁵⁴ Seymour was never certain that tongues served the purpose of preaching in an unlearned foreign language. Parham, who had originally proposed this doctrine of xenolalia, remained cautious about using xenolalia to preach on the mission field because he had yet to verify if it served such a purpose.

⁵⁵ First, they attempted to identify the language. Second, they affirmed the person was called to missions. Third, they clarified if the person was ready to go. Last, the candidate was given money and funds to do missions work. See Robeck, *The Azusa Street Mission*, chap. 6, Kindle.

into foreign lands, often within a matter of days or hours! Parham criticized this sharply as did Azusa's detractors. When mission workers reached the fields, their expectations of missionary tongues were soon disappointed.⁵⁶

Furthermore, the doctrine of tongues as the initial physical evidence of Spirit baptism was a point of controversy. Around 1918, F.F. Bosworth wrote a pamphlet entitled 'Do All Speak with Tongues?', challenging the notion that tongues are the evidence of Spirit baptism. The AOG Council of 1918 took up the contention and determined that tongues were indeed the initial physical evidence. As a result, Bosworth resigned from the AOG. M.W. Mittlestadt suggests that William Seymour was another who had his doubts about tongues as initial physical evidence. He points out that, though Seymour was a supporter of the doctrine at the outset of Azusa, by 1915 he had changed his position and felt that tongues were just *one* of the signs following baptized believers.⁵⁷

The Doctrine of the Trinity

A 'new issue' in Pentecostalism arose in 1913 which later paved the way for Oneness Pentecostalism. In this year, R.E. McAlister proposed that the correct baptismal formula was 'in Jesus' name' and the formula 'Father, Son, and Holy Ghost' was incorrect. In 1914, Frank J. Ewart took this idea further, suggesting that there was only one person in the Godhead, Jesus Christ. 'Father' and 'Holy Ghost' were simply titles of Christ's person. Furthermore, he taught that salvation, sanctification, and the baptism of the Spirit (evidenced by tongues) were all one event that occurred while being baptized in Jesus' name only. The AOG General Council of 1916 finally settled the issue by maintaining the Trinitarian view of the Godhead which preserved the Trinitarian view for the majority of the Pentecostal movement.⁵⁸ The decision caused a schism that resulted in the Oneness camp forming their own denominations.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Wacker, *Heaven Below*, chap. 2, Kindle.

⁵⁷ M.W. Mittlestadt, *Reading Luke-Acts in the Pentecostal Tradition* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2010), pp. 34-37. Mittlestadt suggests Seymour had his doubts about tongues being the initial evidence of Spirit baptism as far back as 1907. Mittlestadt quotes the *AF* in June – September 1907: 'tongues are one of the signs that go with every baptized person, but it is not the real evidence of the baptism in the every day [*sic*] life ... If you get angry or speak evil, or backbite, I care not how many tongues you have, you have not the baptism with the Holy Spirit.' See *AF* 1.9 (June - September, 1907), p. 2.

⁵⁸ The AOG 'Fundamental Truths' were adopted at this council. The denomination, which initially had rejected creeds, was now drawing up a creed of its own to defend its view of the Godhead, experiencing a similar controversy that led to the Nicæan Creed of 325 CE. The rejection of creeds is another area where the early Pentecostals made a misstep that led to challenges.

⁵⁹ See Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition*, pp. 158-60.

Other Issues

As can be seen from above, the glory of the early Pentecostal moved along on a bumpy road. Beyond societal, ministerial, and doctrinal issues, the early Pentecostals experienced frustrations, disappointments, as well as conflicts both from within and without. Perhaps one of the biggest frustrations came from the delay of the Second coming. ‘Belief in the imminent Second Coming could from time to time arouse expectations, but it could not sustain them on a continual basis. Therefore, it became a subordinate, largely formal doctrine, rather than a lively hope.’⁶⁰ Beyond their vexations, Pentecostals had constant in-fighting among key leaders and organizations (Seymour and Parham,⁶¹ Seymour and Durham, Bosworth and the AOG, Tomlinson and the COG,⁶² etc.). They were also persecuted and shunned by society around them.⁶³ Wacker notes that they had ‘social foes’ whom they ‘fell into repeated, protracted, and sometimes physically violent conflicts with’.⁶⁴ This includes Pentecostals being the recipients of unprovoked harassment, such as getting rotten eggs, snow balls, bottles, stink bombs and tin cans hurled at them and their churches. Significant property damage and serious bodily injury occurred in a number of cases.⁶⁵ Verbal harassment was also prevalent. For instance, they were called common insulting nicknames, such as ‘Holy Rollers’. Worse than this, they experienced gunshot wounds, jailings, and beatings. For example, A.J. Tomlinson had bullets shot through the windows of his home in Cleveland, TN; F.F. Bosworth was beat up by 25 men near Hearne, TX; C.H. Mason was beaten up after admonishing some individuals about their godlessness; and an individual known as Brother Burris was stripped naked and lashed with a whip.⁶⁶ In one

⁶⁰ Anderson, *Vision of the Disinherited*, p. 96. As the imminent Second Coming moved to just a formal doctrine, the doctrine of tongues replaced it as the central doctrine of Pentecostalism. Anderson notes that the hope of the Second Coming was ‘replaced by the reality of immediate psychic escape through ecstasy’. It stands to reason that the early Pentecostals’ emphasis on the imminent Second Coming and physical escape may be a result of their unpropitious social conditions.

⁶¹ Parham denounced Azusa Street in 1906. The Azusa saints shared no more affection for Parham, telling Parham he was not welcome at their mission.

⁶² A.J. Tomlinson, first general overseer of the Church of God, was removed from his position in 1923 and went on to start an organization, known today as the Church of God of Prophecy. See Anderson, *Vision of the Disinherited*, p. 205-206 for more on Tomlinson’s controversy. Cf. W.H. Phillips, *Quest to Restore God’s House: A Theological History of the Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee): Volume I, 1886-1923*, R.G. Spurling to A.J. Tomlinson, *Formation-Reformation-Reformation* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2015).

⁶³ Synan notes that the Pentecostals were rejected by society until 1923 when Aimee Semple McPherson’s ‘Foursquare Gospel’ movement gave the Pentecostal movement some societal acceptance due to her celebrity persona. See Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition*, p. 193.

⁶⁴ See Wacker, *Heaven Below*, p. 184.

⁶⁵ See Wacker, *Heaven Below*, p. 184.

⁶⁶ Wacker, *Heaven Below*, p. 184.

instance, Elder L. Echols from East Ellway, GA found two sticks of dynamite under his church!⁶⁷

Pentecostalism Continues to Grow

The early history of American Pentecostalism reveals a marginalized and disenfranchised, yet hopeful, group that was ethnically, socially, and theologically diverse, but at the same time, energized with a divine mission and empowered by the Holy Spirit in spite of the deep suffering and great trials they faced. They were grateful to God, compassionate toward the lost, and courageous enough to go to the ends of the earth to herald the apocalyptic Kingdom.⁶⁸ Despite its many troubles, the movement continued to grow. H. Cox notes:

The most amazing thing about the runaway divineness in the young Pentecostal movement is that while the spats and squabbles continued, so did its spread. The more Pentecostals fought, the more they multiplied. One of the most astonishing features of the movement is that it seems to not only thrive on opposition (which many religious movements have) but on division. This is another reason for its growth. Wherever Pentecostalism goes it evokes joy and anger, gratitude and rejection, polemic and schism ... Over the years Pentecostals have gotten accustomed to exclusion and excommunication. But, as in these early years, what followed rejection was a deeper determination to move on and continue.⁶⁹

As the twentieth century moved forward, Pentecostalism ‘began to shatter almost all the stereotypes, myths, and shibboleths that plagued the movement for over half a century’⁷⁰ as it found its way into the various Christian traditions through neo-Pentecostal movements and the Catholic Charismatic renewal.⁷¹ These movements created a ‘theological melting pot’ within Pentecostalism, making it difficult to place all Pentecostals into a single framework. Yong notes that ‘it is difficult, if not well-nigh impossible, to “essentialize” Pentecostalism conceptually’.⁷² Today, there are those amongst every branch of Christianity who have shared in the Pentecostal experience, both young and old, rich and poor, well-known and unknown, amongst every race and gender. Those who share in the Pentecostal experience, diverse as they are, have a heritage in common that is familiar with suffering – and not just suffering for suffering’s sake – but

⁶⁷ See Wacker, *Heaven Below*, p. 184.

⁶⁸ See Land’s three Pentecostal affections in Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, pp. 135-59.

⁶⁹ Cox, *Fire from Heaven*, pp. 77-78.

⁷⁰ Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition*, p. 220.

⁷¹ For more on these movements see Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition*, pp. 220-52.

⁷² A. Yong, “‘Not Knowing where the Wind Blows ...’”, *On Envisioning a Pentecostal Theology of Religions*, *JPT* 14 (1999), p. 94. Yong notes that it is also impossible to essentialize the Charismatic movement as it is comprised of ‘multifarious’ bodies.

glorying in the suffering. This ‘suffering in glory’ has affected Pentecostal hermeneutics and how Pentecostals read Scripture.

2.3 Pentecostal Hermeneutics

The late W.J. Hollenweger⁷³ helped lead the charge to advance the Pentecostals’ relationship with scholarship and is noted for saying that, ‘it is possible to speak in tongues and be a critical scholar’.⁷⁴ Now, the emergence and recognition of Pentecostal scholarship within academia has brought increased attention to the question of how Pentecostals approach Scripture.⁷⁵ The history of Pentecostal hermeneutics and its trajectory forward can be narrated by discussing: (1) the hermeneutic of early Pentecostals, and (2) the historical development of Pentecostal hermeneutics which includes the work of the Pentecostal Hermeneutics Project (PHP).

The Hermeneutic of Early Pentecostals

The Pentecostals’ story, including their relationship with suffering, is what contributed to shaping their hermeneutic. Just as the movement was a protest against modernity, so, too, was the way they approached Scripture. Frustrated with the historical critical methods employed by fundamentalist cessationists,⁷⁶ the early Pentecostal movement preferred to interpret Scripture by

⁷³ Walter Hollenweger (1927-2016) stood as the foremost authority on Pentecostal studies for many decades. His doctoral work on Pentecostalism yielded a 10-volume encyclopedic work and his scholarship pioneered a place for Pentecostal studies in the Western academy. In 2003, the Walter Hollenweger Centre for Pentecostal Studies opened in VU Amsterdam. This paved the way for the first Professor of Pentecostalism at a European University and led to studies in Pentecostalism in places such as the University of Birmingham, the University of Heidelberg, and Bangor University. This vindicated Hollenweger’s former indictment on Europe’s academies for ignoring the Pentecostal movement, something he called a ‘theological scandal without precedence!’ ‘Today we have institutes and specialists in every possible and impossible theological topic, but not one single library, not one single institute, not one specialized doctoral supervisor in Europe for the hundreds and perhaps thousands of young Pentecostal scholars worldwide who are knocking at the doors of our academic establishments’. See Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism*, p. 197.

⁷⁴ Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism*, p. 199.

⁷⁵ Explicating a hermeneutic that is faithful to the Pentecostal spirit is a relatively recent enterprise. John Christopher Thomas, a pioneer in Pentecostal hermeneutics, observed within the academy that, throughout the decades, Pentecostals were mostly indistinguishable from other evangelicals in regard to hermeneutical method. See J.C. Thomas, “‘Pentecostal Explorations of the New Testament’: Teaching New Testament Introduction in a Pentecostal Seminary”, *JPT* 11.1 (2002), p. 121.

⁷⁶ B.B. Warfield, a Princeton theologian (1887-1921) and fundamentalist, was a well-known cessationist who produced the most influential, modern treatise on cessationism entitled *Counterfeit Miracles* in 1918. His work reveals his Enlightenment thinking as he employs Common Sense Realism and the Baconian scientific method in his methodology. This was common amongst fundamentalists whose super-naturalism was relegated to the Scriptures. They maintained that supernatural manifestations ceased after the apostolic age. See Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, pp. 55-74; J.M. Ruthven, ‘On the Cessation of the Charismata: The Protestant Polemic of Benjamin B. Warfield’, *Pneuma* 12.1 (1999), pp. 14-31. Cf. J.M. Ruthven, *On the Cessation of the Charismata: The Protestant Polemic on Postbiblical Miracles* (JPTSup 3; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993).

way of encounter as opposed to critical exegesis or analytical readings.⁷⁷ Pentecostals were not looking for encounters with God via scholastic endeavors. To the Pentecostals, the Bible was not a document to be picked apart critically, like a dusty manuscript. Rather, it was a story in which they found themselves within, very much part of a narrative they perceived as still ongoing. R.P. Menzies posits:

The hermeneutic of most Pentecostal believers is not overly complex. It is not filled with questions about historical reliability or outdated worldviews. It is not excessively reflective about theological systems, cultural distance, or literary strategies. The hermeneutic of the typical Pentecostal believer is straightforward: the stories in Acts are *my* stories – stories that were written to serve as models for shaping my life and experience.⁷⁸

It is not going too far to suggest that this hermeneutic is partly due to the Pentecostals' experience with suffering. The work of R.M. Anderson notes this suffering.⁷⁹ Anderson points out how its leaders were young, grew up in rural surroundings, and were mostly raised in 'humble circumstances, some even in 'abject poverty'.⁸⁰ Some of its early influential leaders were 'very poor', illiterate, and had no education beyond adolescence.⁸¹ The overwhelming majority of the Pentecostals' recruits came from 'the working poor'. They also maintained a low social status and 'were ill-equipped either to perceive their position in the social order or to alter it even if they had perceived it'.⁸² The 'scum of society' is what formed the early Pentecostals. Not only were they poor and disenfranchised but they were former drunks, gamblers, and infidels. 'The Pentecostals were most often found among those who suffered, both materially and spiritually from the effects of modernity. They faced all those social and psychological problems involved in either breaking into modern urban culture or in its breaking in upon them in rural environments.'⁸³ It should be no wonder why their hermeneutic was a protest to the modernity

⁷⁷ A. Davies, 'What Does it Mean to Read the Bible as A Pentecostal?', *JPT* 18 (2009), p. 221. Though the Pentecostals interpreted Scripture by way of encounter, this does not suggest that Pentecostals failed to acknowledge any benefit in exegesis or critical engagement with the text.

⁷⁸ R.P. Menzies, *Pentecost: This Story is Our Story* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 2013), p. 23.

⁷⁹ See Anderson, *Vision of the Disinherited: The Making of American Pentecostalism*. Wacker notes that Anderson's work is the starting point of understanding the early Pentecostals' social standing and, as I am noting, their plight with suffering. 'There is much to be said for Anderson's portrait. Without question, poverty, hunger, homelessness, minimal education, and ill health defined the lives of thousands. Page after page of Anderson's work, staggering under the weight of hard-won footnotes, attest to the deprivation they endured.' See Wacker, *Heaven Below*, p. 201.

⁸⁰ Anderson, *Vision of the Disinherited*, p. 100.

⁸¹ Smith Wigglesworth was basically illiterate and Mary Woodworth-Etter did not finish elementary school. See Anderson, *Vision of the Disinherited*, p. 101.

⁸² Anderson, *Vision of the Disinherited*, p. 226.

⁸³ Anderson, *Vision of the Disinherited*, p. 226.

that broke them. They were sufferers, broken by sinful society but saved by God's grace. They saw themselves as God's remnant, end-time people. They identified with the early church in the book of Acts and read Scripture accordingly.

Because of this, the Luke-Acts narratives were central to the early Pentecostals' hermeneutic. Their sermons, pamphlets, and literature reveal that the Lukan accounts set the tone for their theology and praxis and was the filter whereby they read the text.⁸⁴ As such, their worldview was supernatural. They assumed the activity of both God and the devil as being present in the material world around them and they understood the miraculous and otherworldly events in the text as being normative for their own day and age.⁸⁵ Thus, high premium was placed on an experiential hermeneutic. 'The truthfulness of Scripture was discovered relationally, personally and experientially more so than "scientifically."' ⁸⁶ It was not that Bible study was disregarded by the Pentecostals. Rather, Bible study and theological reflection in-and-of-itself was not the goal. It was a means to the end of having a first-hand encounter with the reflections which the study yielded.

A major factor in the way the early Pentecostals read Scripture was their understanding of the Latter Rain.⁸⁷ This motif, based on a phenomenon in Palestine where the former rain enables grain to take root in the fall and is followed by a latter rain after the winter that causes growth for a harvest, provides a framework for early Pentecostal hermeneutics. Such a framework afforded them a 'promise-fulfillment' reading strategy, in which they extended the promise of the Latter Rain into their movement.⁸⁸ Being part of the Latter Rain meant that they were at the climax of God's eschatological plan for the world. Their inclusion into this plan gave them the

⁸⁴ See Mittelstadt, *Reading Luke-Acts*, p. 1. Hollenweger, *The Pentecostals*, p. 336, notes, 'The Pentecostals and their predecessors based their views almost exclusively on the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles'.

⁸⁵ Anderson, *Vision of the Disinherited*, pp. 95-96, notes, that 'healing' and 'casting out demons' were related terms in the Pentecostals' vocabulary. They had an animistic outlook on life, demon-spirits being a 'countermovement' against their own movement as God's end-time people.

⁸⁶ Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, p. 97.

⁸⁷ Faupel notes that eight biblical authors mention the Early and Latter Rain (Deut. 11.10-15; Job 29.29; Prov. 16.15; Jer. 3.3, 5.24; Hos. 6.3; Joel 2.23; Zech. 10.1; Jas 5.7). He maintains that Joel 2.23 holds the most significance for Pentecostals: 'Be glad, O children of Zion, and rejoice in the Lord your God, for he has given the early rain for your vindication, as poured down for you abundant rain, the early and the latter rain, as before'. He posits that Peter sees a fulfilment of this prophecy in regard to the events of Pentecost (Acts 2.16) and James links this event to the Second Coming of Christ (Jas 5.7). For more on the Latter Rain motif, see D. W. Faupel, *The Everlasting Gospel: The Significance of Eschatology in the Development of Pentecostal Thought* (PhD dissertation, University of Birmingham, 1989), pp. 62-70. Cf. D.W. Faupel, *The Everlasting Gospel: The Significance of Eschatology in the Development of Pentecostal Thought* (JPTSup 10; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996).

⁸⁸ Early Pentecostals considered the events of Acts 2 to be the 'early rain' and the outpouring of Spirit baptism, which ignited their movement, to be the 'Latter Rain'. See Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, p. 139.

understanding that they were an apocalyptic movement which would bring together Christianity and usher in the Second Coming of Jesus.⁸⁹

D.W. Myland was arguably the most influential in terms of perpetuating the Later Rain motif. He did this through a series of lectures at Stone Church in 1909.⁹⁰ Within these homilies, Myland revealed his reading strategy – the ‘commonsense’ Bible Reading Method approach that early Pentecostals used to examine the text. ‘I took up the Hebrew and Greek and found the word which stands for “latter rain” appears just seven times in addition to its appearance in the Latter Rain Covenant – six times in the Old Testament Scriptures and once in the New.’⁹¹

The Bible Reading Method that Myland employed suited the suffering, early Pentecostals well. It was a literalistic approach that presumed the Bible to be a divine document for practical Christian service and that did not discount the text’s supernaturalism in the least. It gathered verses on a particular subject and harmonized them into a particular doctrine.⁹² Such an approach was similar to the ‘proof texting’ method used by fundamentalists to develop systematic doctrines, however, as Archer notes, the Pentecostals’ approach to this was synchronic and not

⁸⁹ The main proponent of the Latter Rain doctrine was D.W. Myland (1858-1943).

⁹⁰ Myland’s lectures were published in book form. See D.W. Myland, *The Latter Rain Covenant and Pentecostal Power* (Chicago, IL: Evangel Publishing House, 1910).

⁹¹ Myland, *The Latter Rain Covenant*, chap. 2, Kindle. Myland also notes that he used a ‘triple-barreled’ approach to Scripture: literal (historical), typical (spiritual), and prophetic (dispensational). His dispensational understanding was a variation of fundamentalist dispensationalism which, unlike the fundamentalists, took a continuationist approach to the charismata. Such dispensationalism yielded to the Pentecostals a prophetic understanding of themselves as living out God’s plan in human history. See Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, p. 147. Myland’s approach to Scripture is seen being used almost four decades later in the influential dispensational work of *God’s Plan for Man* by Pentecostal minister, F.J. Dake. Dake, *God’s Plan for Man*, pp. 1-3 writes:

The Bible, of God’s plan in Scripture, is very simple to understand ... It is not necessary to look up all the many Scripture references in these lessons, in order to get the truth. They are given as *proof* that what is taught is biblical, and for those who desire to investigate for themselves what the Bible says on various questions ... Let the plain language of the references given be read and understood in the same literal way that we would understand similar statements in any other book (emphasis mine).

⁹² Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, p. 102, notes that two Pentecostal doctrines were developed using the Bible Reading Method: (1) tongues as initial physical evidence of Spirit baptism and (2) baptism in Jesus’ name only (a fundamental doctrine of Oneness Pentecostalism). R.H. Ackland notes that tongues as initial evidence of Spirit baptism was a doctrine developed at the outset of the Pentecostal movement, several years before Myland articulated the Bible Reading Method. It was considered a ‘sign’ and signs were to be expected ‘simply because the Bible said so’. See R.H. Ackland, *Toward a Pentecostal Theology of Glossolalia* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2020), p. 117. This is to say, Pentecostals were using the Bible Reading Method to develop doctrine before Myland articulated the strategy in 1909.

the diachronic tactic of the fundamentalists.⁹³ This Jesus-centered,⁹⁴ uncomplicated handling of Scripture that was used to ‘contend for the faith’⁹⁵ of the suffering early church reflected the Pentecostals’ primitivist perception of Christianity. The early Pentecostals saw themselves as restorers of the way of the apostles. They were the true heirs to what God accomplished through Luther (justification by faith), Wesley (holiness), and Charles Cullis (healing) before being corrupted by intellectualism and ‘great theologians’⁹⁶ who stifled the work of the Spirit through modern methods.⁹⁷ Their movement added to this the restoration of Spirit baptism which would usher in the return of Jesus. Hence, they were suspect of any theological approach that would quench what the Spirit was revealing through uncomplicated readings of the text.

In recent years, K.J. Archer has done work in early Pentecostal hermeneutics to reveal the Central Narrative Convictions (CNCs) of the early Pentecostals.⁹⁸ He divides them into three ‘transitional’ points: (1) the Acts 2 narrative in which the outpouring of the Spirit was characterized by speaking in tongues, (2) the Dark Ages in which God’s Spirit withdrew from the apostate church (save for his remnant), and (3) the Latter Rain outpouring the Pentecostals were experiencing for which Reformers such as Luther and Wesley paved the way. Hence, much of the tradition worked with a modified restorationist view. From this view, the Pentecostals derived the explanation of their existence and their primitive, storied hermeneutical framework

⁹³ See footnote Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, pp. 101-102, n. 44. Archer notes that the Pentecostals were not against historical-cultural and grammatical insight into passages. Yet, their method was not commensurate with academically informed historical-grammatical exegesis.

⁹⁴ Jesus was so central to the Pentecostals’ doctrine that the early Pentecostals have been described as being a ‘Jesus-cult’. Their songs, hymns, and sermons reflect Christ’s central place in their Bible readings and theology. See Wacker, ‘The Functions of Faith in Primitive Pentecostalism’, *HTR* 77.3-4 (1984), p. 371. An excerpt from the *AF* 1.5 (January, 1907), p. 2, only further confirms this: ‘We do not have time to preach anything else but Christ. The Holy Spirit has not time to magnify anything else but the Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.’

⁹⁵ Jude 3 was so engrained in the early Pentecostals’ theology and praxis that it was the subheading under the *Apostolic Faith* publication during the early Pentecostal movement.

⁹⁶ See M. Nel, ‘“Pentecostal Theology” as *Contradictio in Terminis*: A Perspective on the Past and Present’, *Scriptura* 116.1 (2017), p. 5.

⁹⁷ ‘There was a time when we were fed upon theological chips, shavings and wind, but now the long, long night is past. We are feeding upon the Word which is revealed by the Holy Ghost – the whole Word and nothing but the Word.’ See *AF* 1.7 (April, 1907), p. 3.

⁹⁸ For more on CNCs, see Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, pp. 156-61; D. Jacobson, ‘Pentecostal Hermeneutics in Comparative Perspective’, paper presented to the Annual Meeting of the SPS (Oakland, CA: March, 1997). Archer changes Jacobson’s terminology from ‘Foundational Narrative Convictions’ to ‘Central Narrative Convictions’ and suggests that CNCs are convictions that explain why a Christian community exists, what it is, and how it fits into the overall scheme of Christian history, including what responsibilities it has. In short, the CNCs explain the community’s ‘version’ of Christianity.

which relates their experiences – including their experiences with marginalization and suffering – to the experiences of the early church.

The Historical Development of Pentecostal Hermeneutics and the Pentecostal Hermeneutics Project (PHP)

As the Pentecostal movement moved forward in time, the hermeneutics of the Pentecostals moved along with it. The trajectory and development of Pentecostal hermeneutics over the years can be explained by noting the contributions of key seminal figures.⁹⁹ Certain key contributors within this emerging field of study have come to be deemed ‘the Cleveland School’.¹⁰⁰ This name represents a theological approach and hermeneutical orientation by those who share similar affinities.¹⁰¹ However, I deem such terminology is too exclusive and limiting because it does not represent the overall locus of where its contributors come from (they are not all from Cleveland, TN). A more appropriate name is terminology first proposed by J.C. Thomas in 2021, the Pentecostal Hermeneutics Project (PHP). Those found within the PHP are:¹⁰² (1) Pentecostal, (2) part of a Pentecostal worshipping community, (3) deliberately and self-consciously doing Pentecostal hermeneutics, (4) look back to the heart of the Pentecostal movement in the early days in order to drink from their own theological wells, (5) are of a kindred spirit, (6) focus on the final form of the text, and (7) place a high premium on encountering God in the text and through the text.¹⁰³ At the end of this historical survey¹⁰⁴ of the PHP, I note that suffering is part of the theological wells that Pentecostals drink from and show how suffering has had an effect on how the PHP has developed their hermeneutics, even if it is just tacitly.

⁹⁹ See J.C. Thomas, ‘Pentecostal Biblical Interpretation’, in S.L. McKenzie (ed.), *Oxford Encyclopedia of Biblical Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), II, pp. 89-97.

¹⁰⁰ M.J. Cartledge, ‘Pentecostal Theological Method and Intercultural Theology’, *Transformation* 25.2-3 (April & July 2008), p. 94.

¹⁰¹ This is not to suggest that all Pentecostals doing hermeneutics are part of the ‘Cleveland School’/PHP. There are those who differ from the PHP’s position on hermeneutics, preferring the traditional evangelical approach to the task and are sometimes called ‘the Springfield School’. This discussion began to really take shape in 1993 and 1994 within articles of *Pneuma* and the *JPT*. See T.B. Cargal, ‘Beyond the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy: Pentecostals and Hermeneutics in a Postmodern Age’, *Pneuma* 15.2 (1993), pp. 163-87. See a response to Cargal in R.P. Menzies, ‘Jumping Off the Postmodern Bandwagon’, *Pneuma* 16.1 (1994), pp. 115-20. See also F.L. Arrington, ‘The Use of the Bible by Pentecostals’, *JPT* 16.1 (1994), pp. 101-107; J. McKay, ‘When the Veil is Taken Away: The Impact of Prophetic Experience on Biblical Interpretation’, *JPT* 5 (1994), pp. 17-40; G.L. Anderson, ‘Pentecostal Hermeneutics: Part II’, *Paraclete* 28.2 (Spring 1994), pp. 13-22; K.J. Archer, ‘Pentecostal Hermeneutics: Retrospect and Prospect’, *JPT* 8 (1996), pp. 63-81.

¹⁰² I do not offer these points to essentialize the PHP. Rather, they serve a heuristic purpose.

¹⁰³ See R. Waddell, ‘The Pentecostals and Their Scriptures’, *Pneuma* 38.1-2 (2016), p. 116.

¹⁰⁴ This survey does not note every hermeneut who would consider themselves part of the PHP. Rather, it shows what is basic for a perspective on the PHP’s development.

The first figure to note is G.T. Sheppard. Sheppard was the first to call for a distinctly Pentecostal hermeneutic that was not dominated by the influences of modernistic approaches, but, rather, one that reflected the ‘instincts’ of early Pentecostalism.¹⁰⁵ After him came H.M. Ervin, an OT scholar from Oral Roberts University. He was the first to propose a ‘concrete’ Pentecostal hermeneutic in 1981,¹⁰⁶ arguing that a pneumatic epistemology could bridge the gulf between faith and reason. His approach gave priority to the text, left space for the mystical within the text, and recognized the Spirit as necessary for a proper understanding of Scripture. Three years after this article, in 1984, M.D. McLean posited that a Pentecostal hermeneutic was necessary in order for the Pentecostals to engage in effective ministry in the modern world.¹⁰⁷ He says:

A Pentecostal hermeneutic will either be a well-articulated, canonically based expression of normative Christianity, or the twentieth century Pentecostal movements will wither after the deaths of their charismatic leaders and become the religious oddities discussed in the opening chapters of future books ... which study the twenty-first or twenty-second century “neo-charismatic movement”.¹⁰⁸

Next to note is R.P. Spittler who, in 1985, offered a theological sample of his approach to Scripture as a Pentecostal who uses evangelical options.¹⁰⁹ To demonstrate this approach, Spittler surveys a ‘theological sample’ of 1 Cor. 11.2-16. He offers historical insights on Corinth, gives attention to the context of the verse, examines the structure of the text, and proposes an application. He concludes that, while historical critical approaches are useful, they are ‘inadequate’ in-and-of-themselves. He posits, ‘the end of biblical study cannot consist alone in historical dates or tentative judgments about complicated and conjectured literary origins. The end of biblical study consists rather in enhanced faith, hope, and love for both the individual and the community.’¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁵ G.T. Sheppard, ‘Word and Spirit: Scripture and the Pentecostal Tradition - Part I’, *Agora* 1.4 (1978), pp. 4-5, 17-22; G.T. Sheppard, ‘Word and Spirit: Scripture in the Pentecostal Tradition - Part II’, *Agora* 2.1 (1978), pp. 14-19.

¹⁰⁶ H.M. Ervin, ‘Hermeneutics: A Pentecostal Option’, *Pneuma* 3.1 (1981), pp. 11-25.

¹⁰⁷ M.D. McLean, ‘Toward a Pentecostal Hermeneutic’, *Pneuma* 6.1 (1984), pp. 35-56.

¹⁰⁸ McClean, ‘Toward a Pentecostal Hermeneutic’, p. 36.

¹⁰⁹ Spittler’s work is not a proposed model for a Pentecostal hermeneutic. See Thomas, ‘Pentecostal Biblical Interpretation’, p. 99.

¹¹⁰ See R.P. Spittler, ‘Scripture and the Theological Enterprise: View from a Big Canoe’, in R.K. Johnston (ed.), *The Use of the Bible in Theology: Evangelical Options* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1985), pp. 56-77.

Following Spittler is R.D. Moore, whom J.C. Thomas refers to as ‘one of the most significant figures in the call for and development of a Pentecostal hermeneutic’.¹¹¹ In 1987, Moore offered an outline on how a distinctly Pentecostal hermeneutic would look.¹¹² Moore posits four central features toward a Pentecostal hermeneutic: (1) the role of the Spirit as interpreter, (2) the role of both knowledge and lived experience which inform one another in the reader’s response to Scripture, (3) the prophethood of all believers, and (4) the connection between truth and active membership in the local body of Christ.¹¹³ In 1992, Moore examined the elements of inscriptured word and prophetic utterance, which are both found in Deut. 4:5-8, and how they are supposed to function in a community of believers. In 1995, Moore examined how the interpreter of the text not only makes claims about the text but is claimed *by* the text through a look at Deuteronomy and the fire of God at Horeb. Following this, Moore examined the role of the taxonomy of the prophetic calling through presentations of Moses, Elijah, and Elisha, and Jonah. His later contribution, ‘Altar Hermeneutics’, posits this phrase (altar hermeneutics) to describe the experience of encountering God through the text.¹¹⁴ Moore brings together the work of R.W. Wall,¹¹⁵ C. Bridges Johns,¹¹⁶ C.E.W. Green,¹¹⁷ and W. Brueggemann¹¹⁸ to suggest that a Pentecostal’s reading of Scripture is not an intellectual enterprise alone.¹¹⁹ Rather, it is an altar – a place where the reader brings the sacrifice of themselves to the text, allowing the text to interpret *them*. In other words, reading Scripture is not foremost an epistemological pursuit. It is

¹¹¹ See Thomas, ‘Pentecostal Biblical Interpretation’, p. 91.

¹¹² For a collection of Moore’s essays, see R.D. Moore, *The Spirit of the Old Testament* (JPTSup 35; Dorset; Deo Publishing, 2011).

¹¹³ See Thomas, ‘Pentecostal Biblical Interpretation’, p. 91.

¹¹⁴ R.D. Moore, ‘Altar Hermeneutics: Reflections on Pentecostal Biblical Interpretation’, *JPT* 38.1-2 (2016), pp. 148-59.

¹¹⁵ See R.W. Wall, ‘Waiting on the Holy Spirit (Acts 1.4): Extending a Metaphor to Biblical Interpretation’, *JPT* 22.1 (2013), pp. 37-53.

¹¹⁶ See C. Bridges Johns, ‘Grieving, Brooding, and Transforming: The Spirit, the Bible, and Gender’, *JPT* 22.2 (2014), pp. 141-53.

¹¹⁷ See C.E.W. Green, *Sanctifying Interpretation: Vocation, Holiness, and Scripture* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press 2015).

¹¹⁸ See W. Brueggemann, *Texts Under Negotiation: The Bible and Postmodern Imagination* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1993).

¹¹⁹ Moore compares the Babel account in Genesis 11 to western Enlightenment biblical criticism suggesting in his analysis, ‘I see the fall of modern biblical criticism not merely in terms of the rise of postmodern criticism, but ultimately in terms of the inevitable manifestation of divine judgment, by which all human kingdoms and constructions, according to Daniel 2.21, have their beginning and end’. See Moore, ‘Altar Hermeneutics’, pp. 151-52.

a ‘confrontational encounter’ that spreads the readers deepest issues out on the altar, giving the Lord the opportunity to transform them.¹²⁰

J. McKay is another scholar who deserves recognition for his contribution to Pentecostal hermeneutics. In 1994, his article ‘When the Veil is Taken Away: The Impact of Prophetic Experience on Biblical Interpretation’¹²¹ explored his own experience with Spirit baptism and how that experience has affected his approach to hermeneutics. McKay wrestles with the notion that Spirit baptism and biblical scholarship seem like ‘uncomfortable companions’ as the prophetic community and biblical academy operate at ‘two very different levels’. In considering the relationship between the prophetic community and the academy, McKay uses an analogy of theatre performance. He suggests that the academic is the critic of the performance while the charismatic is the performer on the stage. ‘Inevitably there must be a great deal of tension between the two, though it is hoped that in the end they might function to each other’s mutual benefit, even if at times criticism and hurt may be the more apparent marks of their relationship.’¹²² McKay posits that charismatic readers must not just be analysts of the text. Rather, they must approach the text by means of ‘shared experiences’ with the characters. They cannot just be critics – they must step into the performance themselves.

Imperative to the advancement of Pentecostal hermeneutics has been the seminal work of J.C. Thomas. In 1994, he asked the question, ‘what would a Pentecostal hermeneutic look like and, more importantly, how would it function?’ in an article he published for the *Journal of Pentecostal Theology*.¹²³ Thomas’ question came out of a mounting courage amongst Pentecostals which argued Pentecostals had something unique to offer the diverse field of biblical hermeneutics due to their focus on pneumatology. Using a narrative reading of the Jerusalem Council pericope, in which the apostles and elders come together and appeal to

¹²⁰ See also R.D. Moore, ‘A Pentecostal Approach to Scripture’, in L.R. Martin (ed.), *Pentecostal Hermeneutics: A Reader* (Boston, MA: Brill, 2013), pp. 11-13; R.D. Moore, ‘Canon and Charisma in the Book of Deuteronomy and the Fire of God: A Critical Charismatic Interpretation’, *JPT* 7 (1995), pp. 11-33; R.D. Moore, *The Spirit of the Old Testament*.

¹²¹ McKay, ‘When the Veil is Taken Away’, pp. 17-40.

¹²² McKay, ‘When the Veil is Taken Away’, p. 19.

¹²³ See J.C. Thomas, ‘Women, Pentecostals and the Bible: An Experiment in Pentecostal Hermeneutics’, *JPT* 5 (1994), p. 43. His question is similar to the question asked by C.M. Robeck in 1984, ‘What, if anything, do Pentecostals bring by way of a unique contribution to the understanding of Scripture? Is there anything uniquely Pentecostal or charismatic in the way that such individuals can approach Scripture?’ See C.M. Robeck, Jr., ‘Experience, Hermeneutics, and Theology’, *Pneuma* 6.2 (1984), pp. 1-3 quoted in Waddell, ‘The Pentecostals and Their Scriptures’, p. 115.

Scripture in order to decide if Gentile believers needed to participate in Jewish practices to be Christians (Acts 15.1-29), Thomas identifies three components from which he derives a Pentecostal hermeneutical triad:¹²⁴ (1) the *community* was gathered together in the interpretative process, (2) the *Spirit* played an essential role in the interpretative process, and (3) the *Scripture* held a great deal of authority in the interpretative process.¹²⁵ To gauge the usefulness of the Acts 15 triad, Thomas challenged the rationalistic interpretations proposed by fundamentalist readings of Scriptures that pertain to women's role within church ministry. In place of these interpretations, Thomas (1) called upon the Christian communities' shared experience that would include testimony received in light of Scripture;¹²⁶ (2) advocated for an acknowledgment of the work of the Spirit seen within shared experiences; (3) contended that, in light of the testimonies of women within the Pentecostal tradition, texts which testify of women's prominent role in ministry should be given priority over those that seem to restrict such;¹²⁷ and (4) suggested that stipulations made should honor the spirit of those stipulations made in Acts 15 which, thereby, would not undermine women as legitimate ministers.¹²⁸

Thomas has demonstrated the capability of the hermeneutical triad in reference to the Apocalypse, wherein he has done extensive work.¹²⁹ He notes that, when growing up, he

¹²⁴ The development of the Pentecostal triad has been a seminal effort with various Pentecostals making their contributions to its development. R.D. Moore states, 'the emergence and development of Pentecostal hermeneutics could, in large part, be traced from Pentecostal scholars first noting this triadic dynamic (Moore 1987, 1989), then biblically expositing it (Thomas 1994), then historically tracking it through interpretive practices of the Pentecostal movement (Archer 2001, 2004) and then extensively explicating it theologically and hermeneutically in ways engaged with and for the benefit of global ecumenical theology and ecclesial practice (Yong 2002, 2005; Vondey 2010; Kärkkäinen 2014).' See R.D. Moore, 'Revelation: The Light and Fire of Pentecost', in W. Vondey (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Pentecostal Theology* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2020), chap. 5, Kindle.

¹²⁵ Thomas notes that the apostles' methodology for reading the OT Scriptures in order to make an interpretative decision about the matter at hand was 'far removed' from the methods of the evangelicals and fundamentalists. Instead, (1) the apostles moved their way from context to the biblical text, (2) the Spirit helped the apostles choose an OT text from a diverse field of texts on the Gentiles place in God's economy, and (3) Scripture was used authoritatively to draw stipulations between Jew and Gentile. See Thomas, 'Women, Pentecostals, and the Bible', p. 50.

¹²⁶ The value Thomas places on the shared experience of Christian communities in light of Scripture explains his emphasis on *Wirkungsgeschichte* (reception history) from Pentecostal journal articles such as *The Apostolic Faith*, *The Church of God Evangel*, *Pentecostal Holiness Advocate*, *Pentecostal Evangel*, *Latter Rain Evangel*, *Bridal Call*, and the *Crusader*.

¹²⁷ Thomas places the text as authoritative within the triad and, in doing so, offers protection against 'rampant subjectivism'. Yet, he notes that the text should be treated beyond 'uniform propositions' to which it is often reduced. Instead, he suggests that the canon should be allowed to define biblical authority. He considers this a more 'biblical' way of approaching biblical authority. Thomas, 'Women, Pentecostals and the Bible', p. 55.

¹²⁸ Thomas, 'Women, Pentecostals and the Bible', pp. 51-54.

¹²⁹ See J.C. Thomas, *The Apocalypse: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2012); J.C. Thomas and F.D. Macchia, *Revelation* (THC; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016).

observed a theological dilemma in how ‘prophecy preachers’ used the Apocalypse to calculate the coming of Christ instead of actually embracing the real heart of the Apocalypse. A breakthrough occurred for Thomas while sitting in a chapel service at a seminary where he was teaching. Vladimir Mourashkine, a Pentecostal Christian who had been imprisoned in the Soviet Union, spoke about his experience of being a persecuted Christian in the U.S.S.R. He related the history of Russia using the text of the Apocalypse. Thomas began wondering how other people in the world hear the text in places ‘where people do not have the luxury of spending large amounts of time speculating about end-time events’.¹³⁰ In response to this, Thomas now insists for a ‘multidimensional’ reading of the text that not only includes the authority of Scripture and an ‘intentional’ sensitivity to the Holy Spirit, but also dialogue with the Pentecostal community (many of which are at the margins of society) who can inform our interpretations of the text in a valuable way¹³¹ – a hermeneutical triad.

Following J.C. Thomas is the work of L.R. McQueen.¹³² Within his work, McQueen highlights his Pentecostal context to offer fresh readings of Joel that contribute toward Pentecostal eschatology and ecclesiology. In doing so, he also shows consideration for the historical and literary significance of the text. McQueen examines the subjects of lament, salvation, and judgment in Joel and traces them into the book of Acts and into Pentecostal literature.

In 2005, K.J. Archer’s work advanced the development of Pentecostal hermeneutics as he offered the first full monograph on Pentecostal hermeneutics.¹³³ Archer’s work builds upon Thomas’ hermeneutical triad and further emphasizes the unique reading strategy of Pentecostals in comparison to modernist fundamentalists. Archer traces early Pentecostal literature, suggesting that early Pentecostals used the ‘Bible Reading Method’ as their approach to the text. Archer also offers a critique of the historical-critical method of interpretation used by

¹³⁰ J.C. Thomas, ‘Reading the Bible From Within Our Tradition: A Pentecostal Hermeneutic as Test Case’ in J. Green and M. Turner (eds.), *Between Two Horizons: Spanning New Testament Studies and Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), p. 121. Thomas also notes that another significant change in his thinking toward the Apocalypse occurred when he read R. Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*.

¹³¹ Thomas notes that he has used a multidimensional approach in his reading of the Apocalypse for his Two Horizon’s commentary. See J.C. Thomas and F.D. Macchia, *Revelation*.

¹³² L.R. McQueen, *Joel and the Spirit: The Cry of a Prophetic Hermeneutic* (JPTSUP 8; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995). See now L.R. McQueen, *Joel and the Spirit: The Cry of a Prophetic Hermeneutic* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2009).

¹³³ K.J. Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic: Spirit, Scripture and Community* (JPTSUP 28; New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2004). See now Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic*.

fundamentalists and evangelicals. He offers a Pentecostal hermeneutic, which builds upon Thomas' triad, using semiotics, narrative analysis, and reader-response criticism.

In 2010, R. Waddell's seminal work, *The Spirit of the Book of Revelation*,¹³⁴ advanced Pentecostal hermeneutics because he used an intertextual approach that not only extends to echoes and allusions within the text but goes beyond such into 'the life and community of the readers so that the "interested perspective, ethical criteria, theoretical frameworks, religious presuppositions, and sociopolitical locations" serve as (con)textual forces that converge with the literary texts'.¹³⁵ Waddell offers what he calls 'the profile of a Pentecostal reader of the Apocalypse', which consists of four elements: (1) the first word of the text, 'Apocalypse', which encourages readers to expect an encounter with Jesus; (2) Rev 1.3, which demonstrates a relationship between written and spoken word, (3) the interaction between Word and Spirit which should take place in a community that appreciates the prophethood of all believers; and (4) the fear of God which informs a Pentecostal's approach to the text.

In 2008, L.R. Martin contributed to Pentecostal hermeneutics by proposing a Pentecostal hermeneutic in his literary and theological reading of the book of Judges from a Wesleyan-Pentecostal perspective. He attempts to answer how Pentecostal readers should 'hear' a word from the Lord.¹³⁶ Martin's close reading of the speeches of Yahweh leads him to the conclusion that there is a tension between Yahweh's anger and compassion, a tension that the reader is to discern.

C.E.W. Green has advanced the study of Pentecostal hermeneutics in his book *Sanctifying Interpretation*.¹³⁷ This work explores the process of sanctification that takes place as readers interpret the text. Green suggests that Pentecostals have much in common with the way the Church Fathers read Scripture, particularly Origen:

Origen assumes, as Pentecostals do, that Scripture is a coherent whole and the meanings of Scripture are inexhaustible. There is always more to a biblical text than has yet been or ever could be understood, but whatever is discovered in the depths of a particular text is of a piece with all other texts ... We [Pentecostals] should, I believe, assume that biblical texts have multiple senses. And these multiple senses are intimately related to the stages of spiritual

¹³⁴ R. Waddell, *The Spirit of the Book of Revelation* (JPTSUP 30; Dorset: Deo Publishing, 2010).

¹³⁵ Waddell, *The Spirit of the Book of Revelation*, p. 39.

¹³⁶ L.R. Martin, *The Unheard Voice of God: A Pentecostal Hearing of the Book of Judges* (JPTSUP 32; Dorset: Deo Publishing, 2008).

¹³⁷ C.E.W. Green, *Sanctifying Interpretation: Vocation, Holiness, and Scripture*.

maturation. Knowing this, we can see how the reading of Scripture yields different meaning at different times for different people (bracket added).¹³⁸

M.L. Archer advanced the study of Pentecostal hermeneutics using *Wirkungsgeschichte*¹³⁹ (a methodology that examines the way texts have had impact on society over time) and narrative analysis to construct a Pentecostal theology of worship in the Apocalypse.¹⁴⁰ After Archer, D.R. Johnson made his contribution to Pentecostal hermeneutics by also doing work in the Apocalypse.¹⁴¹ Johnson followed Waddell's intertextual methodology and employed *Wirkungsgeschichte*¹⁴² to consider a theological construction of pneumatic discernment in the Apocalypse for the Pentecostal community.¹⁴³

Another important contribution toward Pentecostal hermeneutics was made by S.M. Fettke who took steps to develop a Pentecostal, practical theodicy on account of his son who suffers from autism. Fettke's observation was that Pentecostal churches in his part of the world have hardly been a help.¹⁴⁴ To respond to such lack of help, Fettke proposes having a plan for including the disabled in the functions of the church, seeing them as those having a gift to contribute because they have been created in God's image. Fettke followed this article up with another article in 2016, entitled 'A Practical Pentecostal Theodicy?'¹⁴⁵ In this article, Fettke suggests a theodicy for Pentecostals that is practical and includes observing the work of the Spirit in Acts in order to bring 'peace and light and comfort'. He suggests that this approach to theodicy is 'redemptive, pastoral, and deeply existential'.¹⁴⁶ Fettke sides with J. Swinton,¹⁴⁷ who

¹³⁸ Green, *Sanctifying Interpretation*, p. xiv.

¹³⁹ Archer uses *Wirkungsgeschichte* to explore early Wesleyan-Holiness Pentecostal publications (*The Apostolic Faith, The Bridegroom's Messenger, Evening Light/Church of God Evangel*) as well as Finished Work Pentecostal publications (*The Pentecost, The Latter Rain Evangel, Word and Witness, The Christian/Weekly Evangel*). See Archer, 'I Was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day', pp. 68-118.

¹⁴⁰ See M.L. Archer, 'I Was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day'.

¹⁴¹ See D.R. Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment*.

¹⁴² Johnson followed Archer, using Wesleyan-Holiness publications (*The Apostolic Faith, The Bridegroom's Messenger, The Whole Truth, The Church of God Evangel, The Pentecostal Holiness Advocate*) and Finished Work publications (*The Pentecost, The Latter Rain Evangel, Word and Witness, The Weekly/Christian Evangel*). See Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment*, pp. 101-93.

¹⁴³ See Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment*, p. 49.

¹⁴⁴ S.M. Fettke, 'The Spirit of God Hovered Over the Waters: Creation, the Local Church, and the Mentally and Physically Challenged, A Call to Spirit-led Ministry', *JPT* 17.2 (2008), pp. 170-82. Fettke uses the work of Stanley Hauerwas to critique the tendency of Pentecostal churches to treat the handicapped as though they are a burden. See S. Hauerwas, 'Timeful Friends: Living with the Handicapped', *JRDH* 8.3 (2004), p. 14.

¹⁴⁵ S.M. Fettke, 'A Practical Pentecostal Theodicy? A Proposal', *Pneuma* 38.1-2 (2016), pp. 160-79.

¹⁴⁶ See Fettke, 'A Practical Pentecostal Theodicy?', p. 169.

¹⁴⁷ See J. Swinton, *Raging with Compassion: Pastoral Responses to the Problem of Evil* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011).

suggests that intellectual pursuits of theodicy tend to fall short of answering the problem of suffering. However, Fettke does not altogether throw out the benefit of intellectual pursuits in the area of theodicy – namely, new ways of thinking about theology and the problem of suffering. Fettke’s work provides a Pentecostal way of reading texts that keeps in mind the pain of the sufferer while proposing ways of meeting the needs of those in the community who hurt.

Aside from the work of seminal figures, certain publications helped Pentecostal hermeneutics make significant strides. In 1992, not only was the first issue of the *JPT* published but an issue of *Pneuma* was published wherein four articles and a review essay appeared on Pentecostal hermeneutics.¹⁴⁸ These articles contrasted Pentecostal hermeneutics with fundamentalist evangelicalism and noted the importance of the social location of the reader.¹⁴⁹ The 1994 publication of *Pneuma* contained critical responses to the aforementioned articles which had been influenced by postmodern literature and philosophy.¹⁵⁰ Despite the sharp disagreements amongst the Pentecostal scholars, these discussions pushed the trajectory of Pentecostal hermeneutics forward, distinguishing Pentecostal hermeneutics from evangelical methods.¹⁵¹

More recent discussions have come about in Pentecostal hermeneutics as a result of the publication of C.S. Keener’s work, *Spirit Hermeneutics*.¹⁵² Responses to Keener’s work by other Pentecostal scholars, including J.C. Thomas, C.E.W. Green, and R. Waddell, provide further insight into what a distinctive Pentecostal hermeneutic may look like. Keener’s reviewers make clear that a ‘Spirit’¹⁵³ hermeneutic should not include the sort of emphasis he places on the historical-grammatical method. Green critiques Keener’s intense emphasis on his historical

¹⁴⁸ R.D. Israel, D.E. Albrecht, and R.G. McNally, ‘Pentecostals and Hermeneutics: Texts, Rituals, and Community’, *Pneuma* 15.2 (1993), pp. 137-61; T.B. Cargal, ‘Beyond the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy: Pentecostals and Hermeneutics in a Postmodern Age’, J-D. Plüss, ‘Azusa and Other Myths: the Long Winding Road from Experience to Stated Belief and Back Again’, *Pneuma* 15.2 (1993), pp. 189-201; J.K. Byrd, ‘Paul Ricoeur’s Hermeneutical Theory and Pentecostal Proclamation’, *Pneuma* 15.2 (1993), pp. 203-14; R. Stronstad, ‘Pentecostal Hermeneutics: A Review of Gordon D. Fee, *Gospel and Spirit: Issues in New Testament Hermeneutics*’, *Pneuma* 15.2 (1993), pp. 215-22.

¹⁴⁹ Waddell, ‘The Pentecostals and Their Scriptures’, p. 117.

¹⁵⁰ F.L. Arrington, ‘The Use of the Bible by Pentecostals’; H.K. Harrington and R. Patten, ‘Pentecostal Hermeneutics and Postmodern Literary Theory’, *Pneuma* 16.1 (1994), pp. 109-14; R.P. Menzies, ‘Jumping Off the Postmodern Bandwagon’; G.T. Sheppard, ‘Biblical Interpretation After Gadamer’, *Pneuma* 16.1 (1994), pp. 121-41.

¹⁵¹ See Waddell, ‘The Pentecostals and Their Scriptures’, pp. 115-21.

¹⁵² C.S. Keener, *Spirit Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016). Though Keener is Pentecostal, he has never claimed to be doing ‘Pentecostal hermeneutics’. His approach to hermeneutics is evangelical.

¹⁵³ Keener called the book ‘Spirit’ hermeneutics instead of ‘Pentecostal’ hermeneutics in order to avoid the confusion of whether or not the book is about capital ‘P’ Pentecostalism (the renewal movement of the 20th century and its denominations) or lower case ‘p’ pentecostalism (an expression of diverse beliefs found in various geographical locations). See R. Waddell, ‘Spirit Hermeneutics or Biblical Interpretation by Any Other Name’, *JPT* 27.2 (2018), pp. 196-212.

analysis of the text and says, ‘grammatical-historical exegesis ... is not a model that fits Pentecostal churches. Not least because it privileges the very modernist structures of meaning that Pentecostal spirituality exposes as folly.’¹⁵⁴ Waddell posits ‘historical-cultural backgrounds are important and historical-critical methods can be useful, but they are insufficient tools when the task is Spirit hermeneutics’.¹⁵⁵ Thomas’ critique affirms this and notes that Keener’s work is essentially an evangelical approach that takes into account Spirit baptism. ‘In the end, it is a hermeneutic that advocates doing your proper exegesis and then expecting the Spirit to apply the results.’¹⁵⁶ Thomas defends his own work and the work of other Pentecostal scholars akin to him against Keener’s suspicion of it. In doing so, Thomas brings to light noteworthy observations about Pentecostal hermeneutics, and hermeneuts similar to him, that should be taken into consideration when surveying the emerging field of Pentecostal hermeneutics. These observations are: (1) the historical-critical method is ‘an ill-fitting suit’ (like Saul’s armor) for a Pentecostal reading of Scripture; (2) Pentecostal hermeneuts like him have sought to discern an approach to Scripture that is fitting for the Pentecostal movement God has raised up; (3) Pentecostal hermeneuts like him have used narrative methods which they know to be true of God, such as narrative readings of the text and reception history, in order to give voice to the testimonies of tradition; (4) Pentecostals are not trying to be different in their approach to Scripture just for the sake of being different but embrace similarities with the way other traditions read Scripture; (5) Pentecostals speak for themselves and not for how other Christians should read the text; (6) Pentecostal hermeneuts have used the Five-Fold Gospel as a worldview whereby to read Scripture; and (7) Pentecostals have advocated *a* Pentecostal way of reading Scripture not *the* Pentecostal way of reading Scripture.¹⁵⁷

One such Pentecostal way of reading Scripture is the hermeneutical triad – Scripture, Spirit, and Community. C.E.W. Green notes that eight hermeneutical points, all of which have won widespread acceptance amongst Pentecostals, gather under this triad:

- (1) The work of the Spirit in making faithful interpretation possible, inspiring readers to make gospel sense of the texts.

¹⁵⁴ C.E.W. Green, ‘A Review of Craig Keener’s *Spirit Hermeneutics: Reading Scripture in Light of Pentecost*’, *JTP* 27.2 (2018), p. 221.

¹⁵⁵ Waddell, ‘Spirit Hermeneutics or Biblical Interpretation’, p. 207.

¹⁵⁶ J.C. Thomas, ‘A Critical Engagement with Craig S. Keener’s *Spirit Hermeneutics*’, *JTP* 27.2 (2018), p. 195.

¹⁵⁷ Thomas, ‘A Critical Engagement’, p. 193.

- (2) The authority and sufficiency of the Scriptures' final, canonical form.
- (3) The role of the worshipping community in the process of interpreting the Scriptures.
- (4) The need for confessional, theological readings concerned primarily with how the Scriptures work as God's address to God's people here and now.
- (5) Respect for the irreducible diversity of theological and literary 'voices' in the Scriptures.
- (6) Regard for the over-arching 'story' of the history of salvation as a hermeneutical key.
- (7) The priority of narrative, literary readings of a text over against historical critical readings.
- (8) The significance of the history of effects over the contemporary interpretative process.¹⁵⁸

As a Pentecostal who aligns with the PHP in my theological approach and hermeneutical orientation, this triad is well fitted for my exploration of theodicy and suffering in the Apocalypse. Green's first point fits my Pentecostal conviction of the Spirit's role in interpretation. His second point and seventh point suit my narrative reading of the Apocalypse which concerns itself with the final form of the text. His third point suits my attempt to hear the voices of the early, suffering Pentecostals as they read texts on suffering (particularly texts in the Apocalypse). His fourth point enables me to 'hear what Spirit says to the churches'. His fifth and sixth point make room for storied theology, a well-matched approach for Pentecostals who are story tellers, themselves. His eighth point suits my use of *Wirkungsgeschichte* as a means of hearing the voices of the early, suffering Pentecostals. In the next section, I shall offer a word on how Pentecostals understand each segment of this triad. Before doing so, I will posit a thought about the development of the hermeneutics of the PHP.

As noted above, the PHP is a theological approach and hermeneutical orientation that drinks out of its own theological wells. Suffering is certainly contained in those wells, as can be seen through a small survey of its history. Suffering, which was experienced by the early Pentecostals and shaped their early hermeneutic, seems to also have had an effect on how the PHP has developed its hermeneutics, even if it is just tacitly. Sheppard proposed a hermeneutic in 1981 to protest modernity – the modernity that broke the Pentecostals and was, in many ways, responsible for their sufferings. Spittler's work concerns itself with the faith, hope, and love of the community – a community which has undergone and continues to undergo suffering.

¹⁵⁸ C.E.W. Green, *Toward a Pentecostal Theology of the Lord's Supper: Foretasting the Kingdom* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2012), p. 189.

Moore's work emphasizes the need for an encounter with God from the text, giving the text an opportunity to transform the community in their deepest issues, issues they have suffered through. McKay's work encourages the reader to step into the performance of the characters in the text, characters who often suffered and whose sufferings the early Pentecostals related to. The work of J.C. Thomas indicates that the PHP has developed their hermeneutic with sympathies toward those who suffer. The breakthrough he had in understanding how to read the Apocalypse came from listening to a sufferer! It was precisely because of a testimony of someone who experienced suffering that Thomas now insists on multidimensional readings of the text, wherein the voice of the suffering Pentecostal community can be heard in order to inform our readings of the text. The work of Waddell in the Apocalypse encourages readers to expect an encounter with Jesus, many of which would identify with the sufferings of the Johannine community. Fetkke's work explicitly acknowledges the suffering of the Pentecostal community in his readings of Scripture and provides a step toward reading the text with suffering and theodicy in mind. The work of Archer and Johnson employ the method of *Wirkungsgeschichte* in the Apocalypse which allow voices of the early Pentecostals to be heard, many of which suffered. It only seems conclusive that the development of Pentecostal hermeneutics has either advertently or inadvertently made ripe an exploration such as this one. In keeping with the PHP's affinities toward the suffering, I will keep the Pentecostals' suffering in the foreground of my reading of the Apocalypse, making a contribution apropos to the PHP.

A Pentecostal Hermeneutical Triad

Scripture

Pentecostals affirm the authority of the Word of God and acknowledge that its origins are divine, having been inspired by the Holy Spirit.¹⁵⁹ They believe the canon is complete and the Scriptures can be trusted because of the accuracy of the manuscripts from which the Bible has been translated. They have maintained that their Bible is the most important text, relegating other books and resources to a more inferior place.¹⁶⁰ Early Pentecostals believed the Bible contained

¹⁵⁹ The first point on the Assemblies of God doctrinal statement affirms, 'The Scriptures, both the Old and New Testaments, are verbally inspired of God and are the revelation of God to man, the infallible, authoritative rule of faith and conduct'. See 'The Assemblies of God 16 Fundamental Truths' <https://ag.org/beliefs/statement-of-fundamental-truths#1> (accessed March 29, 2021).

¹⁶⁰ The Bible was held in such high regard and esteemed so superior amongst early Pentecostals that other books were often dismissed without hesitation. Early Pentecostal Bible colleges often used the Bible as the main textbook and had libraries with very few books in them. See Warrington, *Pentecostal Theology*, pp. 180-81.

all the answers to all of life's most difficult problems, and even today, this sentiment is felt within Pentecostal congregations.¹⁶¹ Within the text, Pentecostals see Jesus as being center stage, always having a rich Christology in the foreground.¹⁶²

While Pentecostals assume the Biblical accounts are accurate history, they do not *just* see the text as accurate biblical history. They adapt their own present circumstances in light of the text so that they may become participants in the story. Pentecostals, therefore, are not longing to return to the times of the Bible. They believe the events of the text have now been 'thrust anew' into the present in which they live and interact.¹⁶³ Hence, the truth of the Bible does not depend on historical criticism. It is 'spiritually discerned' within a community of believers who demonstrate it by the gifts of the Spirit and 'anointed' preaching within 'the context of the kerygmatic, koinonia, and doxological functions of the church'.¹⁶⁴

For Pentecostals, the Holy Spirit plays a vital role in the reading of Scripture. C.H. Pinnock notes that 'the external letter must become an inner Word through the work of the Spirit'.¹⁶⁵ Pentecostals today will often express the importance of the work of the Spirit in the handling of the text by saying, 'the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life'.¹⁶⁶ The essence of this expression is not to diminish the role of Scripture but to emphasize the vital role that the Spirit must play in illuminating the text to the reader. Pentecostals understand the text to be alive. It is often referred to as 'the Living Word' because it plays an active role in the contemporary life of the reader. The

¹⁶¹ Wacker refers to the notion that the Bible contains answers to all of life's problems as 'plenary relevance'. 'Whenever serious questions about God's purpose for humans arouse, the obvious recourse was to open the Book and "see what God Himself says on the subject."' Wacker notes that this principle of plenary relevance explains why many Early Pentecostals used the Bible as the sole textbook in all Pentecostal educational programs. Even today, it is common for a Pentecostal to carry their Bible to church with them. Wacker, *Heaven Below*, chap. 4, Kindle.

¹⁶² Vondey, *Pentecostalism*, p. 73

¹⁶³ Vondey refers to the Pentecostals' belief that the events of the text have been thrust into the present as "'this is that" hermeneutics' based on Peter's speech in Acts 2. 'The distance between the present and the past is seemingly eliminated as the present reality is redefined in terms of the past: "This *is* that"! The present participates in the biblical events by fulfilling the past, which now redefines the present.' See W. Vondey, *Pentecostal Theology: Living the Full Gospel* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), p. 16.

¹⁶⁴ F.D. Macchia, 'Theology, Pentecostal', in Stanley M. Burgess and Eduard M. Van Der Mas (eds.), *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), pp. 1122.

¹⁶⁵ C.H. Pinnock, *The Scripture Principle: Reclaiming the Full Authority of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), p. 181.

¹⁶⁶ In my own personal experience of preaching in Pentecostal churches for more than fifteen years (at the time of writing), I have heard this Scripture quoted again and again, especially when the leaders of a church discover I frame a significant amount of my teaching with Greek exegesis. On a number of occasions, while in Mexico and Brazil – where the Pentecostal movement has had profound impact – pastors have rebuked me for explicating syntax!

words of the Bible do not just stay on the page. The Spirit breathes on them, the words fill the heart of the reader, and the text becomes relevant for the present. Pentecostals use Heb. 4.12 to point to this experience, 'For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, or joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart'. 'Therefore, it is not a text we can master through techniques but a text that wants to master us.'¹⁶⁷

Spirit

Pentecostals consider the Holy Spirit to be a vital part of the hermeneutical process. He is the believer's teacher and the one who guides the Christian into all truth (Jn 14.26; 16.13). The Spirit is held in superior regard to the human hermeneut because it is the Spirit who authored the text and who also transmits the various meanings of the text to the reader. Land suggests, 'Scripture is normative but not the text alone. It is text as illuminated by the Spirit which is authoritative and transformative.'¹⁶⁸ J. McKay posits that Pentecostals cannot be only academic about their readings of the text because it is the Spirit who, while reading the text, speaks to the believer about setting captives free and opening the eyes of the blind. These are not the sorts of things that mesh well in a critical academic setting!¹⁶⁹ No matter how accurate the critical investigation of Scripture may be, Pentecostals affirm that the meaning of the text will stay hidden and will fail to produce any effectiveness if not for the help of the Spirit. He is the one who removes the veil and enables the readers' eyes to behold the truth (2 Cor. 3.16-17).

The help of the Spirit in interpreting the text allows for fuller meanings of the text to be accepted. This is quite different from narrow, fundamentalist readings wherein the pursuit of authorial intent dominates the hermeneutical process. Within Pentecostal communities, readers will often point to a text and explain its impact with the preamble 'the Holy Spirit showed me' or 'the Spirit opened my eyes to something I've never seen before, as many times as I've read this verse'.¹⁷⁰ This is not to suggest that Pentecostals believe the Bible is whatever they want it to be. Rather, as C.E.W Green puts it:

¹⁶⁷ Pinnock, *The Scripture Principle*, p. 182.

¹⁶⁸ S.J. Land, 'Response to Professor Harvey Cox', *JPT* 5 (1994), p. 13.

¹⁶⁹ McKay, 'When the Veil is Taken Away', p. 19.

¹⁷⁰ Such treatment of the text has potential for abuse. F.L. Arrington suggests, 'There is, however, an imminent danger in relying solely on this pneumatic guidance in the hermeneutical process. This danger lies in the potential that the interpreter confuses his or her own (or some other) spirit with the Spirit of God.' F.L. Arrington, 'Hermeneutics, Historical Perspectives on Pentecostal and Charismatic', in S.M. Burgess and G.B. McGee (eds.), *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 1988), p. 383 in

We might also think of it like a great banquet buzzing with coinciding, intersecting conversations: some heated, others warm; some nasty, others sweet; some routine, others exoteric; but all lively, and all fraught with misunderstandings and missed understandings ... When all is said and done, we trust not in a concept of perfection, applied to Scripture, but in God who works perfectly in the texts' seeming imperfections – its ambiguities, secrets, complexities, contradictions, confusions, mysteries, and conundrums.¹⁷¹

Not only does the Spirit speak through the text, in Pentecostal communities the Spirit speaks through prophetic words, interpretation of tongues, testimonies, prayer, and lively worship. These expressions of the Spirit evoke a response from the worshipping community which is for the community's 'upbuilding and encouragement and consolation' (1 Cor. 14.3). He also comforts the community in times of suffering (2 Cor. 1.1-5).

Community¹⁷²

Community is at the heart of Pentecostal hermeneutics.¹⁷³ Pentecostals do not interpret Scripture alone. They place a high premium on their corporate experiences together, shared through testimonies and stories that articulate one's narrative journey in relation to the Five-Fold Gospel.¹⁷⁴ 'A Pentecostal hermeneutic is first and foremost a participatory and relational *theological* hermeneutic – a way of interpreting life and ultimate reality. Life is an experience

T.B. Cargal, 'Beyond the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy: Pentecostals and Hermeneutics in a Postmodern Age'. Within Pentecostal hermeneutics, discussions frequently occur concerning where the multiple meanings of the text should be limited.

¹⁷¹ Green, *Sanctifying Interpretation*, p. 4.

¹⁷² As a lifelong Pentecostal, who is both part of a Pentecostal worshipping and academic community, I bring my Pentecostal readings to the text which have been oriented by my experiences in the community. I was raised in an AOG church from the time I was a child (Brightmoor Tabernacle, which was located in Southfield, MI at the time but since has relocated to Novi, MI and is now called Brightmoor Christian Church). Every Sunday, I heard sermons centered around the Five-Fold Gospel and was part of a Pentecostal community that informed my readings of Scripture. In 1998, I received Spirit baptism and spoke with other tongues. My experiences in the Pentecostal community have had a bearing upon my affections which have afforded me interpretive possibilities and have oriented the way I read the text. This includes my reading of the Apocalypse, where there has been a recent resurgence of interest and renaissance of thought amongst Pentecostals. See J.C. Thomas, *The Apocalypse*; J.C. Thomas and F.D. Macchia, *Revelation*; R. Waddell, *The Spirit of the Book of Revelation*; Archer, 'I Was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day'; D.R. Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment in the Apocalypse*; J.K. Newton, *A Pentecostal Commentary on Revelation* (TPONTC; Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2021); U-W. Low, 'Revelation as Drama: Reading and Interpreting Revelation Through the Lens of Greco-Roman Performance' (PhD dissertation, University of Divinity, 2017).

¹⁷³ J.C. Thomas suggests that it is essential for one to be part of a worshipping community for one to be a true Pentecostal hermeneut. See J.C. Thomas, "'What the Spirit is Saying to the Church' – The Testimony of a Pentecostal in New Testament Studies', in K.L. Spawn and A.T. Wright (eds.), *Spirit & Scripture: Exploring a Pneumatic Hermeneutic* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury, 2011), p. 115. Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, p. 224-25, notes that the hermeneut's Pentecostal identity has afforded participation in the Pentecostal story and, therefore, is part of the community and not an isolated individual. Pentecostal hermeneuts cannot interpret the text alone.

¹⁷⁴ J.C. Thomas, 'What the Spirit is Saying to the Church', p. 118.

birthed, formed, and framed through communal participation.’¹⁷⁵ This participation includes interpretation – what the Spirit is saying in and through the text. Together, the community determines what the text is saying and decides how to live out this experience in their lives. ‘The community must faithfully interpret the Scripture as she discerns the voice of the Spirit.’¹⁷⁶ This discerning process includes deciding, communally, which interpretive methods are acceptable and which are not, as well as determining the theological acceptability of what each method produces.

Furthermore, Pentecostals believe their community is part of the Christian community as a whole and is also an extension of the Christianity of the Bible. Yet, within the metanarrative of the Christian story, they embrace a distinct locus which is bound by the experiences they have shared within their tradition.¹⁷⁷ This being the case, Pentecostals are not only interested in hearing the experiences (testimonies) of their contemporaries, but they are also interested in hearing the experiences (testimonies) of those who have been part of their community before them. Thomas suggests that hearing the voices of those who have come from the first two decades of the movement is helpful because it gives the Pentecostal interpreter ‘opportunities’ to ascertain the Pentecostal identity, as well as see examples of how the early Pentecostals approached the text. The experiences (testimonies) of the community are a dynamic source which transforms the affections¹⁷⁸ of the interpreter, opens them up to different interpretive possibilities, and orients how they read the text.¹⁷⁹ *Wirkungsgeschichte* (reception history) has been the means Pentecostal hermeneuts have used to hear the voices of the tradition’s past. Reception history has been illustrated by likening the text to water and suggesting the interpreter then traces how the water (text) has flowed.¹⁸⁰ This process measures the impact that the text has had upon its readers – in the case of this exploration, Pentecostals who have suffered.

¹⁷⁵ K.J. Archer, ‘2015 SPS Presidential Address: Pentecostal Hermeneutics and the Society for Pentecostal Studies: Reading and Hearing in One Spirit and One Accord’, *Pneuma* 37.3 (2015), pp. 317-39.

¹⁷⁶ Archer, ‘2015 SPS Presidential Address’, p. 332.

¹⁷⁷ Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, p. 133.

¹⁷⁸ S.J. Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, p. 135, notes these affections to be: (1) gratitude which comes as a result of experiencing Christ as Savior, (2) compassion that comes as a result of experiencing Christ as Sanctifier, and (3) courage that comes as a result of experiencing Christ as Spirit Baptizer. Thomas expands these to include (4) joy as a result of experiencing Christ as healer and (5) hope as a result of experiencing Christ as Coming King. See Thomas, ‘What the Spirit is Saying to the Church’, p. 117.

¹⁷⁹ See Thomas, ‘What the Spirit is Saying to the Church’, pp. 116-17.

¹⁸⁰ Thomas, ‘Pentecostal Explorations of the New Testament’, p. 126. See also U. Luz, *Matthew in History: Interpretation, History, and Effects* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1994); U. Luz, *Studies in Matthew* (trans. R. Selle; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005).

2.4 *Wirkungsgeschichte* (Reception History)

In this study of suffering and theodicy of the Apocalypse, I will use *Wirkungsgeschichte* (reception history) as one means by which I will engage my Pentecostalism,¹⁸¹ following the work of J.C. Thomas,¹⁸² M.L. Archer,¹⁸³ and D.R. Johnson.¹⁸⁴ *Wirkungsgeschichte* was first introduced by H-G. Gadamer as a hermeneutical method in his work *Truth and Method*.¹⁸⁵ He suggests that the text is ‘partly determined ... by the historical situation of the interpreter and hence by the totality of the objective course of history’.¹⁸⁶ U. Luz, whose seminal work on *Wirkungsgeschichte* was built on Gadamer’s, suggests that reception history is an expression of the text’s power and, therefore, should not be separated from the text. Instead, he invites interpreters to see reception history as a ‘bridge’ between the text and ourselves.¹⁸⁷ Luz goes on to argue that there are essentially two elements of a text: (1) the ‘stable’ element, which is the text itself, and (2) the ‘variable’ element, which is the interpreter who is influenced by their own unique situation. Granted this, interpretation depends on situations. With the changing of the situation, comes the changing of how the interpreter interprets. Given this, there is no interpreter who can possess the sole meaning of the text, as fundamentalists and others suggest. Rather there is a collective treasury of interpretations, based on the loci of the various interpreters. Reception history pulls this treasury of interpretations together and informs us concerning ‘not only what we have become through the texts but also what we could have been and what we could become’.¹⁸⁸ Luz illustrates this by showing how readings of Matthew have produced not just good results, but some horrendous ones, as well.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸¹ Other scholars have used reception history in recent years to explore the Apocalypse who are not part of the Pentecostal community. See C.R. Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001); J. Paulien, ‘The Lion/Lamb King: Reading the Apocalypse from Popular Culture’, in D.L. Barr (ed.), *Reading the Book of Revelation: A Resource for Students* (Atlanta, GA: Society for Biblical Literature, 2003), pp. 151-62; C. Rowland, *Revelation* (London: Epworth Press, 1993), pp. 26-31; J. Kovacs and C. Rowland, *Revelation* (BBC; Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004).

¹⁸² J.C. Thomas and K.E. Alexander, “‘And the Signs are Following’: Mark 16,9-20 – A Journey into Pentecostal Hermeneutics’, *JPT* 11.2 (2003), pp. 147-70.

¹⁸³ M.L. Archer, *I Was in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day*’.

¹⁸⁴ D.R. Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment*.

¹⁸⁵ H-G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1975).

¹⁸⁶ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 263.

¹⁸⁷ Luz, *Matthew in History*, p. 24.

¹⁸⁸ Luz, *Matthew in History*, p. 31.

¹⁸⁹ Luz, *Matthew in History*, p. 33, notes that readings of Mt. 27.25 (‘his blood be on us and our children’), produced Christian anti-Semitism which fostered European anti-Semitism that contributed to the Holocaust. Thomas uses reception history in his commentary on the Apocalypse and notes how there have been disastrous readings of

Reception history is compatible with the Pentecostal tradition because it suggests that parsing the text intellectually (such as with critical methods and historical reconstructions) is not enough to yield meaning. Luz suggests,

Biblical texts are meaningful *only* when they become part of our life. In other words, to understand a New Testament text does not mean to understand the words of the text only but to understand the living Christ to whom it testifies and the life of the situation that was shaped by him, and to understand both as a gift, a question, and a challenge for our own lives. Understanding such texts is not an intellectual knowledge that can be separated from other dimensions of life; rather this understanding is possible only when it encompasses human life in its totality – intellectual insights, feelings, actions, and suffering.¹⁹⁰

For a tradition which considers the Scriptures to be ‘the Living Word’ and presupposes the ongoing narrative of the text while participating in it, this method is a suitable match.¹⁹¹

J.C. Thomas called for the use of *Wirkungsgeschichte* in his 1998 SPS Presidential address out of concern for a NT book’s context within the church.¹⁹² He notes that ‘the primary goal is to discover something of the book’s effects in the history of the church. The history-of-effects method is an attempt to trace the effects a given text has had since its writing.’¹⁹³ Thomas later used *Wirkungsgeschichte* in his reading of Mk 16.9-20 in to order determine how early

Revelation which have caused untold harm such as Charles Manson’s interpretation of Revelation 9 and David Koresh’s interpretation of Revelation 13. See Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, pp. 51-55.

¹⁹⁰ Luz, *Matthew in History*, pp. 13-14.

¹⁹¹ Regarding reception history, Powery says:

If the recent direction of Pentecostal hermeneutics takes seriously Scripture, community and the Spirit’s activity, then Luz offers us a component not only for appreciating Scripture but also the interpretive tradition of Scripture by the community. Furthermore, let us evaluate the effects of such interpretations on our Pentecostal sermons, songs, and testimonies noting not only what they say (their content and understanding) but also their ‘fruits’ seen in the Church’s actions.

See E.B. Powery, ‘Ulrich Luz’s *Matthew in History*: A Contribution to Pentecostal Hermeneutics?’, *JPT* 7.14 (1999), p. 16.

¹⁹² J.C. Thomas, ‘The Spirit, the Text, and Early Pentecostal Reception: the Emergence of a Discipline’, in D.D. Isgrigg, M. W. Mittelstadt, and R. Wadholm, Jr. (eds.), *Receiving Scripture in the Pentecostal Tradition* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2021), p. 53, notes that there were three scholars prior to his 1998 address that anticipated the use of reception history as part of the ‘interpretive arsenal’. See R.W. Heron, *Mark’s Account of Peter’s Denial of Jesus: A History of Its Interpretation* (Lanham, MD: University of America, 1991); H. Jurgensen, ‘Saint Paul et la parousia: I Thessaloniens 4,13 – 5, 11 dans l’exegesis modern et contemporaine’ (ThD thesis, Universite dex Science Humaines de Strasbourg, 1992). Cf. also H. Jurgensen, ‘Awaiting the Return of Christ: A Re-examination of 1 Thessalonians 4.13-5.11 from a Pentecostal Perspective’, *JPT* 4 (1994), pp. 81-113; L.R. McQueen, *Joel and the Spirit*.

¹⁹³ J.C. Thomas, ‘1998 SPS Presidential Address: Pentecostal Theology in the Twenty-First Century’, *Pneuma* 20.1 (1998), p. 16. Thomas notes that hearing the voices from the church in regard to a book is testimony to the impact that particular book has had within the church. This not only includes voices like Augustine, Luther, Wesley, Tolstoy, and Bonhoeffer but also slaves and slaveholders that have utilized Philemon, as well as Nazis in Germany that have used Matthew 23 to promote anti-Semitic propaganda. He posits that discernment must be used in hearing such testimonies, like in any other Pentecostal context where testimonies are shared.

Pentecostals heard the longer (and more problematic) ending of Mark's gospel.¹⁹⁴ Thomas' own investigation confirmed Luz's statement that reception history acts as a bridge between us and the text. Moreover, he agrees with Luz who suggested that reception history yields notable accuracy, even in comparison to critical commentaries.¹⁹⁵ Thomas later employed the use of reception history in his exploration of healing in the atonement in John in order to hear the stories of early Pentecostals who drew connections between healing and the atonement in John.¹⁹⁶ Moreover, Thomas also uses reception history in his commentary on the Apocalypse by offering examples of how the text of the Apocalypse has made an impact on literature, art, music, film, and commentaries.¹⁹⁷

M.L. Archer, a doctoral student of Thomas, later followed Thomas' use of *Wirkungsgeschichte* in her exploration of worship in the Apocalypse by examining early Wesleyan-Holiness Pentecostal publications as well as Finished Work Pentecostal publications.¹⁹⁸ This study yielded a historically rich reading of Revelation which pointed to how early Pentecostals used worship in Revelation to inform their own praxis within their preaching, singing, and praise. A. Yong notes that Archer's reception history worked to demonstrate that dispensational emphases find little support within early Pentecostal readings of Revelation.¹⁹⁹ D.R. Johnson, another doctoral student of Thomas, followed Archer and also used *Wirkungsgeschichte* to inform his Pentecostal reading of pneumatic discernment in the Apocalypse.²⁰⁰ Johnson examined both Wesleyan and Finished Work periodicals for those entries which made reference to the Holy Spirit and spiritual discernment in the Apocalypse. In

¹⁹⁴ Thomas notes that his idea to employ reception history was inspired by his colleague, K.E. Alexander, who had been using reception history as a means to develop a Pentecostal Theology of Healing. See K.E. Alexander, 'Models of Pentecostal Healing and Practice in Light of Early Twentieth-Century Pentecostalism' (PhD thesis, St. John's College, Nottingham/Open University, 2002). Cf. K.E. Alexander, *Pentecostal Healing: Models in Theology and Practice* (JPTSup 29; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2006).

¹⁹⁵ Thomas, 'What the Spirit is Saying to the Church', p. 119; Luz, *Matthew in History*, pp. 34-35.

¹⁹⁶ J.C. Thomas, 'Healing in the Atonement: A Johannine Perspective', *JPT* 14.1 (2005), pp. 23-29. Thomas examines *The Apostolic Faith*, *Triumphs of Faith*, *The Weekly Evangel*, and *The Pentecostal Holiness Advocate*.

¹⁹⁷ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, pp. 51-86.

¹⁹⁸ M.L. Archer, *I Was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day*.

¹⁹⁹ A. Yong, 'Unveiling Interpretation after Pentecost: Revelation, Pentecostal Reading, and Christian Hermeneutics of Scripture', *JTI* 11.1 (2017), p. 146.

²⁰⁰ D.R. Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment*. Johnson's monograph stands as one of the most extensive pneumatological readings of the Book of Revelation to date.

doing so, he reclaimed these voices from the Pentecostal community for a rich and traditionally informed study.²⁰¹

As a Pentecostal and academic who is part of the PHP, I too, will use reception history as part of my methodology, following Thomas, Archer, and Johnson in my exploration of theodicy and suffering in the Apocalypse.²⁰² I will do this by tracing texts in two broad streams, the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition and the Finished Work tradition in order to reveal how these texts have been received by the major streams of the Pentecostal movement. I will consider how the early Pentecostals²⁰³ talked about suffering and matters of theodicy, paying particular attention to theodicean readings of the Apocalypse. The employment of such will enable me to understand how early Pentecostals interpreted the text within their suffering. It will also enable me to recover the voice of the suffering Pentecostal community and use it as a ‘bridge’ between the text and my analysis of it. This will enable my reading to engage the Pentecostal community in order to ‘hear what the Spirit says to the churches’ – in this case, concerning theodicy and suffering as understood from the Apocalypse.

2.5 Narrative Analysis

The next methodological approach I will be using in this Pentecostal exploration of suffering and theodicy in the Apocalypse is narrative analysis.²⁰⁴ M.A. Powell posits four main aspects of narrative analysis:²⁰⁵ (1) it focuses on the final form of the text,²⁰⁶ (2) it emphasizes the unity of

²⁰¹ A. Yong suggests that Johnson and Archer’s work retrieves important voices from the Pentecostal tradition and correctly points out that these voices are all North American. Similar to Johnson and Archer, this exploration of theodicy and suffering in the Apocalypse concerns itself with the Pentecostal history and reception history of North American Pentecostalism. Nevertheless, I acknowledge, as Yong has, that it is important for future studies in reception history to work at ways of retrieving the voices of ‘other early pentecostal churches in other parts of the world’. See A. Yong, ‘*Pneumatic Discernment in the Apocalypse: An Intertextual and Pentecostal Exploration*’, *Pneuma* 41.1 (2019), pp. 183-85.

²⁰² At the time of writing, Aaron Robinson, a Pentecostal scholar who is part of the PHP, is also using reception history to explore the Apocalypse in his doctoral thesis.

²⁰³ Thomas notes that he finds ‘the voices that come from the first ten to twenty years of the movement to be extraordinarily helpful, as this period represents the heart, not necessarily the infancy, of the movement’s spirituality’. See Thomas, ‘The Spirit, the Text, and Early Pentecostal Reception’, pp. 88-89.

²⁰⁴ Narrative analysis is a modern literary critical approach.

²⁰⁵ Narrative analysis can also be referred to as ‘narrative criticism’ or ‘literary criticism’.

²⁰⁶ By ‘final form’ what is meant is how a text reads as an undivided whole, complete in-and-of-itself. This means interpreting the text from this point and not being concerned with compositional history, secondary sources, or redaction.

the text as a whole,²⁰⁷ (3) it views the text as an end in itself,²⁰⁸ and (4) it is based on communication models of speech-act theory.²⁰⁹ From the sending side of the narrative, there is the real author,²¹⁰ the implied author,²¹¹ and sometimes a narrator.²¹² On the receiving end of the narrative, there is the real reader,²¹³ the implied reader, and sometimes the narratee.²¹⁴ The ‘implied reader’ of the text is an ‘ideal reader’ who can read the text the way the implied author intended. This means noticing the subtleties and ironies which the author has placed in the text, as well as responding to the text with whatever ‘emotion, understanding, or knowledge the text ideally calls for’.²¹⁵ Hence, the implied reader is competent enough in the literary, historical, linguistic, and cultural situation of the authorial audience to notice the author’s use of various narrative mechanisms to tell the story.²¹⁶ Narratives also contain two literary elements: (1) story and (2) discourse. Story is *what* the narrative is about. It comprises events, characters, settings, and plot. Discourse refers to *how* the story is told. The narrative critic examines the elements of

²⁰⁷ Instead of dissecting the texts, narrative analysis concerns itself with how individual pericopes and passages contribute to the whole of the narrative.

²⁰⁸ Instead of examining the historicity of a text, the narrative analyst enters the story to experience it and examine the effect that the story has on the reader.

²⁰⁹ In literature, there are three aspects of communication: (1) the sender (author), (2) the message (text), and (3) the receiver (reader). The text communicates a message which is passed from author to reader. See M.A. Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1990), pp. 6-9.

²¹⁰ The actual author is behind the implied author, creating the ‘norms’ of the implied author. See S. Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980), p. 149.

²¹¹ The implied author is the one whom the reader constructs from the narrative. See Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, p. 148. The implied author consists of the impressions the reader forms about the author, including the author’s values and worldview. It is the perspective of the implied author that determines what the narrative means, even if the perspective of the implied author differs from what the real author might actually believe and think. Thus, the implied author provides all that one needs to comprehend what the narrative means, even if the author remains anonymous. Because the implied author provides the impact of the text, no historical reconstruction of the real author is needed to interpret the text. See Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?*, p. 5. The implied author does not directly communicate with the reader. Rather, he or she communicates through the whole design of the narrative and through the narrative mechanisms he or she has employed. See Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, p. 148.

²¹² The narrator is the voice the implied author uses to tell the story. He or she chooses what details he or she wants to tell. Narrators can be reliable or unreliable. A reliable narrator tells the story in accordance with the implied author’s values unlike the views of the unreliable narrator which are expected to be challenged by the reader. See Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?*, p. 26. Often, the narrator is omniscient, presiding over events ‘in, behind, and beyond the story and the thoughts, motives, and response of characters’. See P. Perkins, ‘Crisis in Jerusalem? Narrative Criticism in New Testament Studies’, *TS* 50 (1989), p. 300.

²¹³ The real readers are historical readers, extrinsic to the narrative. The real author and real reader lie outside of the text. Within the world of the text are the implied author, the narrative, and the implied reader. See chart in Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?*, p. 19.

²¹⁴ Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, p. 28. The narratee is the one to whom the story is being told. The narrator and narratee are not the same as the implied author and implied reader. They are created by the implied author to tell the story and it is overheard by the implied reader. See Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?*, p. 27.

²¹⁵ J.D. Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2nd edn, 1988), p. 38.

²¹⁶ J. L. Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), p. 32.

the story and follows how the implied author tells the story while guiding the implied reader. This examination involves paying attention to the story telling devices the implied author uses in the narrative.²¹⁷ Furthermore, narratives also contain the elements of (1) events, (2) characters, and (3) setting. Powell notes that ‘the “something” that is done is an event, the “somebody” and “someone” are characters, and the “somewhere” and “sometime” are settings’.²¹⁸ The narrative critic considers the text for its ‘literariness’, examining these and other literary elements such as rhetoric, style, syntax, plot, imagery, tone, and point of view.²¹⁹ Essentially, the biblical text is examined the same way as short stories, plays, and novels.²²⁰ The narrative critic pays attention to the text’s structure, attempts to locate ironies, looks for unique patterns that might reveal how the author is telling the story, examines repeating words or phrases that might communicate underlying themes, asks questions about the locations of pericopes and how (and when) they transition, attempts to decipher motifs and themes that the author develops throughout the story, pays attention to subtleties and paradoxes throughout the text, asks questions about the setting and any double entendre it might infer, observes how characters enter and exit, observes the narrative arc (plot, conflict, climax, resolution), and sees how images and symbolisms help to tell the story.²²¹ Moreover, the narrative critic engages themselves in a ‘close reading’ of the text.²²² M.H. Abrams defines a close reading as ‘the detailed and subtle analysis of the complex interrelations and ambiguities (multiple meanings) of the components within a work’.²²³ In my narrative reading of the Apocalypse, I will follow the text and offer a close reading of the narrative while paying attention to these elements of the story, discourse, and how the implied author and narrator inform my reading.

²¹⁷ These devices include point of view, narration, symbolism and irony, and narrative patterns which include repetition, contrast, comparison, causation, climax, pivot, particularization and generalization, statements of purpose, preparation, summarization, interrogation, inclusio, interchange, chiasm, and intercalation. For more details on these see Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?*, pp. 23-34. See also Archer, *I Was in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day*, pp. 62-63 nn. 98-104.

²¹⁸ See Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?*, p. 35. For more on each of these see Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?*, pp. 35-83.

²¹⁹ See Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism*, p. 19.

²²⁰ Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism*, p. 19.

²²¹ This summary does not attempt to be an exhaustive detail of what a narrative critic does in their examination. For a more thorough explanation, see Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism*, pp. 19-21.

²²² Resseguie notes that a close reading does not mean that the narrative reader is ignorant of social, linguistic, and historical competencies of the implied reader. The narrative critic ‘joins’ the authorial audience and reads the text as the implied author intended. Yet, this information comes from the text itself and not information outside of the text. See Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism*, p. 39.

²²³ M.H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc, 5th edn, 1981). Abrams also refers to a ‘close reading’ as ‘explication’.

K.J. Archer proposes four reasons why narrative analysis is a well-matched methodology for Pentecostals. First, narrative is the primary genre of Scripture.²²⁴ This includes the Apocalypse. All too often Pentecostals overlook this aspect of the Apocalypse because they take their cues from ‘End Time’, ‘Left Behind’ theologians who use complex, end-time methodologies to read the text.²²⁵ These methodologies are often integrated with political agendas, notions of radical nationalism, conspiracy theories, and ‘doomsday countdown’ rhetoric. D.L. Barr notes:

Because it is part of the Bible, because it is often taken as a code book describing End Times, because it is used in our culture to advocate political agendas – both on the left and right, because it is all divided up into neat chapters and discrete verses, because we are so familiar with a few of its symbols (such as the four horsemen or 666), it is easy to miss the most important thing for understanding the Apocalypse: it is a narrative ... the author is telling this story so others too can share his experience.²²⁶

Second, Archer suggests that narrative analysis is well-matched for Pentecostals because Pentecostals are concerned with the final form of the text. Narrative analysis deals with the text itself and does not concern itself with the world behind the text. This analysis presents the Pentecostals with an opportunity to see the text as a whole and can ‘shape them as a community as they locate their story within the biblical narrative’.²²⁷ Thirdly, narrative analysis can bring scholars and nonprofessional Christian readers together.²²⁸ Lastly, narrative analysis insists on the role of the reader for meaning.²²⁹ Whereas historical critical methods look only for the meaning of the original author to their original audience, narrative analysis attempts to determine the effects the narrative would have on its readers at any time and place. Instead of attempting to reconstruct the original audience, narrative criticism reads from the perspective of the implied reader.²³⁰ This makes room for the reader – in this case a Pentecostal reader – to approach the text by means of shared experiences with the characters – as McKay has suggested – and to step into the performance themselves. This is fitting for a Pentecostal reading of the Apocalypse

²²⁴ See Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, p. 226.

²²⁵ For examples of ‘doomsday’ authors who employ end-time methodologies, see T. LaHaye and J.B. Jenkins, *Left Behind* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1995); J.Hagee, *The Four Blood Moons* (Brentwood, TN: Worthy Publishing, 2013); J. Cahn, *The Harbinger* (Lake Mary, FL: Frontline, 2011); H. Lindsay, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1970).

²²⁶ Barr, D.L., *Tales of the End: A Narrative Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Salem, OR: Polebridge Press, 2011), chap. 1, Kindle.

²²⁷ Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, pp. 228-29.

²²⁸ Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, p. 229. See also Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?*, p. 87.

²²⁹ Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, pp. 229-30.

²³⁰ Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, p. 230.

because the Johannine community in the Apocalypse and the early Pentecostal community were both suffering communities who faced similar circumstances.

The narrative methodology I am employing in this study will, to use Pentecostal terminology, ‘revive’ this narrative aspect of the Apocalypse and is fitting for the renaissance in Apocalypse studies amongst Pentecostal theologians.²³¹ This narrative reading of the Apocalypse shall be integrated with the findings that a reception history of early Pentecostal texts within the Wesleyan-Holiness and Finished Work traditions offer, enabling me to read with the early Pentecostal community in mind. This methodology will allow me to offer a uniquely Pentecostal engagement of the Apocalypse that will enable me to make a contribution towards a Pentecostal theology of suffering and theodicy. Thus, I shall offer a narrative reading of the entirety of the Apocalypse, focusing on the texts that engage suffering and theodicy from the standpoint of human suffering as experienced mostly by those faithful to Christ. I will pay specific attention to texts that handle this explicitly and also implicitly in order to develop this theology.²³²

2.6 Constructing a Pentecostal Theodicy in the Apocalypse

My method will involve overtures towards the construction of a Pentecostal theodicy in the Apocalypse. While most Pentecostals have experienced suffering in some form or another, a theology of suffering and theodicy has not been much of a theological priority for Pentecostals.²³³ (This is difficult to explain considering the heritage of suffering the early Pentecostals were part of.) That such theology is in need of more development became even more apparent to Pentecostals during the COVID-19 pandemic²³⁴ which began in late 2019.²³⁵

²³¹ See J.C. Thomas, *The Apocalypse*; M.L. Archer, *I Was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day*; D.R. Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment*; R. Waddell, *The Spirit of the Book of Revelation*. Outside of Pentecostal communities, there are those who have approached Revelation as a narrative that I acknowledge here. See J.L. Resseguie, *The Revelation of John: A Narrative Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009); S. Sanders, ‘Revelation and Resistance: Narrative and Worship in John’s Apocalypse’, in J.B. Green and M. Pasquarello III (eds.), *Narrative Reading, Narrative Preaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009); D.L. Barr, *Tales of the End*.

²³² In my narrative reading, I shall follow the narrative methods of J.C. Thomas, D.R. Johnson, M.L. Archer, J.L. Resseguie, and M.A. Powell.

²³³ See Warrington, *Pentecostal Theology*, p. 305.

²³⁴ This work does not focus exclusively on the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to its presence during the place and time of this writing (and the unprecedented way it has changed the world), it is considered as one example of suffering in this thesis.

²³⁵ G. Butler, ‘Plague, Pentecostalism, and Pastoral Guidance’, *Pneuma* 43.1 (2021), pp. 5-24, notes that Pentecostals have not prioritized the theology of suffering. Within his article, he places Martin Luther’s sixteenth century response to suffering and the Black Death outbreak into conversation with Pentecostalism. Butler notes that certain divisions of Pentecostals had the tendency be ‘triumphalist’. In response, Butler suggests more engagement with the Christian tradition, namely Luther, in order to find a balance and a ‘mature Pentecostal theology of

Pentecostals have often attributed suffering to the fault of the devil, the result of not having enough faith in God's Word, or failure to use their God-given authority in Christ.²³⁶ Yet the COVID-19 pandemic has provided another occasion (on a much grander scale!) for Pentecostals to reconsider the place that suffering and theodicy have within theology.²³⁷

Despite the need for Pentecostals to cultivate a more robust theology of suffering and theodicy into their theological framework, strides have been made within Pentecostal scholarship to develop a Pentecostal theology of suffering throughout the years (though nothing specifically from the Apocalypse). In 1996, at the annual SPS meeting held at Wycliffe College in Toronto, Canada where the theme was 'Memory and Hope', two papers were presented which directed efforts at the formation of a Pentecostal theology of suffering: (1) M.L. Dusing's paper 'Toward a Pentecostal Theology of Physical Suffering'²³⁸ and (2) M.K. Adams' paper 'Hope in the Midst of Hurt: Towards a Pentecostal Theology of Suffering'.²³⁹ In 2004, M.W. Mittelstadt advanced Pentecostal theology for suffering in a monograph he produced entitled *The Spirit and Suffering in Luke-Acts* where he examines Christian suffering while pursuing a contemporary Pentecostal pneumatology through examining Lukan texts in which the Spirit and suffering converge.²⁴⁰ One of the most significant contributions is K. Warrington's section on suffering in his book, *Pentecostal Theology*, where he identifies the need for Pentecostals to rethink suffering and theodicy.²⁴¹ As mentioned earlier, S.M. Fettke took steps to develop a practical theodicy for Pentecostals in light of his son's autism.²⁴² In 2010, J.C. Thomas discussed suffering in the form of disease and sickness in his monograph *The Devil, Disease and Deliverance: Origins of Illness in New Testament Thought*.²⁴³ Thomas seeks to discover the New Testament writer's attitudes

suffering'. Butler also notes that Luther is a good dialogue partner for Pentecostals because he is pre-modern. Pentecostals, being skeptical of modernity, would find some commonality in Luther. 'Thus, perhaps instead of assuming the modern approach and looking for an answer as to why evil occurs, Pentecostals might consider how those of Luther's era considered the problem [of suffering] before the emergence of modernism and, consequentially, of theodicy (brackets mine).'

²³⁶ See Warrington, *Pentecostal Theology*, p. 304.

²³⁷ Warrington, *Pentecostal Theology*, pp. 304-305, notes that Pentecostals have never quite overlooked suffering in their tradition – their hymns integrated the reality of suffering. He thinks, however, Pentecostals are due to reassess how they think about it. The COVID-19 pandemic has made this a timely prospect.

²³⁸ M.L. Dusing, 'Toward a Pentecostal Theology of Physical Suffering'.

²³⁹ M.K. Adams, 'Hope in the Midst of Hurt'.

²⁴⁰ M.W. Mittelstadt, *The Spirit and Suffering in Luke-Acts*.

²⁴¹ Warrington, *Pentecostal Theology*, pp. 303-308.

²⁴² Fettke, 'The Spirit of God Hovered Over the Waters', pp. 170-82; Fettke, 'A Practical Pentecostal Theodicy?', pp. 160-79.

²⁴³ J.C. Thomas, *The Devil, Disease and Deliverance: Origins of Illness in New Testament Thought* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2010).

toward illness by examining various New Testament writings ‘on their own terms’. In 2012, D. Castelo gives exclusive consideration to theodicy in his monograph entitled *Theological Theodicy*. Castelo seeks to explain theodicy differently by shaping it theologically, emphasizing the God of theodicy as the triune God of Scripture.²⁴⁴ More recently, G. Butler published an article in *Pneuma* entitled ‘Plague, Pentecostalism, and Pastoral Guidance: Luther’s Wisdom for the Contemporary Church’ which recommends Luther’s response to suffering which occurred during the Black Death to Pentecostals in order to handle the COVID-19 pandemic.²⁴⁵ This was followed by an entire special issue edition of *Pneuma* which was dedicated to the impact of the suffering caused by COVID-19, including the impact it had on Pentecostal theology and hermeneutics.²⁴⁶ F.D. Macchia offers an entire chapter in his systematic theology, *Tongues of Fire: A Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, entitled ‘God and Suffering’, which gives a considerable examination to theodicy, including its shortcomings, throughout.²⁴⁷ Finally, in 2023, S.F. Wu, an Australian Pentecostal-leaning scholar, wrote a book entitled *Finding God in Suffering: Journeying with Jesus in Scriptures*.²⁴⁸ In this monograph, Wu reflects on suffering poverty and injustice and combines these reflections with a meaningful reading of Scripture. Based on the above-mentioned scholarship, it appears there is an emerging body of Pentecostal scholarship being directed toward the formation of a Pentecostal theology of suffering and theodicy, perhaps accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The final chapter of this study will make overtures towards such a theology. To do this, I will offer reflections based on my findings yielded by the employment of the hermeneutical triad (Scripture, Spirit, and Community) and *Wirkungsgeschichte*. I will also offer reflections from my narrative reading of the Apocalypse. After, I will place these reflections into conversation with relevant Pentecostal scholarship on suffering and theodicy. I will also move outside of Pentecostal scholarship and will place my reflections into conversation with other relevant scholarship on suffering and theodicy. In doing so, I will make a contribution to Apocalyptic studies and also the emerging field of Pentecostal theology, namely its theology of suffering and

²⁴⁴ D. Castelo, *Theological Theodicy*.

²⁴⁵ Butler, ‘Plague, Pentecostalism, and Pastoral Guidance’, pp. 5-24.

²⁴⁶ ‘Call for Papers for Special Issue of *Pneuma* on the Global COVID-19 Pandemic’, *Pneuma* 42.2 (2020), p. 325. For an article relevant to COVID-19 in this special edition, see Asonzeh Ukah, ‘Prosperity, Prophecy and the COVID-19 Pandemic: The Healing Economy of African Pentecostalism’, *Pneuma* 42.3-4 (2020), pp. 430-59.

²⁴⁷ F.D. Macchia, *Tongues of Fire: A Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2023).

²⁴⁸ S.F. Wu, *Finding God in Suffering: Journeying with Jesus in Scriptures* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2023).

theodicy. Such a contribution will be useful in informing Pentecostal orthodoxy, orthopraxy, and orthopathy.

2.7 Conclusion

As a lifelong Pentecostal who is part of a worshipping and academic Pentecostal community, my Pentecostal context is the perspective whereby I will offer a reading of the Apocalypse in this study in order to pursue a Pentecostal theology of suffering and theodicy. In this chapter, I first gave a brief overview of the early Pentecostal movement in North America which is fitting for my North American social identity. Though I began the story with Agnes N. Ozman's Spirit baptism under Charles Fox Parham in 1901, I centralized the story around the Azusa Street revival of 1906 under the Pentecostal movement's founder, William J. Seymour. I shaped the story through the focal point of suffering by keeping the Pentecostals' suffering, as well as Seymour's suffering, in the foreground. I showed how this suffering came about because the Pentecostal movement broke cultural and theological barriers at the time and affected social and theological challenges. I noted that trials became the norm and that these trials were associated with the Pentecostals' stances on race, their positions on sanctification and tongues, and the controversy that occurred over the doctrine of the Trinity. I also pointed out how Pentecostals also suffered through eschatological disappointment, internal disputes, and persecution from their critics. Despite the suffering and trials, I pointed out how the movement has grown into becoming a 'fourth force' in Christianity, encompassing over 25% of Christians around the world.

Second, I offered a brief overview of Pentecostal hermeneutics which included an overview of how the early Pentecostal movement read Scripture, pointing out this, too, was shaped by their suffering. I then explained the historical development of Pentecostal hermeneutics, especially the PHP, whose hermeneutics reveal shared affinities toward suffering, even if just tacitly. This led into an overview of the Pentecostal 'hermeneutical triad' – Scripture, Spirit, and Community – which I will be using as part of my reading strategy in this exploration.

Third, I offered a brief summary of the developing field of *Wirkungsgeschichte* (reception history) which I will employ in my reading strategy in chapter three of this study in order to hear the voices of the early, suffering Pentecostal community while exploring suffering and theodicy in the Apocalypse. I explained that I will employ this reception history in Wesleyan-Holiness

publications as well as Finished Work publications. These publications will act as a ‘bridge’ between myself (the contemporary reader) and the text itself.

Fourth, I offered a brief summary of narrative analysis and explained why it is well-matched for a Pentecostal reading of the Apocalypse. I stated that I will employ this methodology in chapter four of this study by offering a narrative reading of the entirety of the Apocalypse, focusing on the texts that engage suffering and theodicy from the standpoint of human suffering as experienced mostly by those faithful to Christ. I also stated that I will pay specific attention to texts that handle suffering explicitly, and also implicitly, in order to develop this theology.

Last, I explained that my method involves making overtures toward constructing a Pentecostal theodicy from the Apocalypse which I will do in chapter five of this study.

Up to now, there has not been sufficient work done on a Pentecostal theology of suffering and theodicy. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated this need, which is being felt by Pentecostals within academia. This Pentecostal exploration of suffering and theodicy in the Apocalypse, supplemented by the reading strategy I articulated in this chapter, will offer a contribution to this need that will be useful for Pentecostal orthodoxy, orthopraxy, and orthopathy. As it pertains to orthodoxy, this exploration will offer overtures toward a Pentecostal theology of suffering. As it pertains to orthopraxy, this exploration will offer overtures toward a Pentecostal praxis toward those who suffer; it will suggest fitting action to be taken when suffering is present. And, as it pertains to orthopathy, this exploration will offer overtures toward how Pentecostals should feel, inwardly, toward those who suffer; it will propose what is apt inward feeling when suffering has occurred.

In the next chapter of this study, I shall offer a reception history of the Wesleyan-Holiness and Finished Work publications in which suffering and theodicy appear in the Apocalypse. I will use *Wirkungsgeschichte* to afford myself an orientation toward these texts.

RECEPTION HISTORY: SUFFERING AND THEODICY (IN THE APOCALYPSE) IN EARLY PENTECOSTAL LITERATURE

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will explore early North American Pentecostal periodical literature for the purpose of understanding how early Pentecostals were influenced by the Apocalypse in their understanding of suffering and theodicy. To accomplish this, I will examine publications from the Wesleyan-Holiness and Finished Work traditions from the first ten years of the movement, as well as three additional years to account for the entire duration of WWI and the Spanish flu pandemic,¹ making this an exploration of periodical literature from 1906-1919. I have limited my reception history to this time period because (1) the first ten years of the Pentecostal movement represents its theological heart² and (2) I would like to give attention to the unique suffering

¹ The CDC reports that the 1918 Pandemic (H1N1) virus, known also as the ‘Spanish flu’, was first identified in 1918 and spread worldwide through 1919, infecting 500 million people which was one-third of the world’s population. The pandemic resulted in 50 million deaths, 675,000 alone in the United States. See ‘1918 Pandemic (H1N1 virus)’, <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/pandemic-resources/1918-pandemic-h1n1.html> (accessed December 17, 2021). By referring to the virus as the ‘Spanish flu’ I am not, however, suggesting that the influenza began in Spain. Modern research suggests otherwise. An article entitled ‘The 1918 “Spanish flu” in Spain’ concludes by suggesting that virologists and epidemiologists think the virus probably did not begin in Spain. Nevertheless, the article concludes that ‘the 1918 influenza pandemic will always be known as the Spanish flu pandemic’, despite the evidence against the virus’ origin being the Iberian peninsula. See A. Trilla, G. Trilla, and C. Daer, ‘The 1918 “Spanish Flu” in Spain’, *CID* 47.5 (2008), pp. 668-73. Because it was not uncommon for early Pentecostals to refer to it as such, I will use this language to refer to the virus. Up to this point, I have referred to it as the ‘Flu pandemic’.

² Hollenweger first proposed that the heart of the Pentecostal movement came within the first ten years of the movement, saying ‘How one characterizes Pentecostal spirituality depends on whether one considers the first five to ten years of its history as an expression of a *not yet fully developed infant spirituality* or as the *heart* of pentecostal spirituality’. See W.J. Hollenweger, ‘Pentecostals and the Charismatic Movement’, in C. Jones, G. Wainwright, and E. Yarnold (eds.), *The Study of Spirituality* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 551. S.J. Land posits that the early voices represent the heart of Pentecostal spirituality, not its infancy. See Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, p. 37. J.C. Thomas later affirms this. See Thomas, ‘The Spirit, the Text, and Early Pentecostal Reception’, pp. 88-89. Both M.L. Archer and D.R. Johnson follow Hollenweger in their reception history. See Archer, *I Was in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day*, p. 3, n. 1; Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment*, p. 101, n. 1. I will follow Archer and Johnson and, in doing so, keep with Hollenweger, Land, and Thomas.

during the time frame of the first World War and the Spanish flu pandemic³ that was so close to the beginning of the early Pentecostal movement. In exploring this time period, I will be able to recover the voices of ordinary Pentecostals who suffered in the margins. This chapter gives them a place to be heard on matters of suffering and theodicy, particularly in connection with the Apocalypse.

The periodical literature that I examine includes sermons, teaching, poems, hymns, and testimonies from early Pentecostals who suffered and reflected on suffering during the early years of the movement. I will begin with Wesleyan-Holiness publications examining *The Apostolic Faith*, *Bridegroom's Messenger*, *Church of God Evangel*, *The Pentecostal Holiness Advocate*, *The Apostolic Evangel*, and *Live Coals*. After I will explore Finished Work publications which include *The Pentecost*, *Latter Rain Evangel*, *Word and Witness*, and *The Christian/Weekly/Pentecostal Evangel*.

3.2 Wesleyan-Holiness Publications

The Apostolic Faith

The Apostolic Faith (AF) was a newspaper published from the Azusa Street Mission in Los Angeles, CA under the leadership of William J. Seymour from September 1906-May 1908. For the most part, it was printed on a monthly basis and totaled 13 issues in all. The publication reported on the revival at Azusa Street and featured letters from around the world which testified about the spread of Pentecost. The publication often wrote about Spirit baptism with the 'Bible evidence' of speaking in tongues⁴ and contains frequent references of individuals who 'received their Pentecost'.⁵ Clara Lum⁶ was the editor of the newspaper and wrote many of the articles that were printed anonymously.⁷ Occasionally, Seymour wrote articles and would include his name or initials.⁸ By January 1907, the Azusa mission was receiving up to 50 letters a day, many of

³ For a Pentecostal case study and theological reflection on both WWI and the Spanish flu pandemic see Alexander, *Pentecostal Healing*, pp. 215-24. Alexander shows how WWI and the Spanish flu affected the Pentecostals and their world. Within her analysis, she examines Pentecostal journals and differentiates between how the Wesleyan-Pentecostal stream and the Finished Work stream coped with these events.

⁴ See the testimony of Leila McKinney in *AF* 1.1 (October, 1906), p. 1.

⁵ See the testimony of Henry Prentiss in *AF* 1.8 (May, 1907), p. 4.

⁶ Lum was Seymour's secretary.

⁷ See C.M. Robeck, *The Azusa Street Mission and Revival*, chap. 3, Kindle. *AF* 1.4 (December, 1906), p. 2 notes, 'we publish no names of editors. All work for the honor and glory of God. This we believe will be a real protection to the paper to keep it pure.'

⁸ See *AF* 1.3 (November, 1906), pp. 2-3; *AF* 1.9 (June-September, 1907), p. 3.

which were testimonies from those in the mission field spreading the message of Pentecost. Lum would choose excerpts from these correspondences and place them in the newspaper.⁹ Each paper was sent out with a prayer. The paper was free of charge and each edition explicitly said at the top of the publication ‘Subscription Free’.¹⁰ Instead of charging for the paper, the editor simply made readers aware of publication needs and readers contributed by sending in enough cash or postage stamps to make *The Apostolic Faith* self-sustaining.¹¹ During its 21 months of publication, the paper represented the heart of the Azusa movement. It displayed many of the voluminous reports of miraculous healings and deliverances taking place within the North American Pentecostal movement. Moreover, it reveals how the early Pentecostals thought about suffering as well as how they were influenced by the Apocalypse.

Pentecostals and Suffering and Theodicy

Theodicy is not a term that is used within *The Apostolic Faith*. However, human suffering is directly mentioned enough times¹² within *The Apostolic Faith*'s 13 publications to suggest that the Azusa saints were confronted by suffering and did, in fact, have a way of approaching their own suffering in light of the goodness of God which they presupposed. Every publication, with the exception of one,¹³ makes direct reference(s) to the reality of suffering that the early Pentecostals were aware of in their own milieu and world in which they lived. *The Apostolic Faith* even suggested that the movement began as a result of its leader's awareness of human suffering: ‘Many are asking how the work in Azusa Mission started ... A band of humble people

⁹ Robeck, *The Azusa Street Mission and Revival*, chap. 3, Kindle.

¹⁰ Under a column entitled ‘Published Free By Faith’ the newspaper reports, ‘The Lord showed us before starting this paper that it was to be free ... It was to be a Holy Ghost paper and it was to be free ... No begging for money in it or through it ... It costs a cent a copy to send it anywhere in the world, and the Lord can afford that.’ This was no small task for the editing team. From the initial publication unto the fourth publication, the paper had grown by leaps and bounds: ‘We praise the Lord for enabling us to publish and send out 5,000 of No. 1; 10,000 of No. 2; 30,000 of No. 3; and 30,000 again of this issue. Some have received their Pentecost through reading this paper ...’ See *AF* 1.4 (December, 1906), p. 2.

¹¹ Robeck, *The Azusa Street Mission and Revival*, chap. 3, Kindle.

¹² For precise references to suffering see *AF* 1.1 (September, 1906), p. 3; *AF* 1.2 (October, 1906), pp. 3-4; *AF* 1.3 (November, 1906), pp. 1-2, 4; *AF* 1.4 (December, 1906), p. 1; *AF* 1.5 (January, 1907), pp. 1-2, 4; *AF* 1.6 (February-March, 1907), p. 8; *AF* 1.8 (May, 1907), pp. 2, 4; *AF* 1.9 (June-September, 1907), pp. 3-4; *AF* 1.10 (September, 1907), p. 4; *AF* 1.11 (October-January, 1908), pp. 3-4; *AF* 1.12 (January, 1908), pp. 1, 3; *AF* 2.13 (May, 1908), pp. 1-2. These are direct mentions of ‘suffering’ and do not include the many indirect mentions of suffering that come through forms of suffering such as agony, sickness, persecution, death, trials, and adverse conditions.

¹³ *AF* 1.7 (April, 1907). Though this issue does not mention ‘suffering’ per se, there is a section where the editor writes about Paul's thorn and refers to it as ‘affliction’, suggesting that these afflictions are to be expected in the lives of God's witnesses who follow Paul's example. Hence, this issue is not altogether without any reference to suffering, though it is indirect.

in Los Angeles had been praying for a year or more for more power with God for the salvation of lost and suffering humanity.’¹⁴

The Azusa saints believed that the Lord was concerned about suffering and Christian suffering in particular. In an exposition of Mt. 24.19, Seymour wrote, ‘The Lord Jesus Christ knows all about our struggles. He knows all about our sufferings and our trials. He is touched with every infirmity and He remembers us.’¹⁵ *The Apostolic Faith* made it clear that God had not turned a blind eye to their affliction. Christ understood their suffering because he himself had suffered. Suffering the way Christ suffered, namely bearing the scorn of the world, was prerequisite to reigning with Christ.¹⁶ Yet, *The Apostolic Faith* was careful to delineate between suffering for following Jesus and the suffering that came as a result of sickness, disease, and emotional turmoil.

Suffering for following Jesus was to be expected in the Christian experience. God would strengthen his people to endure such suffering and persist through it the way Christ had. Though believers shared in Christ’s suffering they were to also share in his joy.¹⁷ Hence, *The Apostolic Faith* encouraged saints to rejoice in suffering which came as a result of persecution and to press forward in spite of it. An example of this is apparent in one column entitled ‘In Jail for Jesus’ Sake’. An individual named Henry McLain shares his experience of being in jail for the sake of God, saying, ‘I knew it was all in the order of the Lord for me to be arrested and put in jail ... I never had such power of God on me as when I was in jail ... I never had the Lord use me so much before as in jail’.¹⁸ During this time, his wife suggested that she had never experienced such a precious presence of the Lord near to her.

Yet suffering that came as a result of sickness, disease, and inner turmoil was seen as an opponent to the Christian experience. It was something that the believer should seek God to heal or deliver them from. One except says, ‘O beloved, if we expect to reign with Him, we must suffer with Him – not that people must be sick or unhealthy or go with a long face, but we must bear all things and keep the faith of Jesus in our hearts. Our lives are now with the suffering

¹⁴ *AF* 1.4 (December, 1906), p. 1.

¹⁵ *AF* 1.12 (January, 1908), p. 3.

¹⁶ *AF* 1.11 (October-January, 1908), p. 3.

¹⁷ *AF* 1.9 (June-September, 1907), p. 4.

¹⁸ *AF* 1.3 (November, 1906), p. 4. Besides McLain’s account of persecution, there were plenty of other accounts in *The Apostolic Faith* which included persecution and pressing through it with the presence of the Lord. See a similar and more detailed account in *AF* 1.4 (December, 1906), p. 4, under the column ‘Arrested for Jesus’ Sake’.

Jesus.’¹⁹ *The Apostolic Faith* instructed saints to ‘preach healing’,²⁰ because ‘Jesus still heals today’.²¹ It was the ‘duty’ of ‘every sick child of God in the body of Christ’ to seek prayer for healing, as opposed to grieving about it.²²

Whether it was suffering for persecution’s sake or suffering as the result of sickness, the Pentecostals believed that God was active and present in their afflictions, whatever those afflictions were. *The Apostolic Faith* even expressed that God would even be near to believers during suffering which came as a result of natural disasters, namely earthquakes. The Lord would save the faithful if one occurred.²³

The Apostolic Faith never deliberated as to *why* suffering occurred, nor did it attempt to give any rational answers about it. Instead, the Pentecostal experience²⁴ was the answer to their prayers for suffering humanity – an answer that began their movement:

We never saw a salvation that brought such peace and joy to homes and families, and did so much for poor suffering humanity. There are many happy homes where the whole family, father, mother, and children have been brought in and all baptized with the Holy Ghost. They are homes of prayer and praise and rejoicing, and they are going about telling the glad story.²⁵

The Apostolic Faith was practical in its approach to theodicy. It exhorted faithfulness to Christ, in spite of suffering,²⁶ and urged believers to spread the message of Pentecost²⁷ which had saved them from their own sin, sickness, and many instances of suffering.²⁸ It was more concerned with the ‘simplicity’ of God’s love that reaches humanity in its suffering than theorizing. S.J.

¹⁹ *AF* 1.11 (October-January, 1908), p. 3.

²⁰ *AF* 1.4 (December, 1906), p. 2.

²¹ *AF* 1.6 (December, 1906), p. 6.

²² *AF* 1.6 (December, 1906), p. 6.

²³ *AF* 1.2 (October, 1906), p. 2. Sister Mary Golmond prophesied God would shake Los Angeles with a great earthquake because of ‘wickedness’. Mary expressed that the Lord would save the faithful. Moreover, God would protect the saints so thoroughly that the earthquake would not come on a Sunday. See also the column entitled ‘A Correction’ in *AF* 1.3 (November, 1906), p. 1.

²⁴ The term ‘The Pentecostal experience’ refers to being saved, sanctified, baptized with the Holy Ghost (which includes speaking with other tongues), and healed of all manner of sickness. In many instances, this led to traveling to foreign lands to preach the very same message. See *AF* 1.1 (September, 1906), p. 1.

²⁵ *AF* 1.8 (February-March, 1907), p. 8.

²⁶ An example of Pentecostals being faithful to Christ in spite of suffering is found in a short column which deals with the innocent suffering of a little girl whose drunk father kicked her because she had gone to a Pentecostal meeting. In response, the little girl expressed her faithfulness to Jesus by looking at her father and saying, ‘Glory to Jesus!’ See *AF* 2.13 (May, 1908), p.1.

²⁷ This Pentecostal experience was often referred to as ‘receiving Pentecost’ and it would often be said that someone had ‘received their Pentecost’. See *AF* 1.5 (January, 1907), p. 3; *AF* 1.6 (February-March, 1907), p. 1; *AF* 1.8 (May, 1907), p. 1; *AF* 1.10 (September, 1907), p. 1.

²⁸ See the column ‘Signs Follow’ in *AF* 1.3 (November, 1906), p. 4.

Mead tells a testimony of a slave woman in Africa that he led to Christ. The slave woman's village was burned, and her son became afflicted with smallpox. The woman later testified to Mead that the Lord healed her son of smallpox when she prayed for him. In spite of her suffering, Mead recounts, 'She may have preached the fundamental truth of the gospel to more souls in Africa than myself ... if your love and faith were but more simple, to take God at His word, our life would be full of sunshine and it would lighten and brighten up the dark places, that sin has caused on God's beautiful earth.'²⁹

This practical approach to theodicy was quite simple: the Jesus they preached was the answer to suffering. 'Heaven was searched to find one that could come and save suffering humanity ... We believe in this glorious Gospel that saves a man and a woman through and through.'³⁰ This moved the Pentecostals to take action against suffering through gospel work, which is, in large part, how they endured it.

Suffering and Theodicy in Revelation

The Book of Revelation³¹ was important for the early Pentecostals. Every volume of *The Apostolic Faith* directly references it at least once.³² Beyond direct references, *The Apostolic Faith* also alludes to language from the Apocalypse, especially in poems, hymns, and prophetic utterances throughout.³³ One example from the publication that demonstrates the importance of Revelation is the testimony of Ardell K. Mead who shares how the Book of Revelation 'so wonderfully opened up' to her and her missionary partners' souls after receiving Spirit baptism.³⁴ The prevalence of language from the Apocalypse in *The Apostolic Faith* suggests that the Apocalypse played a significant role in influencing the theology of the early Pentecostal movement and, in particular, how they approached suffering and theodicy.

The Apostolic Faith published a sermon from Seymour on Christ's message to the churches (Rev. 1-3), entitled 'Christ's Messages to the Church'. Seymour affirmed that the Book of Revelation was written by a man who had suffered, John. In describing the vision of chapter one,

²⁹ *AF* 2.13 (May, 1908), p. 1.

³⁰ *AF* 1.8 (May, 1907), p. 2.

³¹ It was not uncommon for *The Apostolic Faith* to refer to the Book of Revelation as 'Revelations'. See *AF* 1.2 (October, 1906), p. 1; *AF* 1.8 (May, 1907), p. 3; *AF* 1.11 (October-January, 1908), p. 3.

³² For a thorough list of places *The Apostolic Faith* references the Book of Revelation explicitly, see Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment*, p. 102, n. 5; Archer, 'I Was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day', p. 70, n. 15. In addition to the references in these lists, see also *AF* 1.1 (September, 1906), p. 3, (Rev. 20.4).

³³ See *AF* 1.5 (January, 1907), p. 2; *AF* 1.6 (February-March, 1907), p. 4; *AF* 1.9 (June-September, 1907), pp. 3-4.

³⁴ *AF* 1.3 (November, 1906), p. 3.

Seymour says, ‘This is the beginning of this wonderful and blessed message given to our beloved Apostle John, while he was suffering for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ’.³⁵ The article goes on to express John’s faithfulness amidst his trials and tribulations – trials and tribulations that came from preaching the gospel. *The Apostolic Faith* related John’s trials to Jesus’ trials, suggesting that Jesus ‘knew all about His servant’. It used this to encourage believers that, like John, Jesus was aware of their suffering too: ‘O beloved, the Lord Jesus knows all about our trials and tribulations, because ... his whole life was a life of suffering’.³⁶ Hence, *The Apostolic Faith* used suffering to identify the early Pentecostals with Jesus and the Apostle John. In this same section, *The Apostolic Faith* quotes a passage from Christ’s message to the church at Ephesus wherein Christ says he knows their works (Rev. 2.2). This included their ‘trials’ and ‘conditions’. Amidst such, Christ had come to ‘seek and to save’ them.³⁷

Throughout *The Apostolic Faith* there are references to Revelation regarding faithful believers reigning with God after having suffered.³⁸ This can be seen in a poem which Brother A. Beck wrote entitled ‘The Warfare, The Rapture, and the Afterwards’. In it, Beck echoes language from the Apocalypse and ends by giving a charge that calls for saints to be faithful in their suffering, even to death, because they will reign in spite of it:

Be faithful unto death,
And give not thyself no care;
Lay down thy life for Jesus’ sake,
A crown of life to wear.³⁹

Beck contributed another poem that is similar entitled ‘When Jesus Comes’. In it, as well, he echoes language from the Apocalypse and points to the coming of Christ as the end of Christian suffering:

He who came from heaven before
To suffer, bleed, and die,
Now comes in majesty to reign.
The Lord of earth and sky ...

Amen, e’en so, dear Lord, we say,
Come Jesus, quickly come.

³⁵ *AF* 1.11 (October-January, 1908), p. 3.

³⁶ *AF* 1.11 (October-January, 1908), p. 3.

³⁷ *AF* 1.11 (October-January, 1908), p. 3.

³⁸ *AF* 1.1 (September, 1906), p. 3; *AF* 1.5 (January, 1907), p. 2; *AF* 1.6 (February-March, 1907), p. 4; *AF* 1.9 (June-September, 1907), pp. 3-4; *AF* 1.10 (September, 1907), p. 4; *AF* 1.11 (October-January, 1908), p. 3; *AF* 1.12 (January, 1908), p. 2.

³⁹ *AF* 1.6 (February-March, 1907), p. 4.

And end the awful conflict here,
And take Thy loved ones home ...
Our prayers shall then be turned to praise,
And faith shall end in sight;
What bliss to see His blessed face!
With infinite delight!⁴⁰

Beck's poem demonstrates that early Pentecostals held an eschatological expectation for God to right their wrongs. In the end, God would vindicate their suffering and end their 'awful conflict'. They would reign with him because they, too, had suffered.

The Apostolic Faith put forth the notion that the saints would reign during the Millennium (Rev. 20.4) wherein they would have 'great glory'. In an article entitled 'The Millenium [*sic*]', *The Apostolic Faith* states:

Our place will be higher than the angels ... We shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of our Father ... That is the time when God is going to give some two cities to reign over and some ten ... In the millennial [*sic*] age, we shall have great glory ... we shall be living in the new heaven and the New Jerusalem and Jesus will turn the kingdom over into His Father's hand and sit down among the brethren, and we shall have the same glory that Jesus had with His Father before the foundation of the world. God will be all in all and we shall be swallowed up in immortality.⁴¹

The theme of sufferers being vindicated and ruling with Christ in the Millennial reign is reiterated again later in *The Apostolic Faith*:

Those that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus during the tribulation will be raised at His revelation. Rev. 20.4 makes this plain ... Jesus is coming to be King over all the earth and reign from sea to sea. We see Him in Revelations [*sic*] with a name written on His thigh, 'King of kings and Lord of lords.' We are coming back with Him on white horses ... We shall sit with the glorified Christ in His throne as His queen, the Lamb's wife. We are going to help Him rule this old world in the millenium [*sic*] ... Then afterwards at the white throne judgment, we shall sit with Him and judge the world ... Then after the new heavens and new earth ... we shall reign with Him throughout eternity. O beloved, are you ready?⁴²

Christ's return with his saints was perceived by *The Apostolic Faith* as his means of avenging his blood. From out of this vengeance would come the rule of the saints with Christ:

The Lord Jesus is coming back with his bride on white horses from the marriage supper of the lamb, to avenge His blood on the antichrist and the false prophet. –Rev. 19. 11, 14 ... Then the millennium is ushered in when Jesus shall sit on His throne and reign from shore to

⁴⁰ *AF* 1.5 (January, 1907), p. 2.

⁴¹ *AF* 1.1 (September, 1906), p. 3.

⁴² *AF* 1.10 (September, 1907), p. 4.

shore ... Then after we have reigned with Christ a thousand years, we shall sit on the judgment seat of Christ and judge men and angels.⁴³

In light of this coming vengeance, *The Apostolic Faith* urged its readers to be ‘overcomers’.⁴⁴ If they overcame, they would be ‘raptured’ and meet Jesus in the skies and later come back with him to reign. ‘Every full overcomer is going to be caught up when Jesus comes.’⁴⁵ Overcomers would escape their current state of suffering, avoid more suffering that was to come, and would be positioned to rule with Jesus, ‘The second coming of Jesus is near at hand ... If you do not stir yourselves up to seek the Lord now and receive His blessing, you will be left behind when Jesus comes and then you must suffer a great deal.’⁴⁶ Seymour appealed to Rev. 3.21-22 and the language of ‘overcoming’ to express that overcomers would ‘be priests and kings unto God, reigning with Him a thousand years in a jubilee of peace’. He believed that overcomers would be given an appointed number of cities to rule over.⁴⁷

The early Pentecostals’ hope in Christ’s coming to deliver them from suffering was so important to them that *The Apostolic Faith* published a hymn, entitled ‘Jesus is Coming’, which encapsulated their theology on the matter. This hymn used language familiar to Revelation and encouraged believers to put their hope for the future into Christ’s return:

Jesus is coming! Let anthems arise:
Jesus is coming! our God’s loving prize,
The world’s great Redeemer,
The Savior of men,
Jesus has conquered! He’s coming to reign.⁴⁸

Summary

The Apostolic Faith was concerned about Christian suffering and theodicy, though it never used the term ‘theodicy’ to explain the justice of God and its relationship to suffering or evil.

However, theodicean ideas, particularly from the Apocalypse, permeate *The Apostolic Faith*. The early Pentecostals never used the Apocalypse to answer why their suffering occurred nor did they use it to reconcile the idea of a benevolent God with the existence of suffering and evil.

They posited no theoretical or philosophical answers about suffering from it. Instead, they

⁴³ *AF* 1.12 (January, 1908), p. 2.

⁴⁴ *AF* 1.12 (January, 1908), p. 2. The term ‘overcomer’ is reoccurring language in the Apocalypse. See Rev. 2.7, 11, 17, 26; 3.5, 12, 21; 5.5; 6.2; 11.7-8; 12.10-11; 13.7; 15.2; 17.14; 21.7.

⁴⁵ *AF* 1.12 (January, 1908), p. 2.

⁴⁶ *AF* 1.10 (September, 1907), p. 4.

⁴⁷ *AF* 1.5 (January, 1907), p. 2.

⁴⁸ *AF* 1.9 (June-September, 1907), p. 4.

related their suffering to the apostle John's suffering as well as the suffering of the seven churches in Asia Minor. Like John and the churches in Asia Minor, Christ was aware of their suffering because he had suffered. Because of this, *The Apostolic Faith* urged believers to be faithful to Christ in their sufferings. Full faithfulness to Christ made them overcomers. As overcomers, they would be caught up to Christ in the rapture and would return with Christ at his coming in order to reign with him in the Millennium and then in the new heaven and new earth. Christ's return was how the Lord would avenge the blood of his own innocent suffering and it was how he would right the wrongs of the Pentecostals' suffering. Hence, *The Apostolic Faith* expresses a practical theodicy in Revelation which maintains a significant eschatological expectation in the Lord's return. Until the fulfillment of this expectation, *The Apostolic Faith* used Revelation to exhort believers unto holy lives in practical, hopeful service to the Lord.

Aside from this exploration, other work has been done with regard to how *The Apostolic Faith* approached suffering and theodicy. In 2010, O. McMahan offered a warm, heartfelt piece in honor of his friend, R.H. Gause.⁴⁹ He focused on Gause's own experience with suffering by integrating the works of C.S. Lewis with his own exploration of the history of Azusa Street as told by *The Apostolic Faith*. He seems to suggest that *The Apostolic Faith* is rather triumphalist about suffering. McMahan posits:

In *The Apostolic Faith* and thereby of Azusa, we find little mention of pain, no effort to weep, no desire to embrace the powerless, but rather only a quest to escape infirmity through healing, rapture and praise, at best occasional, episodic references to the plight of the tragic while apocalyptically looking for revival, and an absence of sitting with the suffering while building an empire called a movement ... Why do we not hear about those who were never healed, who continued to wander, remained in prison, were destitute and were never delivered in this world?

It should be noted that every issue of *The Apostolic Faith*, except for one, refers to some form of suffering and the entire movement is said to have started because its leader's awareness of suffering humanity. In times of tragedy, *The Apostolic Faith* continually exhorted that the Lord was near those who suffered, and the early Pentecostals grieved with those who grieved. Yet, McMahan correctly points out that the Pentecostals did not approach suffering philosophically, like C.S. Lewis. The Pentecostals approach to suffering was in keeping with the nature of their own movement which was practical and pragmatic. They did not see any need to have to posit

⁴⁹ O. McMahan, 'Grief Observed: Surprised by the Suffering of the Spirit', in S.J. Land, R.D. Moore, and J.C. Thomas (eds.), *Passover, Pentecost, & Parousia: Studies in Celebration of the Life and Ministry of R. Hollis Gause* (JPTSup 35; Dorset: Deo Publishing, 2010), pp. 296-314.

philosophical answers for something that is vexing and mysterious, something rationalists struggled to explain.⁵⁰ Instead, the early Pentecostals embraced the powerless and suffering by offering themselves to their service in the most heartfelt, compassionate ways they knew how.

The Bridegroom's Messenger

The Bridegroom's Messenger (TBM) was an early Pentecostal periodical begun by G.B. Cashwell in Atlanta, GA in 1907. Cashwell started it to promote the rising Pentecostal movement in the South⁵¹ by reporting the happenings and events taking place within it. Issues contained field reports from Pentecostal preachers, updates from international missionaries, exhortations to endure challenges and trials, recommendations for Pentecostal literature, announcements of upcoming Pentecostal camp meetings, as well as prayer requests, giving records, testimonies, and teachings. In its issues from 1907-1919, *The Bridegroom's Messenger* is filled with references to the suffering experienced by those alive during the early 20th century including references to famine in India, the 'War of Nations' (WWI),⁵² and the Spanish flu pandemic.⁵³ The Book of Revelation is often cited within most of these issues.⁵⁴ This suggests that Revelation was an important part of early Pentecostal theology. Revelation shaped (1) how Pentecostals thought about the suffering they were faced with, (2) how Pentecostals perceived what God was doing about suffering, and (3) what Pentecostals thought about the eschatological justice that God would bring about in the new earth.

Pentecostals and Suffering and Theodicy

The numerous times that suffering is mentioned in *The Bridegroom's Messenger* suggests that suffering and theodicy were a major emphasis for the early Pentecostals.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ S. Kivistö and S. Pihlström, *Kantian Antitheodicy: Philosophical and Literary Varieties* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), p. 4, point out that philosophical and moral approaches to theodicy can be 'insincere' and even 'morally scandalous'. What Kivistö and Pihlström make clear is that suffering does not *have* to be – and according to them, should not be – approached theoretically. They suggest that rational theodicies fail to acknowledge the suffering individual, their experience, and the sincerity of that experience.

⁵¹ H.V. Synan, 'Cashwell, Gaston Barnabas', in S.M. Burgess and E.M. Van Der Mas (eds.), *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), pp. 457-58.

⁵² *TBM* 8.174 (September 1, 1915), p. 1.

⁵³ *TBM* 12.212 (April, 1919), p. 3; *TBM* 12.217 (October, 1919), p. 3.

⁵⁴ For issues between 1907-1918 that contain explicit references and quotations of Revelation see Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment*, pp. 111-12, n. 62. Not included are references and quotations of Revelation in the 1919 issues. These are *TBM* 12.212 (April, 1919), p. 1; *TBM* 12.214 (June, 1919), pp. 1, 4; *TBM* 12.215 (July and August, 1919), pp. 1, 4; *TBM* 12.216 (September, 1919), pp. 1, 4; *TBM* 12.217 (October, 1919), pp. 2, 3; *TBM* (November, and December, 1919), pp. 1-2.

⁵⁵ For explicit mentions to various forms of suffering in *The Bridegroom's Messenger*, see *TBM* 1.1 (October 1, 1907), p. 4; *TBM* 1.2 (November 1, 1907), pp. 1-2; *TBM* 1.3 (December 1, 1907), pp. 1-2, 4; *TBM* 1.4 (December

15, 1907), p. 2; *TBM* 1.5 (January 1, 1908), p. 2; *TBM* 1.6 (January 15, 1908), p. 3; *TBM* 1.7 (February 1, 1908), p. 2, 4; *TBM* 1.9 (March 1, 1908), p. 1; *TBM* 1.12 (April 15, 1908), p. 4; *TBM* 1.13 (May 1, 1908), p. 2; *TBM* 1.14 (May 15, 1908), pp. 1-2, 4; *TBM* 1.16 (June 15, 1908), p. 1; *TBM* 1.17 (July 1, 1908), pp. 1-3; *TBM* 1.18 (July 15, 1908), pp. 1, 3; *TBM* 1.19 (August 1, 1908), pp. 1-2, 4; *TBM* 1.22 (September 15, 1908), pp. 1, 4; *TBM* 2.23 (October 1, 1908), p. 1; *TBM* 2.25 (November 1, 1908), pp. 1-4; *TBM* 2.26 (November 15, 1908), pp. 1-2, 4; *TBM* 2.27 (December 1, 1908), p. 4; *TBM* 2.29 (January 1, 1909), pp. 1, 4; *TBM* 2.30 (January 15, 1909), pp. 1-3; *TBM* 2.31 (February 1, 1909), pp. 1, 3, 5-6; *TBM* 2.32 (February 15, 1909), pp. 1, 3-4; *TBM* 2.33 (March 1, 1909), pp. 3-4; *TBM* 2.34 (March 15, 1909), pp. 2-3; *TBM* 2.35 (April 1, 1909), pp. 1-3; *TBM* 2.36 (April 15, 1909), pp. 2, 4; *TBM* 2.37 (May 1, 1909), p. 4; *TBM* 2.40 (June 15, 1909), p. 3; *TBM* 2.43 (August 1, 1909), p. 1; *TBM* 2.44 (August 15, 1909), pp. 3-4; *TBM* 2.45 (September 1, 1909), p. 3; *TBM* 2.46 (September 15, 1909), p. 3; *TBM* 3.47 (October 1, 1909), p. 1; *TBM* 3.48 (October 15, 1909), pp. 2-4; *TBM* 3.49 (November 1, 1909), pp. 1-2; *TBM* 3.50 (November 15, 1909), pp. 1, 4; *TBM* 3.51 (December 1, 1909), p. 1; *TBM* 3.53 (January 1, 1910), pp. 1-2; *TBM* 3.54 (January 15, 1910), pp. 2-4; *TBM* 3.55 (February 1, 1910), pp. 2-4; *TBM* 3.56 (February 15, 1910), pp. 1-2, 4; *TBM* 3.57 (March 1, 1910), p. 4; *TBM* 3.59 (April 1, 1910), pp. 3-4; *TBM* 3.60 (April 15, 1910), pp. 2, 4; *TBM* 3.61 (May 1, 1910), pp. 1-2, 4; *TBM* 3.62 (May 15, 1910), p. 2; *TBM* 3.63 (June 1, 1910), p. 2; *TBM* 3.64 (June 15, 1910), pp. 1-4; *TBM* 3.65 (July 1, 1910), pp. 1, 4; *TBM* 3.66 (July 15, 1910), pp. 3-4; *TBM* 3.67 (August 1, 1910), p. 3; *TBM* 3.68 (August 15, 1910), pp. 2-3; *TBM* 3.69 (September 1, 1910), p. 1; *TBM* 3.70 (September 15, 1910), p. 4; *TBM* 3.71 (October 1, 1910), p. 3; *TBM* 4.72 (October 15, 1910), pp. 3-4; *TBM* (November 1, 1910), pp. 1, 3-4; *TBM* 4.74 (November 15, 1910), p. 3; *TBM* 4.75 (December 1, 1910), pp. 3-4; *TBM* 4.77 (January 1, 1911), pp. 1, 3; *TBM* 4.78 (January 15, 1911), pp. 1-4; *TBM* 4.79 (February 1, 1911), pp. 2-3; *TBM* 4.80 (February 15, 1911), pp. 1-2, 4; *TBM* 4.81 (March 1, 1911), pp. 3-4; *TBM* 4.82 (March 15, 1911), pp. 1-4; *TBM* 4.83 (April 1, 1911), pp. 1-2; *TBM* 4.84 (April 15, 1911), p. 4; *TBM* 4.85 (May 1, 1911), pp. 1-2, 4; *TBM* 4.85 (June 15, 1911), p. 4; *TBM* 4.89 (July 1, 1911), pp. 1-2, 4; *TBM* 4.91 (August 1, 1911), pp. 1-4; *TBM* 4.92 (August 15, 1911), pp. 1-3; *TBM* 4.93 (September 1, 1911), pp. 3-4; *TBM* 4.94 (September 15, 1911), pp. 2-3; *TBM* 5.95 (October 1, 1911), pp. 2-4; *TBM* 5.96 (October 15, 1911), pp. 1-3; *TBM* 5.97 (November 1, 1911), pp. 1-2, 4; *TBM* 5.98 (November 15, 1911), pp. 1-3; *TBM* 5.100 (December 15, 1911), pp. 2-4; *TBM* 5.101 (January 1, 1912), pp. 2-3; *TBM* 5.102 (January 15, 1912), pp. 1-4; *TBM* 5.103 (February 1, 1912), pp. 1-4; *TBM* 5.104 (February 15, 1912), pp. 1-4; *TBM* 5.105 (March 1, 1912), pp. 1-2, 4; *TBM* 5.106 (March 16, 1912), pp. 1-3; *TBM* 5.107 (April 1, 1912), pp. 1-3; *TBM* 5.108 (April 15, 1912), p. 1; *TBM* 5.109 (May 1, 1912), p. 2, 4; *TBM* 5.110 (May 15, 1912), pp. 1, 3-4; *TBM* 5.111 (June 1, 1912), pp. 2, 4; *TBM* 5.112 (June 15, 1912), pp. 1-4; *TBM* 5.113 (July 1, 1912), pp. 1-3; *TBM* 5.114 (July 15, 1912), pp. 2-4; *TBM* 5.115 (August 1, 1912), pp. 1-4; *TBM* 5.116 (August 15, 1912), pp. 1-4; *TBM* 5.117 (September 1, 1912), p. 2; *TBM* 5.118 (September 15, 1912), pp. 1-4; *TBM* 5.119 (October 15, 1912), pp. 1-4; *TBM* 5.120 (November 1, 1912), pp. 2-4; *TBM* 6.121 (November 15, 1912), pp. 1-4; *TBM* 6.122 (December 1, 1912), pp. 2-3; *TBM* 6.123 (December 15, 1912), pp. 1-4; *TBM* 6.124 (January 1, 1913), pp. 1-3; *TBM* 6.125 (January 15, 1913), pp. 2-4; *TBM* 6.126 (February 1, 1913), pp. 1-4; *TBM* 6.127 (February 15, 1913), pp. 1-4; *TBM* 6.128 (March 1, 1913), pp. 1-2; *TBM* 6.130 (April 1, 1913), pp. 1-4; *TBM* 6.131 (April 15, 2013), pp. 2-4; *TBM* 6.132 (May 1, 1913), pp. 1-4; *TBM* 6.133 (May 15, 1913), pp. 1-3; *TBM* 6.134 (June 1, 1913), pp. 2-3; *TBM* 6.135 (June 15, 1913), pp. 2-3; *TBM* 6.136 (July 1, 1913), pp. 1-4; *TBM* 6.137 (August 1, 1913), pp. 2-4; *TBM* 6.138 (August 15, 1913), pp. 3-4; *TBM* 6.139 (September 1, 1913), p. 4; *TBM* 6.140 (September 15, 1913), pp. 1-4; *TBM* 7.141 (October 1, 1913), pp. 2-4; *TBM* 7.142 (October 15, 1913), pp. 1, 3; *TBM* 7.143 (November 1, 1913), pp. 2, 4; *TBM* 7.144 (November 15, 1913), pp. 2-4; *TBM* 7.145 (December 1, 1913), pp. 2-4; *TBM* 7.146 (December 15, 1913), pp. 2-4; *TBM* 7.147 (January 1, 1914), pp. 1-2; *TBM* 7.148 (January 15, 1914), pp. 2-4; *TBM* 7.149 (February 1, 1914), pp. 1, 3; *TBM* 7.150 (February 15, 1914), pp. 1, 3-4; *TBM* 7.151 (March 1, 1914), pp. 1-2, 4; *TBM* 7.152 (March 15, 1914), pp. 2-3; *TBM* 7.153 (April 1, 1914), pp. 1-3; *TBM* 7.154 (May 1, 1914), pp. 1-2, 4; *TBM* 7.155 (May 15, 1914), pp. 3-4; *TBM* 7.156 (June 1, 1914), p. 2-3; *TBM* 7.157 (June 15, 2017), pp. 1-4; *TBM* 7.158 (July 1, 1914), p. 1; *TBM* 7.159 (August 1, 1914), pp. 1-3; *TBM* 7.160 (August 15, 1914), pp. 1, 3; *TBM* 7.161 (September 1, 1914), pp. 1-3; *TBM* 7.162 (September 15, 1914), pp. 1-4; *TBM* 8.163 (October 1, 1914), pp. 1, 3-4; *TBM* 8.164 (November 1, 1914), pp. 1-4; *TBM* 8.165 (December 1, 1914), pp. 1-3; *TBM* 8.166 (January 1, 1915), pp. 1-4; *TBM* 8.167 (February 1, 1915), p. 2; *TBM* 8.168 (March 1, 1918), p. 2; *TBM* 8.169 (April 1, 1915), pp. 2-3; *TBM* 8.170 (May 1, 1915), pp. 1, 3-4; *TBM* 8.171 (June 1, 1915), pp. 1-4; *TBM* 8.172 (July 1, 1915), p. 4; *TBM* 8.173 (August 1, 1915), pp. 2-4; *TBM* 8.174 (September 1, 1915), pp. 1-4; *TBM* 8.175 (October 1, 1915), pp. 2-3; *TBM* 9.176 (November 1, 1915), pp. 2-3; *TBM* 9.177 (December 1, 1915), pp. 1-4; *TBM* 9.178 (January 1, 1916), pp. 1-4; *TBM* 9.179 (February 1, 1916), pp. 1-2, 4; *TBM* 9.180 (March 1, 1916), pp. 1-4; *TBM* 9.181 (April 1, 1916), p. 3; *TBM* 9.182 (May 1, 1916), pp. 2-4; *TBM* 9.183 (June 1, 1916), pp. 1-2, 4; *TBM* 9.184 (July 1, 1916), pp. 1-2; *TBM* 9.185 (August 1, 1916), pp. 1-2, 4; *TBM* 9.186 (September 1, 1916), pp. 1-4; *TBM* 9.187 (October 1, 1916), pp. 1-4; *TBM* 10.188 (November 1, 1916), pp. 1-2; *TBM* 10.189

For early Pentecostals, not all human suffering was the same and their response to suffering was determined by the type of the suffering experienced. The first kind of suffering they identified was suffering that came because creation is fallen. This included sickness, war, famine, flood, pestilence, pandemic, temptation, and demonic oppression. The editor of *The Bridegroom's Messenger*, Elizabeth Sexton, wrote a column in 1915 entitled 'And There Shall Be No More Curse, But the Throne of God and the Lamb' where she affirms that there is a kind of suffering that is the result of broken creation saying, 'Thinking Christians are almost unanimous in the belief that sickness and all kinds of suffering are the result of the fall. According to the working of the law of "cause and effect," sickness is in the world because of sin. Not that the individual is guilty of sin that produced the sickness, but because we are living under the law of sin and death.'⁵⁶

This kind of suffering evoked a vigorous response from Pentecostals wherein they sought to mitigate it.⁵⁷ They believed their movement was a partnership with God to bring relief,⁵⁸ though the second coming of Christ and his future eschatological reign would be the final answer to end this suffering:

Our hearts may yearn over suffering humanity, and long for surcease from all the horrors of wars and pestilences and famines and distress of nations and pain and poverty. But there is only One, great and righteous, who can take the kingdoms of the earth and cause peace to reign forever. There is only One who can quiet the raging of the boisterous waves of discontent and confusion. There is only one [*sic*] who can cause righteousness to cover the earth as the waters cover the sea. There is only One who can cause nations to learn war no more and the only One who can lift the curse that is upon the whole world because of sin: It

(December 1, 1916), pp. 1, 3-4; *TBM* 10.190 (January 1, 1917), pp. 2-3; *TBM* 10.191 (February 1, 1917), pp. 1-4; *TBM* 10.192 (March 1, 1917), pp. 2-4; *TBM* 10.193 (April 1, 1917), p. 2; *TBM* 10.199 (May 1, 1917), pp. 1-2, 4; *TBM* 10.200 (June 1, 1917), pp. 2, 4; *TBM* 10.202 (September 1, 1917), p. 1; *TBM* 11.205 (June, 1918), pp. 2-4; *TBM* (July, 1918), pp. 1-3; *TBM* 11.206 (October 1, 1918), pp. 1-4; *TBM* 12.207 (November, 1918), pp. 2-4; *TBM* 12.212 (April, 1919), pp. 1-4; *TBM* 12.214 (June, 1919), pp. 2-4; *TBM* 12.215 (July and August, 1919), pp. 1-2; *TBM* 12.216 (September, 1919), pp. 1-3; *TBM* 12.217 (October, 1919), p. 2; *TBM* 13.218 (November-December, 1919), pp. 1-4.

⁵⁶ *TBM* 1.16 (June 15, 1908), p. 1.

⁵⁷ *The Bridegroom's Messenger* taught that sickness was not from God. However, God could use the suffering from sickness to teach those sick 'important lessons' because God perfects believers through suffering. In lieu of this, *The Bridegroom's Messenger* exhorted sufferers to pray that God quickly teach them the lesson they needed to learn and then seek healing. On the other hand, *The Bridegroom's Messenger* warned about 'the danger of settling down in a condition of suffering'. See *TBM* 13.218 (November-December, 1919), p. 1.

⁵⁸ In an article entitled 'Keep the Fire Burning', in which the 'fire' refers to Spirit baptism, readers are exhorted to stir up the fire in them. In order to stir up the fire and 'grow in grace', readers are instructed to cooperate with God 'in behalf of suffering humanity'. Thus, the early Pentecostal saints understood themselves as workers together with the Lord to mitigate suffering through Spirit baptism. This would refresh their spiritual fervor and keep them from departing from the movement. See *TBM* 4.77 (January 1, 1911), p. 1.

is Jesus, the Holy One, Lord of Lords and King of Kings. Why should we not desire Him to come and set up His righteous kingdom and reign forever?⁵⁹

In almost every issue, Pentecostals are at work, on behalf of God, against this kind of suffering. There are abundant prayer requests for those suffering because of sickness and natural disaster,⁶⁰ testimonies of individuals who experienced divine healing,⁶¹ and there are frequent reports offered which reflect a consistent effort to bring relief to what *The Bridegroom's Messenger* refers to as 'famine sufferers', 'flood sufferers', and 'war sufferers', which are human beings suffering the result of famine and war in countries wherein Pentecostals were supporting missionaries. These countries include India, North China, Armenia, Japan, Syria, and various countries in Africa, South America, and Central America.⁶² Pentecostals also partnered with God in their movement to bring relief to child suffering by supporting and caring for suffering orphans.⁶³ In 1914, *The Bridegroom's Messenger* begins to discuss the increased suffering of the world due to WWI⁶⁴ and by 1919 the publication mentions the daunting hardships brought on by the Spanish flu pandemic.⁶⁵ In these grave times of suffering, the Pentecostals did not shy away. *The Bridegroom's Messengers* portrays them partnering with God, offering up prayers, and bringing aid where they could.

The Bridegroom's Messenger offers no theoretical or philosophical reasons for human suffering beyond suffering being a result of the fall and sin.⁶⁶ Like *The Apostolic Faith*, *The*

⁵⁹ *TBM* 10.188 (November 1, 1916), p. 1.

⁶⁰ For examples of prayer requests, see *TBM* 1.4 (December 15, 1907), p. 3; *TBM* 4.93 (September 1, 1911), p. 1; *TBM* 10.198 (April 1, 1917), p. 2; *TBM* 12.214 (June, 1919), p. 2.

⁶¹ For testimonies of divine healing, see *TBM* 1.2 (November 1, 1907), pp. 1, 3; *TBM* 2.32 (February 15, 1909), p. 3; *TBM* 4.73 (November 1, 1910), p. 1; *TBM* 4.86 (May 15, 1911), p. 3.

⁶² For examples, see *TBM* 1.13 (May 1, 1908), p. 1; *TBM* 1.15 (June 1, 1908), p. 2; *TBM* 4.72 (October 15, 1910), p. 3; *TBM* 4.89 (July 1, 1911), p. 2; *TBM* 5.101 (January 1, 1912), p. 2; *TBM* 5.111 (June 1, 1911), p. 2; *TBM* 6.124 (January 1, 1913), p. 1; *TBM* 6.126 (February 1, 1913), p. 2; *TBM* (November 15, 1913), p. 2; *TBM* 11.204 (June, 1918), p. 2.

⁶³ *TBM* 2.23 (October 1, 1908), p. 1; *TBM* 2.29 (January 1, 1909), p. 1; *TBM* 3.49 (November 1, 1909), p. 2.

⁶⁴ *TBM* 8.163 (October 1, 1914), p. 1; *TBM* 8.174 (September 1, 1915), p. 1; *TBM* 9.177 (December 1, 1915), p. 1; *TBM* 9.180 (March 1, 1916), p. 3; *TBM* 12.207 (November, 1918), p. 1.

⁶⁵ *TBM* 12.212 (April, 1919), p. 3; *TBM* 12.217 (October, 1919), p. 3. While there are mentions of the Spanish flu pandemic in *The Bridegroom's Messenger* (as well as the other early Pentecostal publications surveyed in this reception history), it may be surprising to some that it is not mentioned more than it is, especially if one compares the attention the Spanish flu receives in these publications with the coverage that COVID-19 has received in Christian publications between 2020-2022. E. Outka notices this conundrum: 'Why does the deadly 1918-1919 influenza pandemic seem to make so few appearances in British, Irish, and American literature of the period? ... It is equally astonishing that the flu is rarely considered in modern scholarship.' For her complete investigation, see E. Outka, *Viral Modernism: The Influenza Pandemic and Interwar Literature* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2020), p. 1.

⁶⁶ The 'superstition' of Hinduism and Mohammedanism were considered to be responsible for famine in India. 'The fact does now exist that in some parts of India there is chronic famine, and many persons starve to death every

Bridegroom's Messenger is applied in its approach to suffering, positing something of a practical theodicy.⁶⁷ Their movement expressed the goodness of God in lieu of suffering. God could be found within their efforts, working against suffering to bring healing and relief, through prayer and their missionary efforts. Thus, Pentecostals focused on practical responses to suffering so that the goodness of God could be experienced despite the atrocities caused by the fall and sin. Ultimately, these Pentecostals were confident that God's final divine justice would be experienced at the Lord's return and, therefore, they worked to partner with God in this age, having the hope of his return in mind.

The other kind of suffering discussed in *The Bridegroom's Messenger* is the suffering that comes with serving God, to which the Pentecostals responded by welcoming it.⁶⁸ For them, it was an unavoidable part of partnering with Christ effectively. In one column, entitled 'Persecution', it is stated that 'persecution therefore is the price of success'.⁶⁹ This article goes on to exhort believers to 'rejoice' in this persecution because Christ's disciples – Paul, Martin Luther, and John Wesley – all experienced this form of suffering.⁷⁰ *The Bridegroom's Messenger* taught that this persecution was cosmic, being caused by Satan, 'The more you fight against Satan, the more Satan will fight against you. The stronger God makes you, the stronger Satan will come against you ... But let us pray and seek God for an understanding and say with Paul, "I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us"'.⁷¹ Rejoicing in suffering is what the Pentecostals did, stating often that they counted it a blessing to be counted 'worthy' to suffer with Christ.⁷²

year. How can this be otherwise amid the superstition of Hinduism and Mohammedanism?' See *TBM* 2.33 (March 1, 1909), p. 1.

⁶⁷ *The Bridegroom's Messenger* never uses the word 'theodicy' in any regard. However, it does consider the matter of God's goodness and divine justice in light of suffering.

⁶⁸ Suffering that comes from serving God is what I refer to as 'Christian suffering'.

⁶⁹ *TBM* 5.101 (January 1, 1912), p. 3.

⁷⁰ It was common for early Pentecostals to relate their sufferings for Christ to those saints who had come before them. In a column entitled 'Suffering for Jesus' *The Bridegroom's Messenger* relates the early Pentecostals' suffering to that of 'John Wyclif' [*sic*], John Huss, 'William Tindale' [*sic*], Dr. Rowland Taylor, 'Hugh Lattimer' [*sic*], Dr. Nicholas Ridley, 'John Sullman' [*sic*], 'Andrew Hewet' [*sic*], 'John Frisk' [*sic*], John Lambert, Anna Askew, John Bradford, 'Thomas Cramer' [*sic*], Peter Waldo, 'Tanler the mystic', Girolamo Savonarola, John Knox, 'Madam Guyon' [*sic*], 'the Huguenots' [*sic*], 'the Boxer movement', and 'the thousands in Armenia who have laid down their lives for the truth's sake'. Just as God rewarded them, he would reward the unknown Pentecostals who suffered for Christ. See *TBM* 10.202 (September 1, 1917), p. 1.

⁷¹ *TBM* 3.64 (June 15, 1910), p. 1.

⁷² *TBM* 1.14 (May 15, 1908), p. 4; *TBM* 2.26 (November 15, 1908), p. 1; *TBM* 2.29 (January 1, 1909), p. 1.; *TBM* 4.77 (January 1, 1911), p. 1; *TBM* 6.130 (April 1, 1913), p. 3.

In a series of columns which appeared in publications from April 1, 1913 – May 1, 1913,⁷³ E.T. Slaybaugh discussed Christian suffering in some significant detail. Using Phil. 3.10,⁷⁴ Slaybaugh discerns three degrees of Christian experience: (1) knowing Christ as personal savior, (2) the Pentecostal Spirit baptism, and (3) knowing Christ in his suffering – the latter of these Slaybaugh comments on saying, ‘many people who have entered into the two former experiences with Christ fail to grasp and enter into the truth, reality and blessedness of His sufferings’.⁷⁵ Slaybaugh taught that suffering was necessary for being transformed into Christ’s image and being part of the first resurrection.⁷⁶ He also posited six points about this Christian suffering that contributed to a practical theology on suffering which he used to exhort believers: (1) without the sweet fellowship of Christ’s suffering believers shall never become worthy of Christ as Bridegroom, (2) it is part of the believer’s calling to suffer with Christ, (3) believers are to suffer willingly with Christ and consider it a privilege, (4) believers are to rejoice in Christ’s suffering, (5) the secret of enduring suffering is having a revelation of the glory that follows suffering, and (6) believers are made perfect through suffering.⁷⁷

Finally, *The Bridegroom’s Messenger* taught that Christian suffering was not just exclusive to one believer. If one believer suffered, the whole body suffered.⁷⁸ Prayer and intercession were important because it connected believers to one another’s suffering, even if individuals being prayed for were unknown missionaries in unknown whereabouts around the world:

We suffer more with the different members who are passing through trials than we are aware. We are oppressed by it without understanding that it is caused by the suffering of some member of the body of Christ to which we belong. Many cases could be cited where the suffering of one has been keenly felt by another, although separated by hundreds of miles, and knowing nothing about the great trial of the other member of the body, except that the Spirit would cause them to understand and drive them to prayer for that one.⁷⁹

This suggests that Pentecostals saw Christian suffering as something which connected their movement together and formed a bond between one another wherein they sought the Lord together as one. They would endure the suffering as long as need be. What gave them hope was

⁷³ See ‘Jesus Is Coming Soon’ in *TBM* 6.130 (April 1, 1913), p. 4; ‘Jesus Is Coming Soon’, *TBM* 6.131 (April 15, 1913), p. 4; ‘Jesus Is Coming Soon’, *TBM* 6.132 (May 1, 1913), p. 4.

⁷⁴ ‘That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings’.

⁷⁵ *TBM* 6.130 (April 1, 1913), p. 4.

⁷⁶ *TBM* 6.131 (April 15, 1913), p. 4.

⁷⁷ *TBM* 6.132 (May 1, 1913), p. 4.

⁷⁸ For examples, see *TBM* 7.150 (February 15, 1914), p. 4; *TBM* 9.178 (January 1, 1916), p. 1.

⁷⁹ *TBM* 2.32 (February 15, 1909), p. 1.

that the God of justice would vindicate their suffering at his coming. This notion is expressed in a poetic article entitled ‘The Lord is at Hand’ by Horatius Bonar:

To the saint wearied with a vexing world, fretted with its vanities, and troubled with the thickening darkness of its midnight, I can say ‘Be of good cheer, the Lord is at hand; but a little while and the world shall cease to vex; sooner than you think the morn will break – yea, before it is broken we shall be caught up and meet the morning ere it is yet spread upon the mountains.’ To the suffering saint I can say ‘Weep not, the Lord is at hand; the torn heart shall be bound up, and the bitterness of bereavement forgotten in the joy of union forever.’⁸⁰

Suffering and Theodicy in Revelation

The Book of Revelation was indispensable for an early Pentecostal understanding of Christian suffering and theodicy.⁸¹ Though *The Bridegroom’s Messenger* discusses the various chapters in Revelation throughout its publication,⁸² there are two major sections of Revelation which the publication focuses on regarding suffering and theodicy. The first section is Christ’s messages to the seven churches in Revelation 2-3.⁸³ Christ’s messages to the seven churches resonated with the early Pentecostals in relation to suffering for two reasons: (1) they believed that their suffering and trials were similar to the sufferings and trials of the seven churches and (2) just like the seven churches, they were called to overcome and be ‘overcomers’. In one column entitled ‘Ready for His Appearing’, *The Bridegroom’s Messenger* seeks to address the question of why

⁸⁰ *TBM* 5.115 (August 1, 1912), p. 4.

⁸¹ The majority of the suffering that *The Bridegroom’s Messenger* concerned itself with in relation to the Book of Revelation was suffering that Christians experienced for the sake of Christ.

⁸² In 1913, E.T. Slaybaugh began giving an extensive, futurist, dispensational reading of the Book of Revelation (and other eschatological portions of the NT) in *The Bridegroom’s Messenger* entitled, ‘Jesus Is Coming Soon’. Over time, Slaybaugh worked through most of the text of Revelation and posited a chapter by chapter teaching of Revelation which continued for a period of three years: 1913-1915. In doing so, Slaybaugh interpreted many of the events in revelation as being fulfilled, or being near to fulfillment, in his day. See *TBM* 6.125 (January 15, 1913), p. 4; *TBM* 6.126 (February 1, 1913), p. 4; *TBM* 6.127 (February 15, 1913), p. 4; *TBM* 6.128 (March 1, 1913), p. 4; *TBM* 6.129 (March 15, 1913), p. 4; *TBM* 6.130 (April 1, 1913), p. 4; *TBM* 6.131 (April 15, 1913), p. 4; *TBM* 6.132 (May 1, 1913), p. 4; *TBM* 6.134 (June 1, 1913), p. 4; *TBM* 6.135 (June 15, 1913), p. 4; *TBM* 6.136 (July 1, 1913), p. 4; *TBM* 6.137 (August 1, 1913), p. 4; *TBM* 6.140 (September 15, 1913), p. 4; *TBM* 7.143 (November 1, 1913), p. 4; *TBM* 7.144 (November 15, 1913), p. 4; *TBM* 7.154 (May 1, 1914), p. 4; *TBM* 7.155 (May 15, 1914), p. 4; *TBM* 7.156 (June 1, 1914), p. 4; *TBM* 7.158 (July 1, 1914), p. 4; *TBM* 7.159 (August 1, 1914), p. 4; *TBM* 7.160 (August 15, 1914), p. 4; *TBM* 7.161 (September 1, 1914), p. 4; *TBM* 8.167 (February 1, 1915); *TBM* 8.168 (March 1, 1915), p. 4; *TBM* (April 1, 1915), p. 4; *TBM* (May 1, 1915), p. 4; *TBM* (June 1, 1915), p. 4; *TBM* 8.172 (July 1, 1915), p. 4; *TBM* 8.175 (October 1, 1915), p. 4; *TBM* 9.176 (November 1, 1915), p. 4.

⁸³ For examples of places where Revelation 2-3 is considered, see *TBM* 1.19 (August 1, 1908), pp. 2-3; *TBM* 2.34 (March 15, 1909), p. 1; *TBM* 3.50 (November 15, 1909), p. 1; *TBM* 3.51 (December 1, 1909), pp. 2, 4; *TBM* 3.52 (December 15, 1909), p. 3; *TBM* 3.68 (August 15, 1910), p. 4; *TBM* 4.80 (February 15, 1911), p. 4; *TBM* 4.82 (March 15, 1911), p. 4; *TBM* 4.83 (April 1, 1911), p. 3; *TBM* 7.150 (February 15, 1914), p. 1; *TBM* 7.159 (August 1, 1914), p. 2; *TBM* 8.167 (February 1, 1915), p. 2; *TBM* 8.168 (March 1, 1915), p. 3; *TBM* 9.180 (March 1, 1916), p. 1; *TBM* 10.200 (June 1, 1917), p. 2; *TBM* 12.212 (April, 1919), p. 1; *TBM* 12.214 (June, 1919), p. 1; *TBM* 12.215 (July and August, 1919), pp. 1, 4.

God permits Christian suffering and uses the situation of the seven churches in Revelation 2-3 to address it:

Many good people have wondered at the hand of Providence in permitting suffering to come to the saints of God. They express surprise that God would suffer his children to go through such hard places. All who thus question God's love strokes have not yet learned that in every trial His loving hand is indeed upon us for good and will cause these things to work out for us 'a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory'. Yes, all of the hard trials, disappointments, sickness, suffering, pain and even death, 'are not worthy to be compared to the glory that shall be revealed in us' ... In the letters to the seven churches in Asia, in Rev. 2nd and 3rd chapters, there are many blessed promises to the overcomers ... To overcome as he overcame ... This kind of overcoming is only accomplished by our choosing God's way instead of our own way ... Thank God that we will have a company of overcomers, a people purified and arrayed in linen, clean and white, ready to welcome their Bridegroom, when He comes. And oh, so many are saying today, Even so come, Lord Jesus.⁸⁴

Christian suffering for an early Pentecostal was not meaningless. It was purposeful in that it prepared them to be like Christ, who suffered, and readied them for his coming. E.M. Scurrah, a missionary in South Africa, pointed to Rev. 3:21 to confirm the necessity and purpose behind Christian suffering saying:

I hear someone say, 'Oh, well, that was for us that He suffered so. We haven't "got" to go that way.' We haven't 'got to', that is true. We haven't got 'to take up our cross and follow Him', but if we would be glorified with Jesus, and occupy the nearest place (of the Bride) with Him in eternity, we must be overcomers just like Him, but in His strength. (Rev. 3:21.) ... As we suffer as children of God we find how much of the divine nature is ours ... Let us become emptied of the man and filled with Christ; lose all of the creature and be filled with the Creator. But let us first learn that from us God asks nothing but to unlock the door, admitting Him who through us will conquer evermore.⁸⁵

For Pentecostals, suffering like Christ meant overcoming with Christ just as the seven churches had been called to do.

The second section of Revelation in which *The Bridegroom's Messenger* focused on in reference to suffering and theodicy is Revelation 20-22.⁸⁶ There is no overemphasizing these texts and their importance to the early Pentecostals' understanding of suffering and God's divine

⁸⁴ *TBM* 7.150 (February 15, 1914), p. 1.

⁸⁵ *TBM* 4.80 (February 15, 1911), p. 4.

⁸⁶ For examples of places where Revelation 20-22 is considered, see *TBM* 1.15 (June 1, 1908), p. 1; *TBM* 1.16 (June 15, 1908), p. 1; *TBM* 3.50 (November 15, 1909), p. 1; *TBM* 3.61 (May 1, 1910), p. 1; *TBM* 4.75 (December 1, 1910), p. 3; *TBM* 4.94 (September 15, 1911), p. 1; *TBM* 5.97 (November 1, 1911), p. 3; *TBM* 5.101 (January 1, 1912), p. 1; *TBM* 6.132 (May 1, 1913), p. 1; *TBM* 6.139 (September 1, 1913), p. 1; *TBM* 7.151 (March 1, 1914), p. 4; *TBM* 7.154 (May 1, 1914), p. 1; *TBM* 8.164 (November 1, 1914), p. 1; *TBM* 8.166 (January 1, 1915), p. 4; *TBM* 8.167 (February 1, 1915), p. 1; *TBM* 8.169 (April 1, 1915), p. 1; *TBM* 8.170 (May 1, 1915), p. 1; *TBM* 8.175 (October 1, 1915), p. 4; *TBM* 9.179 (February 1, 1916), p. 4; *TBM* 11.204 (June, 1918), p. 1; *TBM* 12.214 (June, 1919), p. 1; *TBM* 13.218 (November-December, 1919), p. 1.

justice. Not only do they appear often, but they also frequently appear randomly, without context, as a means of exhortation and way of nudging readers to remain hopeful in suffering because of the nearness of Christ's return.⁸⁷ *The Bridegroom's Messenger* taught that Christ would return and they, as part of the overcomers of Revelation 2-3, would go on to experience God's divine justice in the age to come when the source of their persecution, Satan, would be bound. Editor Elizabeth Sexton wrote: 'And He [Satan] sees the overcomers, which is the Bride of Christ, arrayed in linen, pure and white, sitting in His throne, Rev. 3:21, and inheriting all things, Rev. 21:7. Hallelujah! "I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."'”⁸⁸ This coming eschatological justice was expounded in a reading of Revelation 21 that explains the various precious stones in the New Jerusalem (21.19-20). These precious stones 'tell the story of redemption' and explain everything from the Lord's suffering to his resurrection, second coming, destruction of enemies, and the setting up of his kingdom in which overcomers reign with him forever.⁸⁹ This imagery portrayed Christ's victory over suffering and was intended to give readers hope of the same. While there are many references to Revelation 20-22 in *The Bridegroom's Messenger*, an article entitled 'Comfort One Another', written by editor Elizabeth Sexton, references Revelation 21-22 three times (Rev. 22.3; Rev. 21.5; Rev. 22.7) and sums up how *The Bridegroom's Messenger* talks about God's coming eschatological justice in light of these chapters:

All the ills that have fallen to us because of the curse of sin will be healed, including all manner of sickness and death, 'And there shall be no more curse' (Rev. 22:3). 'And He that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And He said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful' (Rev. 21:5). And so the last promise in the New Testament Scripture is also of His coming, 'Surely, I come quickly'. This is the glad announcement from His own lips. The blessed and glorified Son of God is coming to receive those who belong to Him, His elect who are waiting and longing for His return ... 'Behold, I come quickly: blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book.' (Rev. 22:7.)⁹⁰

Aside from the two aforementioned sections of Revelation, *The Bridegroom's Messenger* offers significant insight on the fifth seal in Rev. 6.9-11 that adds to how Revelation was used in light of the suffering souls under the altar. *The Bridegroom's Messenger* taught that these souls are individuals who are not prepared for the rapture and suffer martyrdom for testifying of Christ in

⁸⁷ For examples, see *TBM* 4.75 (December 1, 1910), p. 3; *TBM* 8.164 (November 1, 1914), p. 1; *TBM* 8.164 (November 1, 1914), p. 1; *TBM* 8.169 (April 1, 1915), p. 1; 13.218 (November-December 1919), p. 1.

⁸⁸ *TBM* 3.50 (November 15, 1909), p. 1 (bracket mine).

⁸⁹ *TBM* 5.101 (January 1, 1912), p. 1.

⁹⁰ *TBM* 6.132 (May 1, 1913), p. 1.

the coming tribulation that is to follow the rapture. In addressing their plea for justice, *The Bridegroom's Messenger* says, 'It was not that they wanted revenge, as poor weak mortals sometimes do, but they realized that the day of vengeance had come, and that they day of final deliverance and glory would not come till the time of vengeance was fulfilled, so they longed to see it accomplished, and perhaps could hardly understand why it was not hastened on'.⁹¹ Hence, the cry of the martyrs reveals a longing for God to respond to their suffering with his eschatological justice.

Summary

The Bridegroom's Messenger is deeply concerned with suffering – both human suffering (war, famine, pandemic, natural disasters, orphaned children, sickness, demon oppression) and especially Christian suffering (persecution). It also references the Book of Revelation in light of suffering and theodicy an abundance of times. In all of these references. *The Bridegrooms' Messenger* never seeks to give theoretical reasons for *why* there is human suffering beyond the fall of humankind and the presence of sin in the world. On the one hand, it takes an applied approach to suffering and posits a practical theodicy in that early Pentecostals are portrayed as co-laborers with God, aiding him to bring relief to suffering humanity. On the other hand, as far as theodicy is concerned with God's eschatological justice in light of suffering, *The Bridegroom's Messenger* reveals contours of theodicy around two main sections of Revelation: (1) the messages of the seven churches in Revelation 2-3 and (2) the coming of Christ and the new heaven and new earth in Revelation 20-22. The messages of the seven churches exhort early Pentecostals to be 'overcomers' in the face of their suffering. The scenes of the coming kingdom of God, where suffering comes to an end, offers early Pentecostals hope to endure. *The Bridegroom's Messenger* also uses the suffering of the souls under the altar in Rev. 6.9-11 to demonstrate that the people of God's cry for justice is legitimate, that God hears these prayers, that the time of ultimate divine justice will be fulfilled, and this justice will satisfy the longing of the sufferer.

⁹¹ *TBM* 10.188 (November 1, 1916), p. 4. See also, *TBM* 6.126 (February 1, 1913), p. 4.

The Church of God Evangel

In March 1910, the Church of God (Cleveland, TN) began publishing its weekly denominational journal, *The Evening Light and Church of God Evangel*⁹² under the leadership of A.J. Tomlinson, who was the first editor of the publication. Eventually it became just *The Church of God Evangel* (COGE) in 1911. Initially it had 125 subscribers⁹³ and cost 3 cents per copy, 25 cents for a six-month subscription, and 50 cents for an annual subscription.⁹⁴ It remains the official denominational publication of the COG.⁹⁵ Its articles contain denominational teaching and exhortation, appeals to missionary work and support, addresses from the general overseer and news from the annual assembly,⁹⁶ field reports, prayer requests and testimonies, advertisements for Pentecostal literature and tracts, and biblical/pastoral responses to world news.

The Church of God Evangel makes frequent references to various forms of suffering with relevance to the-day-and-age in which the early Pentecostals lived.⁹⁷ In doing so, *The Church of*

⁹² The name ‘Evening Light’ was based on Zech. 14.7, ‘at evening time it shall be light’. This verse served as ‘a common explanation for the emergence of the Pentecostal movement’. See D.C. Roebuck, ‘The Evening Light and Church of God Evangel’, <https://www.evangelmagazine.com/2017/04/about-us/> (accessed January 9, 2022).

⁹³ See D.C. Roebuck, ‘The Evening Light and Church of God Evangel’.

⁹⁴ See *COGE* 1.1 (March 1, 1910), p. 4.

⁹⁵ At the time of writing it is issued six times per year.

⁹⁶ *COGE* 7.47 (November 18, 1916), p. 1; *COGE* 10.45 (November 15, 1919), p. 1.

⁹⁷ For explicit mentions to various forms of suffering in *The Church of God Evangel*, see *COGE* 1.1 (March 1, 1910), pp. 2, 8; *COGE* 1.3 (April 1, 1910), pp. 1, 4, 7; *COGE* 1.4 (April 15, 1910), pp. 3, 7; *COGE* 1.6 (May 15, 1910), pp. 4, 8; *COGE* 1.7 (June 1, 1910), p. 2; *COGE* 1.9 (July 1, 1910), pp. 5-6; *COGE* 1.10 (July 15, 1910), pp. 1, 4; *COGE* 1.11 (August 1, 1910), p. 3; *COGE* 1.12 (August 15, 1910), p. 1; *COGE* 1.16 (October 15, 1910), p. 6; *COGE* 1.17 (November 1, 1910), p. 7; *COGE* 1.18 (November 15, 1910), p. 1; *COGE* 1.20 (December 15, 1910), p. 5; *COGE* 5.1 (January 3, 1914), pp. 4, 6; *COGE* 5.5 (January 31, 1914), p. 2; *COGE* 5.6 (February 7, 1914), pp. 1-2; *COGE* 5.7 (February 14, 1914), p. 2; *COGE* 5.8 (February 21, 1914), pp. 6-7; *COGE* 5.9 (February 28, 1914), pp. 6, 8; *COGE* 5.10 (March 7, 1914), pp. 5-6; *COGE* (March 14, 1914), pp. 6, 8; *COGE* 5.13 (March 28, 1914), p. 8; *COGE* 5.14 (April 4, 1914), p. 1; *COGE* 5.16 (April 18, 1914), p. 4; *COGE* 5.19 (May 9, 1914), pp. 6-8; *COGE* 5.25 (June 20, 1914), p. 6; *COGE* 5.26 (June 27, 1914), p. 5; *COGE* 5.27 (July 4, 1914), pp. 2, 5-7; *COGE* 5.28 (July 11, 1914), pp. 1-2, 8; *COGE* 5.30 (July 25, 1914), p. 2; *COGE* 5.32 (August 8, 1914), p. 2; *COGE* 5.33 (August 15, 1914), pp. 2, 6-8; *COGE* 5.34 (August 22, 1914), p. 6; *COGE* 5.36 (September 5, 1914), pp. 1, 6; *COGE* 5.38 (September 19, 1914), p. 6; *COGE* 5.39 (September 26, 1914), p. 6; *COGE* 5.40 (October 4, 1914), p. 3; *COGE* 5.41 (October 10, 1914), p. 6; *COGE* 5.43 (October 24, 1914), p. 6; *COGE* 5.47 (November 28, 1914), pp. 6-7; *COGE* 5.49 (December 12, 1914), pp. 1, 4; *COGE* 5.50 (December 19, 1914), p. 3; *COGE* 5.51 (December 26, 1914), p. 3; *COGE* 6.1 (January 2, 1915), p. 3; *COGE* 6.2 (January 9, 1915), p. 2; *COGE* 6.4 (January 23, 1915), p. 2; *COGE* 6.5 (January 30, 1915), pp. 2-3; *COGE* 6.6 (February 6, 1915), p. 3; *COGE* 6.7 (February 13, 1915), pp. 2-3; *COGE* 6.8 (February 20, 1915), pp. 1, 3; *COGE* 6.9 (February 27, 1915), p. 3; *COGE* 6.10 (March 6, 1915), p. 4; *COGE* 6.11 (March 13, 1915), p. 4; *COGE* 6.12 (March 20, 1915), p. 4; *COGE* 6.13 (March 27, 1915), p. 1; *COGE* 6.15 (April 10, 1915), p. 3; *COGE* 6.17 (April 24, 1915), pp. 2-4; *COGE* 6.18 (May 1, 1915), pp. 2-3; *COGE* 6.19 (May 8, 1915), p. 2; *COGE* 6.20 (May 15, 1915), p. 1, 3; *COGE* 6.21 (May 22, 1915), p. 2; *COGE* 6.23 (June 5, 1915), pp. 1-2; *COGE* 6.24 (June 12, 1915), p. 3; *COGE* 6.26 (June 26, 1915), p. 4; *COGE* 6.27 (July 3, 1915), p. 3; *COGE* 6.28 (July 10, 1915), p. 3; *COGE* 6.29 (July 17, 1915), pp. 2-4; *COGE* 6.30 (July 24, 1915), p. 2; *COGE* 6.31 (July 31, 1915), p. 3; *COGE* 6.33 (August 14, 1915), p. 3; *COGE* 6.35 (August 28, 1915), pp. 2-4; *COGE* 6.36 (September 4, 1915), p. 2; *COGE* 6.38 (September 18, 1915), pp. 2, 4; *COGE* 6.42 (October 16, 1915), p. 4; *COGE* 6.43 (October 23, 1915), p. 2; *COGE* 6.44 (October 30, 1915), p. 2; *COGE* 6.47 (November 20, 1915), p. 1; *COGE*

6.49 (December 4, 1915), p. 2; *COGE* 6.50 (December 11, 1915), p. 1; *COGE* 6.52 (December 25, 1915), p. 2; *COGE* 7.1 (January 1, 1916), p. 1; *COGE* 7.2 (January 8, 1916), pp. 2, 4; *COGE* (January 15, 1916), p. 2; *COGE* (January 22, 1916), pp. 2, 4; *COGE* 7.5 (January 29, 1916), p. 4; *COGE* 7.6 (February 5, 1916), p. 3; *COGE* 7.7 (February 12, 1916), p. 3; *COGE* 7.8 (February 19, 1916), p. 3; *COGE* 7.10 (March 4, 1916), pp. 1-2; *COGE* 7.11 (March 11, 1916), p. 1; *COGE* 7.12 (March 18, 1916), p. 2; *COGE* 7.13 (March 25, 1916), pp. 1, 3-4; *COGE* 7.14 (April 1, 1916), pp. 2, 4; *COGE* 7.15 (April 8, 1916), p. 2; *COGE* 7.16 (April 15, 1916), pp. 3-4; *COGE* 7.18 (April 29, 1916), p. 3; *COGE* 7.20 (May 13, 1916), p. 2; *COGE* 7.23 (June 3, 1916), p. 1; *COGE* 7.24 (June 10, 1916), p. 3; *COGE* 7.25 (June 17, 1916), p. 3; *COGE* 7.27 (July 1, 1917), p. 3; *COGE* 7.29 (July 15, 1916), p. 3; *COGE* 7.30 (July 22, 1916), p. 1; *COGE* 7.31 (July 29, 1916), p. 3; *COGE* 7.32 (August 3, 1916), pp. 2, 4; *COGE* 7.35 (August 26, 1916), pp. 3-4; *COGE* 7.38 (September 16, 1916), p. 3; *COGE* 7.40 (September 20, 1916), p. 3; *COGE* 7.41 (October 4, 1916), pp. 2-3; *COGE* 7.43 (October 21, 1916), pp. 1, 4; *COGE* 7.44 (October 28, 1916), p. 4; *COGE* 7.46 (November 11, 1916), pp. 2-3; *COGE* 7.51 (December 16, 1916), p. 2; *COGE* 8.1 (January 6, 1917), p. 1; *COGE* 8.2 (January 13, 1917), pp. 3-4; *COGE* 8.6 (February 10, 1917), p. 1; *COGE* 8.7 (February 17, 1917), p. 4; *COGE* 8.8 (February 24, 1917), pp. 1-2; *COGE* 8.9 (March 3, 1917), pp. 2-3; *COGE* 8.10 (March 10, 1917), p. 3; *COGE* 8.13 (March 31, 1917), pp. 2-3; *COGE* 8.14 (April 14, 1917), p. 4; *COGE* 8.15 (April 22, 1917), p. 3; *COGE* 8.16 (April 28, 1917), p. 4; *COGE* 8.17 (May 5, 1917), p. 2; *COGE* 5.26 (May 26, 1917), p. 4; *COGE* 8.21 (June 2, 1917), p. 2; *COGE* 8.24 (June 23, 1917), pp. 2, 4; *COGE* 8.25 (June 30, 1917), p. 2; *COGE* 8.26 (July 7, 1917), p. 1; *COGE* 8.27 (July 14, 1917), p. 4; *COGE* 8.29 (July 28, 1917), pp. 2-3; *COGE* 8.30 (August 4, 1917), p. 1; *COGE* 8.31 (August 11, 1917), p. 4; *COGE* 8.36 (September 15, 1917), p. 3; *COGE* 8.37 (September 22, 1917), p. 2; *COGE* 8.30 (October 6, 1917), p. 3; *COGE* (October 20, 1917), p. 3; *COGE* 8.42 (October 27, 1917), p. 2; *COGE* 8.44 (November 10, 1917), p. 2; *COGE* 8.45 (November 17, 1917), pp. 1, 3; *COGE* 8.46 (November 24, 1917), p. 4; *COGE* 8.49 (December 15, 1917), p. 4; *COGE* 8.51 (December 29, 1917), p. 4; *COGE* 9.1 (January 1, 1918), p. 3; *COGE* 9.2 (January 12, 1918), pp. 3-4; *COGE* 9.3 (January 19, 1918), pp. 2-3; *COGE* 9.5 (February 2, 1918), p. 1; *COGE* (February 9, 1918), pp. 3-4; *COGE* 9.7 (February 16, 1918), p. 2; *COGE* 9.8 (February 23, 1918), p. 1; *COGE* 9.9 (March 2, 1918), p. 3; *COGE* 9.10 (March 9, 1918), pp. 2-4; *COGE* 9.11 (March 16, 1918); *COGE* 9.12 (March 23, 1918), p. 4; *COGE* 9.13 (March 30, 1918), pp. 1, 3-4; *COGE* 9.14 (April 6, 1918), p. 4; *COGE* 4.20 (April 20, 1918), pp. 1, 3-4; *COGE* 9.17 (April 27, 1918), pp. 2, 4; *COGE* 9.18 (May 4, 1918), pp. 1-2, 4; *COGE* 9.19 (May 11, 1918), pp. 2-3; *COGE* 9.20 (May 18, 1918), p. 4; *COGE* 9.22 (June 1, 1918), p. 4; *COGE* 9.23 (June 8, 1918), p. 4; *COGE* 9.24 (June 15, 1918), pp. 1, 3-4; *COGE* 9.25 (June 22, 1918), p. 4; *COGE* 9.26 (June 29, 1918), p. 2; *COGE* 9.27 (July 6, 1918), p. 3; *COGE* 9.28 (July 13, 1918), pp. 1, 4; *COGE* 9.29 (July 20, 1918), pp. 3-4; *COGE* (July 27, 1918), pp. 2, 4; *COGE* 9.31 (August 3, 1918), pp. 1-4; *COGE* 9.32 (August 10, 1918), pp. 1-2, 4; *COGE* 9.33 (August 17, 1918), p. 4; *COGE* 9.34 (August 24, 1918), p. 4; *COGE* 9.35 (August 31, 1918), pp. 1, 4; *COGE* 9.36 (September 7, 1918), pp. 3-4; *COGE* (September 14, 1918), pp. 1, 3-4; *COGE* (September 21, 1918), pp. 1-2, 4; *COGE* 9.39 (September 28, 1918), pp. 1-4; *COGE* 9.40 (October 5, 1918), pp. 3-4; *COGE* 9.41 (October 12, 1918), pp. 2-4; *COGE* 9.42 (October 19, 2018), pp. 3-4; *COGE* 9.45 (November 9, 1918), pp. 1-2, 4; *COGE* 9.46 (November 16, 1918), p. 4; *COGE* 9.47 (November 23, 1918), pp. 3-4; *COGE* 9.48 (November 30, 1918), pp. 1, 4; *COGE* 9.49 (December 7, 1918), pp. 2, 4; *COGE* 9.50 (December 14, 1918), p. 4; *COGE* 9.51 (December 21, 1918), pp. 2-3; *COGE* (January 4, 1919), pp. 2-3; *COGE* 10.2 (January 11, 1919), pp. 1, 3; *COGE* 10.4 (January 25, 1919), pp. 1-3; *COGE* 10.5 (February 1, 1919), pp. 1, 3-4; *COGE* 10.6 (February 8, 1919), pp. 3-4; *COGE* (February 15, 1919), pp. 1, 4; *COGE* 10.8 (February 22, 1919), p. 4; *COGE* 10.9 (March 1, 1919), pp. 3-4; *COGE* 10.10 (March 8, 1919), p. 3; *COGE* 10.11 (March 15, 1919), pp. 2, 4; *COGE* 10.12 (March 22, 1919), pp. 1-2; *COGE* 10.15 (April 12, 1919), pp. 3-4; *COGE* 10.16 (April 19, 1919), pp. 1, 4; *COGE* 10.17 (April 26, 1919), pp. 1, 3-4; *COGE* 10.20 (May 17, 1919), pp. 3-4; *COGE* 10.21 (May 24, 1919), p. 4; *COGE* 10.22 (May 31, 1919), pp. 2-4; *COGE* 10.23 (June 7, 1919), pp. 1, 3-4; *COGE* 10.25 (June 21, 1919), p. 2; *COGE* 10.26 (June 28, 1919), pp. 1-2; *COGE* 10.27 (July 5, 1919), p. 2; *COGE* 10.29 (July 19, 1919), pp. 1-4; *COGE* 10.30 (July 26, 1919), pp. 1, 4; *COGE* 10.31 (August 2, 1919), p. 4; *COGE* 10.32 (August 9, 1919), pp. 1-2; *COGE* 10.33 (August 16, 1919), pp. 1, 4; *COGE* 10.34 (August 23, 1919), pp. 1, 4; *COGE* 10.35 (August 30, 1919), pp. 2, 4; *COGE* 10.36 (September 6, 1919), p. 4; *COGE* 10.37 (September 13, 1919), pp. 2, 4; *COGE* 10.38 (September 20, 1919), p. 2; *COGE* 10.40 (October 4, 1919), pp. 1, 3-4; *COGE* 10.41 (October 11, 1919), p. 4; *COGE* 10.42 (October 18, 1919), p. 1; *COGE* 10.43 (October 25, 1919), p. 3; *COGE* 10.44 (November 8, 1919), p. 4; *COGE* 10.46 (November 22, 1919), pp. 1, 4; *COGE* 10.47 (November 29, 1919), pp. 1, 4; *COGE* 10.49 (December 13, 1919), pp. 2, 4; *COGE* 10.50 (December 20, 1919), p. 4; *COGE* 10.51 (December 27, 1919), p. 4.

God Evangel considers the question of God's eschatological justice in spite of the persecution the early Pentecostals endured, as well as the suffering of the world due to WWI⁹⁸ and the Spanish flu.⁹⁹ Like *The Apostolic Faith* and *The Bridegroom's Messenger*, *The Church of God Evangel* considered Revelation a key text in preaching and teaching, as is apparent by its frequent references to it.¹⁰⁰ There are significant places wherein the publication used Revelation to consider suffering (particularly Christian suffering) and theodicy.¹⁰¹

Pentecostals and Suffering and Theodicy

The Church of God Evangel offers unique insights into understanding how early Pentecostals thought about suffering and theodicy. First, it uses the term 'suffering' to refer to different forms of suffering. Early Pentecostals considered all sickness, such as the Spanish flu, suffering. It considered war, particularly WWI, suffering. Persecution for the gospel was also considered suffering (Christian suffering). Christian suffering was the suffering they experienced the most, living as Pentecostals.¹⁰²

Secondly, Pentecostals believed humanity was suffering. They were aware of the world's sorrow, compassionate and empathetic toward it, and desired to respond practically. In the inaugural issue of the publication, a pastor by the name of W.F. Bryant published an article about his pastoral work in the mountains of Tennessee wherein he served those who were suffering financial distress and did not have warm clothes for the winter. He asks the readers for their

⁹⁸ For mentions of WWI, see *COGE* 6.14 (April 3, 1915), p. 2; *COGE* 8.8 (February 24, 1917), pp. 1; *COGE* 8.13 (March 31, 1917), pp. 1, 3; *COGE* 8.10 (October 13, 1917), pp. 1-2.

⁹⁹ For mentions of the Spanish Flu, see *COGE* 9.49 (December 7, 1918), p. 2; *COGE* 10.1 (January 4, 1919), pp. 2-3; *COGE* 10.6 (February 8, 1919), pp. 3-4; *COGE* 10.11 (March 15, 1919), pp. 2-3.

¹⁰⁰ For issues between 1907-1918 that contain explicit references and quotations of Revelation, see Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment*, pp. 133-34, n. 174. Not included are references and quotations of Revelation in the 1919 issues. These are *COGE* 10.2 (January 11, 1919), p. 1; *COGE* 10.3 (January 18, 1919), p. 4; *COGE* 10.4 (January 25, 1919), p. 2; *COGE* 10.6 (February 8, 1919), p. 3; *COGE* 10.7 (February 15, 1919), p. 1; *COGE* (February 22, 1919), p. 3; *COGE* 10.10 (March 8, 1919), p. 2; *COGE* 10.12 (March 22, 1919), pp. 1, 3; *COGE* 10.16 (April 19, 1919), p. 1; *COGE* (May 8, 1919), pp. 2-3; *COGE* 10.21 (May 24, 1919), pp. 2-4; *COGE* 10.24 (June 14, 1919), p. 2; *COGE* (July 12, 1919), pp. 1, 3; *COGE* 10.29 (July 19, 1919), p. 2; *COGE* 10.32 (August 9, 1919), p. 1; *COGE* 10.33 (August 16, 1919), pp. 1, 3; *COGE* 10.34 (August 28, 1919), pp. 1, 4; *COGE* 10.25 (August 30, 1919), p. 3; *COGE* 10.36 (September 6, 1919), p. 3; *COGE* 10.37 (September 13, 1919), p. 2; *COGE* 10.39 (September 27, 1919), p. 4; *COGE* 10.40 (October 4, 1919), p. 4; *COGE* 10.41 (October 11, 1919), pp. 3-4; *COGE* 10.44 (November 8, 1919), p. 1; *COGE* 10.46 (November 22, 1919), p. 2; *COGE* 10.48 (December 6, 1919), p. 4; *COGE* 10.49 (December 13, 1919), p. 2; *COGE* 10.50 (December 20, 1919), p. 4.

¹⁰¹ Though the *Church of God Evangel* never uses the term 'theodicy' it does discuss how God vindicates his people in light of the suffering and evil they have endured.

¹⁰² An example of the suffering Pentecostals experienced in their world is found in an article entitled 'That Lonely Feeling'. The article describes the lonely feeling Spirit filled believers suffered in this world. The article explains that this lonely feeling is the Holy Spirit working within them to make them more like Christ who, himself, suffered loneliness. See *COGE* 5.33 (August 15, 1914), pp. 1-2.

prayers and closes the letter with the salutation, ‘Yours for the salvation of lost souls and suffering humanity, W.F. Bryant’.¹⁰³ This attitude is fitting for the inaugural issue, as it serves as a preview for the care and concern that early Pentecostals would show toward suffering humanity in the issues which followed.

Third, *The Church of God Evangel* admits that suffering is something that cannot be fully explained in this life. Early Pentecostals not only accepted suffering as a mystery, but they also believed that suffering remained a mystery to the biblical writers. It was their conviction that the apostles did not muse over suffering or question God about it. They accepted it for what it was. For these early Pentecostals, it seems the NT was not a theodicy in the general, theoretical sense. This is suggested in an article by Sam C. Perry entitled ‘What is the Use of Speaking in Tongues? If They be of God, Why Reject Them?’ In discussing various hard to explain things within the biblical text, Perry mentions suffering:

Abraham did not question but went to the task of obedience. So with all of God’s servants, Joseph, Daniel and the Hebrew children and others. They were doubtless puzzled over the providence that brought such inconveniences and suffering, but they spent no time questioning over it. Peter, James, and John no doubt could have asked many questions as to their sufferings and disappointments while in the service of the Lord. But they did not.¹⁰⁴

Fourth, these early Pentecostals did not see suffering as something to resent. An article that appeared in 1919 entitled ‘Suffering a Blessing’ says that ‘anything that is for our best interest should be welcomed’. The article speaks of all forms of suffering and encourages believers to endure the suffering, without complaint and with joy, and to continue to do the work of the ministry. This is possible because God gives grace to sufferers. It can be beneficial:¹⁰⁵

Let the world see how a man or a woman of God can suffer and never groan ... the suffering may be caused from disease of sickness. It may be caused by mob violence, or hunger, or shortage of clothing, or travelling on foot to carry the great Gospel message across the mountains ... No matter what the cause, it must be endured, and taken joyfully ... Do not be weaklings and tell every body about your pains, and how you are suffering. Bear up under it and look sweet and be happy and cheerful in the midst of it. God has the grace if you will only take it and appropriate it to your use ... Silently, patiently endure and work with a tremendous will to plant the Church in every nation!¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ *COGE* 1.1 (March 1, 1910), p. 4.

¹⁰⁴ *COGE* 9.16 (April 20, 1918), p. 3.

¹⁰⁵ One might argue that to suggest suffering is beneficial to a person is a theodicy in itself. It is true that early Pentecostals did, at times, suggest suffering could benefit one’s soul. However, I do not classify such suggestions as an attempt at theodicy because, in offering these suggestions, Pentecostals were not trying to rationalize the problem of evil and suffering to make sense of it, as soul-making theodicy does.

¹⁰⁶ *COGE* 10.4 (January 25, 1919), pp. 1-2.

Finally, these early Pentecostals trusted in the Lord's eschatological coming to answer the mystery of suffering and to vindicate the sorrow caused by it:

All that we could not understand in these tragic days – the sin, the sorrow, the suffering, the indifference of Nature to the agony of men – shall be interpreted. When Jesus comes there will be a surprising revelation of the mercy that was hidden in the sorrows of the night. Only when we stand with Him in heaven shall we fully know the vastness of the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Expect then, beloved, the coming of the Lord.¹⁰⁷

Suffering and Theodicy in Revelation

While the Book of Revelation is cited frequently in *The Church of God Evangel*, it is not widely cited in relation to suffering and theodicy. Yet, it is significant when the publication does discuss matters of suffering (particularly Christian suffering) and theodicy in Revelation. The texts used and explained exhort readers to endure their suffering and to anticipate the coming of the Lord, which was vindication for their suffering.

The first passage that *The Church of God Evangel* uses is the messages to the seven churches (Revelation 2-3).¹⁰⁸ These messages are expounded upon to encourage readers to endure their trials and afflictions in this life, as well as to prompt them to remain obedient amidst their suffering. In an article entitled 'Be Thou Faithful Unto Death', Sam G. Perry describes the true saints as being those who have suffered for Christ and those who remain faithful to him in the process. Perry quotes Rev. 2.10:

God's faithful ones are in for the length of this war ... They have gone too far, have suffered too much to turn back now ... New difficulties will arise, yea are arising along the journey, but we have overcome in the past and we can yet ... We are willing to be burden bearers, toilers, or any thing. We will sacrifice, and suffer for Him; we will bear the cross. Yes we will go all the way to stand among the faithful in that day is our aim at any cost.¹⁰⁹

An article entitled 'The Trying Time Has Surely Come' shares the same sentiment. It uses Rev. 3.10 to suggest that 'there is a promise to the faithful in this time of dire distress and need'.¹¹⁰ This was not just a promise to the church at Philadelphia, but something God's faithful could expect in their suffering.

The next text that *The Church of God Evangel* utilizes to consider suffering and theodicy is Revelation 17.¹¹¹ The way this text gets expounded shows that the early Pentecostals believed

¹⁰⁷ *COGE* 10.9 (March 1, 1919), p. 3.

¹⁰⁸ For examples of Revelation 2-3, see *COGE* 5.34 (August 22, 1914), p. 1; *COGE* 6.50 (December 11, 1915), p. 1; *COGE* 7.11 (March 11, 1916), p. 1; *COGE* 9.2 (January 12, 1916), p. 3.

¹⁰⁹ *COGE* 9.2 (January 12, 1918), p. 3.

¹¹⁰ *COGE* 10.33 (August 16, 1919), p. 1.

¹¹¹ *COGE* 9.2 (January 12, 1918), p. 3.

that their suffering counted for something. It was not just suffering for suffering's sake. Rather, it would result in honor from the Lord. An article 'The Called and Chosen' expounds on Rev. 17.14 and shows, 'It is the called, and chosen, and faithful that will be honored with the great privilege of being with the Lord of lords and King of kings when He shall overcome the beast and kings of the earth when they make war against Him'.¹¹²

The final text that *The Church of God Evangel* makes use of is Revelation 19. This chapter contributed to the early Pentecostals' thinking about WWI. In one article, entitled 'Is this Armageddon?', Sam C. Perry says that WWI is not Armageddon. However, it would go towards shaping Armageddon. Perry's article reveals high eschatological tensions among early Pentecostals. They fully anticipated the events of their day to culminate eventually in the coming of Christ, at which point their suffering would begin to be vindicated.¹¹³ The way Pentecostals interpreted Revelation 19 shows that they believed that the future coming of the Lord was cause for their suffering. 'And, as the bride or "wife hath made herself ready" (Rev. 19:7) at a certain time, it proves that there has been some time or preparation ... it could hardly be expected that He would wed a wife that had never been disciplined and trained. Jesus not only learned "obedience by the things which he suffered," but He was also brought to perfection through suffering.'¹¹⁴ This suffering would be vindicated at the marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev. 19.9). A poem that was published in *The Church of God Evangel* in 1919, entitled 'The Refiner's Fire',¹¹⁵ conveys this:

He sat by a furnace of seven-fold heat,
As he watched by the precious ore,
And closer He bent with a searching gaze
As heated it more and more.

He knew He had ore that could stand the test
And wanted the finest gold,
To mold as a crown for the King to wear,
Set with gems of price untold.

So He laid our gold in the burning fire,

¹¹² *COGE* 9.33 (August 31, 1918), p. 1.

¹¹³ *COGE* 6.3 (January 16, 1915), p. 3. See the article entitled 'Christ is Coming' in *COGE* 6.29 (July 17, 1915), p. 1. In light of Christ's return, *COGE* 8.16 (April 28, 1917), p. 1, summoned its readers to be alert and prepared, based on Revelation 19.7.

¹¹⁴ *COGE* 8.30 (August 4, 1917), p. 1. See also *COGE* 8.40 (October 13, 1917), p. 1, where it is suggested that early Pentecostals were in the day of preparation.

Tho' we fain would say Him, 'Nay';
And watched the dross that had not seen,
As it melted and passd [*sic*] away.

And the gold grew brighter and yet more bright,
But our eyes were dim with tears
We saw but the fire – not the Master's hand,
And questioned with anxious fears.

Yet our gold shone out with a richer glow
As it mirrored a Form above.
That bent o'er the fire, tho' unseen by us,
With a look of ineffable love.

Can we think it pleases His loving heart
To cause us a moment's pain?
Ah, no! but he sees thro' the present cross
The bliss of eternal gain.

So He waited there with a watchful eye,
With a love that is strong and sure;
And His gold did not suffer a bit more heat
Than was needed to make it pure¹¹⁶

Summary

The Church of God Evangel offers five important insights into how early Pentecostals understood suffering and theodicy: (1) Pentecostals differentiated between various forms of suffering; (2) Pentecostals believed humanity was suffering and they demonstrated empathy toward such; (3) Pentecostals did not believe suffering could be fully explained in this life and supposed that the biblical writers did not attempt to explain their own suffering theoretically; (4) Pentecostals did not think suffering was something to resent, but could even be for the best interest of the sufferer; and (5) Pentecostals believed that the Lord's eschatological coming was the answer to the mystery of suffering, being the vindication for it. *The Church of God Evangel* also uses Revelation as a text in thinking about suffering (particularly Christian suffering) and theodicy. It focuses on three key portions of Revelation. First, is the message to the seven churches (Revelation 2-3). This text is used to encourage readers in their trials and sufferings and prompt them to remain faithful to Christ. Second, is Revelation 17. This text is used to show the Pentecostals' suffering was meaningful and would result in honor from the Lord. Finally, is Revelation 19. This text is used to reveal how Revelation shaped the way early Pentecostals

¹¹⁶ *COGE* 10.7 (February 15, 1919), p. 1.

thought about WWI, their own suffering, and their vindication which would be realized at the marriage supper of the Lamb.

The Pentecostal Holiness Advocate and Live Coals/Apostolic Evangel¹¹⁷

From 1904-1907, the Fire-Baptized Holiness Church offered a weekly publication entitled *Live Coals*¹¹⁸ which was edited by J.H. King.¹¹⁹ In 1907, *Live Coals* changed its name to the *Apostolic Evangel*.¹²⁰ In 1917, the Fire-Baptized Holiness Church became part of the Pentecostal Holiness Church (PHC). At the Third General Conference of the Pentecostal Holiness Church, *The Pentecostal Holiness Advocate* commenced. Its first editor was G.F. Taylor, one of the early leaders of the PHC, who remained editor until 1925 and then was replaced by King. Here I will include *Live Coals/Apostolic Evangel* in my exploration of *The Pentecostal Holiness Advocate* because both publications share denominational backgrounds and editors. Moreover, some of the same articles from *The Apostolic Evangel* later appear in *The Pentecostal Holiness Advocate*.

These publications are filled with editorial thoughts, reports from the mission field, personal testimonies, doctrinal teachings, Sunday School lessons, Q&A regarding biblical topics, announcements of upcoming Pentecostal events, and news about the Pentecostal movement. The Book of Revelation¹²¹ plays a key part in informing the early Pentecostals' theology in these

¹¹⁷ In 1976, *The Pentecostal Holiness Advocate* (PHA) underwent a name change and became known as *The International Pentecostal Holiness Advocate* (IPHA). In 1987, the masthead title became just *International Pentecostal Holiness Advocate*. Because I am engaging with it from the years 1917-1919, I will refer to it the way it was known then, *The Pentecostal Holiness Advocate* (PHA).

¹¹⁸ Prior to being called *Live Coals*, it was called *Live Coals of Fire* (1899-1900). *Live Coals of Fire* will not be surveyed here because this reception history is interested in the years of 1906-1919.

¹¹⁹ J.H. King was the first bishop of the Pentecostal Holiness Church (PHC). See J. Campbell, 'King, Joseph Hillery', in S.M. Burgess and E.M. Van Der Mas (eds.), *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), pp. 822-23.

¹²⁰ See *AE* 1.4 (April 3, 1907), p. 3.

¹²¹ For issues of *Live Coals* that contain explicit references and quotations of Revelation from 1906-1907, see *LC* 4.6 (February 7, 1906), p. 4; *LC* 4.19 (May 9, 1906), p. 4; *LC* 5.16 (May 16, 1906), p. 2; *LC* (November 14, 1906) p. 2. For issues of *The Apostolic Evangel* and *The Pentecostal Holiness Advocate* that contain explicit references and quotations of Revelation from 1907-1919, see *AE* 1.1 (February 15, 1909), p. 6; *AE* 1.7 (May 15, 1907), pp. 1; *AE* 1.8 (June 1, 1909), pp. 2, 3, 8; *AE* 1.13 (August 15, 1909), pp. 7-8; *AE* 1.18 (November 1, 1909), p. 1; *AE* 2.12 (August 1, 1910), p. 1; *AE* 2.22 (January 1, 1911), p. 1; *AE* 2.24 (February 1, 1911), p. 1; *AE* 3.11 (July 15, 1911), pp. 1, 5, 7; *AE* 3.22 (January 1, 1912), pp. 1-2; *AE* 3.24 (February 1, 1912), pp. 1, 3; *AE* 4.1 (February 15, 1912), pp. 1, 8; *AE* 4.2 (March 1, 1912), p. 1; *AE* 6.9 (June 15, 1915), p. 10; *AE* 9.20 (January 15, 1918), p. 3; *AE* 10.14 (September 15, 1918), p. 5. For issues of *The Pentecostal Holiness Advocate* that contain explicit references and quotations of Revelation from 1917-1918, see Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment*, pp. 147, n. 254. For issues of *The Pentecostal Holiness Advocate* that contain explicit references and quotations of Revelation in 1919, see *PHA* 2.38 (January 16, 1919), pp. 2, 4, 11-13; *PHA* 2.39 (January 23, 1919), p. 3; *PHA* 2.39 (January 30, 1919), p. 8; *PHA* 2.44-45 (March 6-13, 1919), pp. 7-9; *PHA* 2.47 (March 20, 1919), pp. 8-9; *PHA* 2.49 (April 3, 1919), pp. 8-9; *PHA* 2.50 (April 10, 1919), pp. 1, 8-10; *PHA* 2.51 (April 17, 1919), pp. 3, 8-9; *PHA* 3.6 (June 5, 1919), pp. 8-10; *PHA* 3.9 (June 26, 1919), p. 2, 9-10; *PHA* 3.12-13 (July 17-24, 1919), pp. 8-9; *PHA* 3.14 (July 31, 1919), pp. 8-10; *PHA* 3.15 (August 7, 1919), pp. 2, 8-9; *PHA* 3.16-17 (August 14-21, 1919), pp. 8-9, 12; *PHA* 3.18 (August 28,

periodicals, as does the subject of suffering¹²² and, ultimately, theodicy through Christ's eschatological coming.

1919), pp. 3, 15; *PHA* 3.19-20 (September 4-11, 1919), pp. 2-3; *PHA* 3.22 (September 25, 1919), pp. 2, 6, 8, 10; *PHA* 3.23-24 (October 2, 1919), pp. 4, 8-10; *PHA* 3.31-32 (November 27-December 4, 1919), pp. 2, 9, 12.

¹²² For explicit mentions to various forms of suffering in *Live Coal*, see *LC* 4.13 (March 28, 1906), p. 1; *LC* 4.47 (November 28, 1906), p. 3. For explicit references to various forms of suffering in *The Apostolic Evangel*, see *AE* 1.1 (February 15, 1909), pp. 2, 5-8; *AE* 1.7 (May 15, 1909), p. 1; *AE* 1.8 (June 1, 1909), pp. 2-4, 7-8; *AE* 1.9 (June 15, 1909), pp. 1-2; *AE* 1.13 (August 15, 1909), pp. 2-3; *AE* 1.18 (November 1, 1909), p. 1; *AE* 2.4 (April 1, 1910), pp. 2, 4, 8; *AE* 2.12 (August 1, 1910), pp. 2-3; *AE* 2.24 (February 1, 1911), pp. 2, 4; *AE* 3.22 (January 1, 1912), pp. 1-2, 5-8; *AE* 3.24 (February 1, 1912), p. 3; *AE* 4.1 (February 15, 1912), p. 2; *AE* 4.2 (March 1, 1912), pp. 3, 6; *AE* 4.20 (December 1, 1912), pp. 3-5; *AE* 5.2 (March 1, 1913), pp. 2-4, 6; *AE* 5.8 (March 15, 1913), pp. 1, 8; *AE* 5.4 (April 1, 1913), pp. 5, 11, 13-14; *AE* 6.9 (June 15, 1914), pp. 1, 7, 9, 13, 15; *AE* 7.8 (June 1, 1915), p. 14; *AE* 8.29 (September 6, 1916), pp. 5-6; *AE* 9.16 (November 1, 1917), p. 6; *AE* 9.17 (November 15, 1917), pp. 4, 8; *AE* 9.20 (January 15, 1918), pp. 3, 8; *AE* 9.21 (February 1, 1918), p. 7; *AE* 10.2 (March 15, 1918), pp. 6-7; *AE* 10.5 (May 1, 1918), pp. 4, 6; *AE* 10.14 (September 15, 1918), pp. 2, 5, 8, 12; *AE* 10.22 (February 1, 1919), pp. 1, 5; *AE* 11.8 (June 15, 1919), pp. 2-3, 5, 13-14; *AE* 11.9 (July 1, 1919), pp. 9, 11. For explicit references to various forms of suffering in *The Pentecostal Holiness Advocate*, see *PHA* 1.2 (May 10, 1917), pp. 13-15; *PHA* 1.3 (May 17, 1917), pp. 8, 13; *PHA* 1.4 (May 24, 1917), pp. 2-3; *PHA* 1.5 (May 31, 1917), p. 1; *PHA* 1.6 (June 7, 1917), p. 14; *PHA* 1.7 (June 15, 1917), pp. 4, 11; *PHA* 1.8 (June 21, 1917), p. 15; *PHA* 1.9 (June 28, 1917), p. 10; *PHA* 1.10 (July 5, 1917), p. 1; *PHA* 1.11 (July 12, 1917), pp. 3, 6, 15; *PHA* 1.12 (July 19, 1917), pp. 5, 12, 16; *PHA* 1.13 (July 26, 1917), p. 6; *PHA* 1.14 (August 2, 1917), pp. 2, 4, 6; *PHA* 1.16 (August 16, 1917), p. 3; *PHA* 1.17 (August 23, 1917), p. 6; *PHA* 1.21 (September 20, 1917), pp. 3, 7; *PHA* 1.22 (September 27, 1917), p. 3; *PHA* 1.24 (October 11, 1917), p. 14; *PHA* 1.25 (October 18, 1917), pp. 4, 8; *PHA* 1.27 (November 1, 1917), pp. 1, 3; *PHA* 1.28 (November 8, 1917), pp. 5, 7, 15; *PHA* 1.29 (November 15, 1917), pp. 2, 7, 14; *PHA* 1.30 (November 22, 1917), p. 8; *PHA* 1.31 (November 29, 1917), pp. 3, 6; *PHA* 1.32 (December 6, 1917), pp. 2-3, 15; *PHA* 1.33 (December 13, 1917), pp. 2-3, 7, 10; *PHA* 1.34 (December 20, 1917), p. 7; *PHA* 1.35 (December 27, 1917), pp. 8, 12; *PHA* 1.36 (January 3, 1918), p. 8; *PHA* 1.38 (January 17, 1918), pp. 3, 7; *PHA* 1.41 (February 7, 1918), p. 8; *PHA* 1.42 (February 14, 1918), p. 6-7; *PHA* 1.43 (February 21, 1918), p. 10; *PHA* 1.45 (March 7, 1918), pp. 5-6, 16; *PHA* 1.47 (March 21, 1918), p. 7; *PHA* 1.48 (March 28, 1918), pp. 2, 7; *PHA* 1.50 (April 11, 1918), pp. 2, 7; *PHA* 1.51 (April 18, 1918), pp. 4, 12; *PHA* 1.52 (April 25, 1918), pp. 3-4, 10, 13; *PHA* 2.2 (May 9, 1918), pp. 6, 10; *PHA* 5.16 (May 16, 1918), p. 7; *PHA* 2.4 (May 23, 1918), pp. 3, 7; *PHA* 2.5 (May 30, 1918), pp. 4-6, 12; *PHA* 2.6 (June 6, 1918), p. 2; *PHA* 2.7 (June 13, 1918), p. 5; *PHA* 2.8 (June 20, 1918), pp. 5, 12; *PHA* 2.9 (June 27, 1918), pp. 3-4, 12; *PHA* 2.10 (July 4, 1918), p. 3, 7; *PHA* 2.11 (July 11, 1918), pp. 8-10; *PHA* 2.12 (July 18, 1918), p. 12; *PHA* 2.13 (July 25, 1918), pp. 12-13; *PHA* 2.14 (August 1, 1918), p. 13; *PHA* 2.15 (August 8, 1918), p. 12; *PHA* 2.16 (August 15, 1918), p. 7, 16; *PHA* 2.17 (August 22, 1918), pp. 2, 4, 8; *PHA* 2.18 (August 29, 1918), p. 8; *PHA* 2.19 (September 5, 1918), p. 12; *PHA* 2.20 (September 12, 1918), pp. 12-13; *PHA* 2.21 (September 19, 1918), p. 12; *PHA* 2.22 (September 26, 1918), pp. 10, 14; *PHA* 2.23 (October 3, 1918), p. 12; *PHA* 2.28-28 (November 7-14, 1918), p. 14; *PHA* 2.31-32 (November 21-28, 1918), pp. 5, 7; *PHA* 2.32 (December 12, 1918), pp. 5, 13; *PHA* 2.33-34 (December 19-26, 1918), pp. 1, 3, 6, 9-11, 16; *PHA* 2.36-37 (January 2-9, 1919), pp. 2-3; *PHA* 2.38 (January 16, 1919), p. 13; *PHA* 2.39 (January 23, 1919), pp. 2-10; *PHA* 2.40 (February 6, 1919), p. 12; *PHA* 2.42 (February 13, 1919), p. 14; *PHA* 2.43 (February 20, 1919), pp. 2, 12-16; *PHA* 2.44 (February 27, 1919), pp. 5, 15; *PHA* 2.44-45 (March 6-13), p. 15; *PHA* 2.46 (March 20, 1919), pp. 5, 9; *PHA* 2.48 (March 27, 1919), pp. 4-5, 13-14; *PHA* 2.49 (April 3, 1919), p. 11; *PHA* 2.50 (April 10, 1919), p. 12; *PHA* 2.51 (April 17, 1919), pp. 6, 8, 11; *PHA* 2.52 (April 24, 1919), pp. 1, 10; *PHA* 3.1-2 (May 1-8, 1919), pp. 13, 16; *PHA* 3.3 (May 15, 1919), p. 12; *PHA* 3.4-5 (May 22-29, 1919), pp. 11-13; *PHA* 3.6 (June 5, 1919), pp. 11, 14; *PHA* 3.7-8 (June 12-19, 1919), pp. 5, 11-12; *PHA* 3.9 (June 26, 1919), p. 13; *PHA* 3.10 (July 13, 1919), p. 12; *PHA* 3.11 (July 10, 1919), pp. 2, 4; *PHA* 3.14 (July 31, 1919), pp. 1, 11; *PHA* 3.15 (August 7, 1919), pp. 2, 10; *PHA* 3.16-17 (August 14-21), pp. 4-5, 12-13; *PHA* 3.18 (August 28, 1919), pp. 2, 4, 6; *PHA* 3.19-20 (September 4-11, 1919), pp. 5-6, 11; *PHA* 3.21 (September 18, 1919), p. 2; *PHA* 3.22 (September 25, 1919), pp. 8, 13; *PHA* 3.23-24 (October 2-9, 1919), p. 13; *PHA* 3.25-26 (October 16-23, 1919), pp. 12, 15; *PHA* 3.27 (October 30, 1919), pp. 5-7; *PHA* 4.28 (November 6, 1919), p. 7; *PHA* 3.29 (November 13, 1919), pp. 7-9, 10; *PHA* 3.31-32 (November 27-December 4, 1919), pp. 2-3, 12, 14; *PHA* 3.33 (December 11, 1919), pp. 4-6, 9, 14, 16; *PHA* 3.34 (December 18, 1919), pp. 3-4, 12, 15; *PHA* 3.35 (December 25, 1919), pp. 6, 8, 13.

Pentecostals and Suffering and Theodicy

The Pentecostal Holiness Advocate discusses various forms of suffering, such as sickness, mental illness, famine, as well as the effects of WWI¹²³ and the Spanish flu.¹²⁴ In one article entitled ‘Where Suffering is Chronic’, *The Pentecostal Holiness Advocate* points out the breadth and scope of suffering, saying that the suffering of WWI is just ‘a mere drop in the bucket compared with the sacrifice of life and the endless agony endured year after year as a normal condition in many parts of the mission field’.¹²⁵ The only theological explanation that *The Pentecostal Holiness Advocate* offers for suffering is that ‘all sickness and suffering in this world is a result of Adam’s sin’.¹²⁶ In one article, the *Pentecostal Holiness Advocate* takes up an acute examination of suffering, saying, ‘In this editorial we wish to inquire into the cause of trouble’. It decides, ‘There is, of course, only one primary cause of trouble; viz., sin, or the fall of man’.¹²⁷ There are no explanations, philosophical or theological, beyond this. However, it does not appear that *The Pentecostal Holiness Advocate* is interested in offering complex answers for suffering. It is more concerned with portraying how early Pentecostals did gospel work and overcame suffering through following the example of Christ amidst the suffering of their time, caused by the fall of humankind. ‘Life is full of disagreeable incidents, but if we reach out after the infinite power of God, we can soar above them. We have much to learn from Christ before we can know

¹²³ PHA 1.12 (July 19, 1917), p. 5; AE 10.22 (February 1, 1919), p. 1.

¹²⁴ PHA 2.50 (April 10, 1919), p. 12; AE 11.8 (June 15, 1919), p. 1.

¹²⁵ PHA 1.12 (July 19, 1917), p.5-6. This article suggests that 30,000,000 hungry Chinese children cry themselves to sleep every night; 100,000,000 people in India, China, and Africa sleep without shelter every night; and 200,000,000 people go to bed hungry every night. It also acknowledges the suffering women endured for ages in Africa ‘with scant sympathy or help from their white brothers and sisters’.

¹²⁶ PHA 1.8 (June 21, 1918), p. 15.

¹²⁷ PHA 1.25 (October 18, 1917), pp. 4-5. The term ‘trouble’ is synonymous with the way *The Pentecostal Holiness Advocate* uses the term suffering throughout its publications. The author describes ‘trouble’ (suffering):

The mother whose son or daughter goes to the bad is in trouble. The child without father, mother, shelter, or friend is in trouble. The girl with all hopes of the future blighted is in trouble. The tramp with virtue destroyed, friends lost, money gone, with no bread for supper, with no shelter for the night, the future dark, life wasted, knows something of trouble. The drunkard’s wife, the drunkard’s child, with an empty cupboard, with a mean husband and father, with scornful neighbors, with worn shoes, with thin clothing, in an open house, hovering over a few live embers, carries trouble in her breast. The business man, who has tried but failed, his debts hang like massive rocks over his head, the business world is against him, he knows not which way to turn next; but one thing he does know, and that is trouble ... Europe is bathed in the blood of her sons, homes are broken up, loved ones are parted never to meet again, men are suffering untold hardships in the trenches, and trouble reigns everywhere. Some of these same troubles are coming home to us. Mothers are bidding farewell to their boys, wives are parting from their husbands, the flowers of our land are being gathered into the cantonments, and anguish and distress of mind are felt the land over. These things we call trouble ... However, the greatest trouble, and the trouble of all troubles on earth, is troubling over the trouble that never troubles us.

how to endure suffering, and before we can be so that we are impregnable. But no matter what the cost may be, the Lamb that was slain is worthy.’¹²⁸

The Pentecostal Holiness Advocate discusses Christian suffering more frequently than any other form of suffering. This form of suffering is not only considered unavoidable, but it is also considered necessary and preparatory: ‘Yet praise God all this [suffering] leads home and the more we endure for Jesus the brighter will be our crown. Suffering is only an evidence of Sonship and of preparation of future dominion.’¹²⁹ Suffering with Christ is considered necessary because it rids believers of ‘earthly dross’¹³⁰ and prepares believers for their position of glory in heaven.¹³¹ Yet, Christian suffering will end after this life is over.¹³² ‘It will not be long before all the battles of this life will be over, and we will go to the place where there is no more sorrow, no more pain, no more crying ... Sometimes I get to thinking of heaven and how it will be, until I get homesick and want to go.’¹³³ Until this moment, the early Pentecostals would trust in God, despite not having a complex answer to explain suffering. ‘Being fully saved, or wholly sanctified, puts us in such a oneness with Jesus, that whatever we are called upon to do or suffer for Him, we accept it with perfect confidence that it will work out for us the highest purpose of God and our good.’¹³⁴ This simple conclusion was all the theodicy these early Pentecostals needed to follow Christ and join him in the garden of his suffering: ‘Though he lead me through the garden, I’ll go with Him, with Him, all the way’.¹³⁵

Suffering and Theodicy in Revelation

The Book of Revelation plays an important theological role in *The Pentecostal Holiness Advocate*, appearing in an abundance of issues, and is often interpreted with a dispensational futurist, and sometimes historicist, framework.¹³⁶ There are frequent teachings that expound on

¹²⁸ *AE* 10.5 (May 1, 1918), p. 6.

¹²⁹ *AE* 2.12 (August 1, 1910), p. 3 (brackets mine).

¹³⁰ *PHA* 1.28 (November 8, 1917), p. 7.

¹³¹ *AE* 6.9 (June 15, 1914), p. 13.

¹³² *PHA* 2.3 (May 16, 1918), p. 7.

¹³³ *AE* 6.9 (June 15, 1914), p. 10. Revelation 7.14 is used in connection with this quote. The writer, Hattie Wiggins, uses this text to compare present suffering to the suffering of those who had come out of the great tribulation, having ‘overcome by the blood’.

¹³⁴ *AE* 10.14 (September 15, 1918), p. 8.

¹³⁵ *PHA* 3.31-32 (November 27-December 4, 1919), p. 2.

¹³⁶ For examples of Revelation being interpreted with a dispensational or historicist framework, see *PHA* 1.16 (August 16, 1917), pp. 2-3; *PHA* 1.30 (November 22, 1917), p. 8; *PHA* 2.33-34 (December 19-26, 1918), p. 12; *PHA* 2.51 (April 17, 1919), pp. 8-10.

various chapters of Revelation, revealing these early Pentecostals' interest in the book which is due in part to their high eschatological expectations.

In all of its expositing, *The Pentecostal Holiness Advocate* makes use of Revelation to orient its readers to how they should approach the suffering of their day, providing a sense of comfort and hope,¹³⁷ especially amidst World War I. 'The Great European War',¹³⁸ as it is called, provoked eschatological interest that *The Pentecostal Holiness Advocate* addresses using Revelation to appeal to the second coming of Christ as a final solution to the world's sorrow.¹³⁹ G.F. Taylor says in one editorial:

The whole world is in some way affected by this war, and the eyes of the whole race are now focused on the scene of the battle ... Since these things are such we feel that a treatise on the second coming of Jesus appearing just at this time would be regarded as failing in its purpose if it is said [*sic*] nothing concerning the present war, and it [*sic*] relation to the subject in hand.¹⁴⁰

Taylor's statement captures the overall theological disposition *The Pentecostal Holiness Advocate* took toward not only the suffering caused by World War I, but all suffering that was experienced in the early 20th century: the early Pentecostals looked to the second coming of Jesus as their ultimate hope and way out of Christian suffering and the suffering the world experiences, in general. For this reason, the editorials in *The Pentecostal Holiness Advocate* engage Revelation 20-22 when it considers the ultimate and final resolve to suffering.¹⁴¹ Their sentiment toward Revelation 20-22 is expressed in an exhortation written by Mrs. D.H. Jones from Smithfield, NC. She says:

I love to think of that passage in Rev. 22:1, 2 ... Oh, dear people of God, we have all things to encourage us. I see nothing to turn back to. The way may seem a little weary at times, but it won't be long, and it will all be over. Let's hold out faithful unto the end, that we may see Jesus face to face, and dwell with Him in the city of God that John tells us about in Rev. 21 and 22.¹⁴²

Until the time of the eschaton, *The Pentecostal Holiness Advocate* exhorts its readers to endure suffering. In doing so, it gives proper attention to Revelation 2-3 and the endurance of the saints

¹³⁷ Revelation 14.12-13 is often used as a text for funerals, to comfort mourners, and to hearten the bereaved. See *PHA* 1.33 (December 13, 1917), p. 7; *PHA* 1.51 (April 18, 1918), p. 10; *PHA* 2.19 (September 5, 1918), p. 10.

¹³⁸ *PHA* 2.39 (January 30, 1919), p. 8.

¹³⁹ *PHA* 2.44 (February 27, 1919), p.8.

¹⁴⁰ *PHA* 2.39 (January 30, 1919), p. 8. The editorial in which this quote appears is taken from chapter 17 in Taylor's book entitled *The Second Coming of Jesus*, printed in 1916.

¹⁴¹ *LC* 4.6 (February 7, 1906), p. 4; *LC* 4.19 (May 9, 1906), p. 4; *AE* 3.11 (July 15, 1911), p. 7; *PHA* 1.3 (May 17, 1917), p. 6; *PHA* 1.12 (July 19, 1917), p. 18; *PHA* 1.16 (August 16, 1917), p. 3.

¹⁴² *AE* 10.14 (September 15, 1918), p. 5.

within the seven churches. In one particular article entitled ‘The Age to Come’, W.H. Turner, a missionary to China, uses Rev. 3.21 to address God’s coming vindication for Christians who endure and overcome suffering. He says:

There are to be thrones and setting up of thrones, and those who overcome are promised to sit upon thrones. (Rev. 3:21.) Oh, the blessedness of this! Many of God’s dearest children here in this world have to take a back seat, but then they will be given a throne, praise God. Oh, what a blessed consolation for the one who is suffering hardships and deprivation here in this life! Let us look up, for our redemption draweth near.¹⁴³

The Pentecostal Holiness Advocate suggested that early Pentecostals were no different than the saints in Revelation.¹⁴⁴ They shared their suffering and endurance and, in return, they would share their reward in the coming eschaton. The idea of enduring suffering until the coming eschaton is further elaborated in response to a question that is posed concerning Christ’s address to the Philadelphian church. The question is: ‘In Rev. 3:10, what does “my patience” mean?’ The response is given: ““Patience” comes from a Latin word which means to suffer. This text refers to suffering without murmur and waiting for the coming of Jesus.’¹⁴⁵ The testimonies, teachings, and missionary stories throughout *The Pentecostal Holiness Advocate* reveal this is exactly what the early Pentecostals did, in spite of the suffering and trauma the early 20th century presented.

Summary

Suffering and theodicy play an intricate role in *The Pentecostal Holiness Advocate*. Various forms of suffering are discussed, including suffering that is a result of WWI and the Spanish flu. Christian suffering is focused on the most. *The Pentecostal Holiness Advocate* posits the fall of humankind and Adam’s sin as the cause for suffering, never seeking to go beyond this explanation to form a traditional theodicy. Its concern is with practical theodicy, portraying how early Pentecostals did gospel work and overcame suffering through following the example of Christ amidst suffering. Their hope was in the age to come. The Book of Revelation plays an important part of this. Revelation chapters 2-3 and 20-22 are engaged to exhort Pentecostals to endure suffering and to encourage them with the idea that their faithfulness to Christ would lead to reigning with Christ in the eschaton.

¹⁴³ PHA 1.16 (August 16, 1917), p. 3.

¹⁴⁴ Some Pentecostals even interpreted Revelation to suggest that the seven churches are distinct church ages, and they are living in the Laodicean age. See PHA 1.18 (August 30, 1917), p. 8.

¹⁴⁵ PHA 1.52 (April 25, 1918), p. 11.

Summary of the Wesleyan-Holiness Stream

After surveying the publications within the Wesleyan-Holiness stream, six essential conclusions emerge:

First, Pentecostals differentiated between various forms of suffering. These forms of suffering include the suffering caused by WWI, the Spanish flu, widespread famine in various regions of the world, natural disasters, and sickness. Christian suffering was also included as a form of suffering. This suffering was the persecution their movement experienced as they shared the gospel.

Second, Pentecostals never sought to give rational explanation for suffering beyond the fall of humankind and the presence of sin in the world. They offered no theodicy in the traditional sense. Further, they did not use the Apocalypse to answer why suffering occurred nor did they attempt to use it to reconcile the idea of a benevolent God with the presence of evil and suffering.

Third, Pentecostals offered a practical response to suffering and evil – a practical theodicy. Rather than being theoretical, the early Pentecostals are portrayed as co-laborers with God, bringing relief to the world's suffering through the power endued upon them in Spirit baptism.

Fourth, Pentecostals used the Apocalypse to exhort readers to overcome in their suffering while here on the earth. While they used various texts, the messages to the seven churches (chapters 2-3) emerge as dominant. These texts are used to prompt believers to remain faithful to Christ in their affliction as well as encourage believers that their suffering was seen by God and is meaningful.

Fifth, the Pentecostals believed God's final eschatological justice was the answer to human suffering, including Christian suffering. One key text used is Rev. 6.9-11. It shows that the cry of the sufferer is legitimate, God hears prayers, and the time of divine justice will come and satisfy the sufferer. Revelation 19-22 also emerges as a key text. It is used to show that suffering finds its end at the marriage supper of the Lamb wherein divine justice is realized and believers enter into reigning with Christ in the new heaven and the new earth, free from all suffering.

Sixth, though some of the periodicals contained dispensational and futurist readings of Revelation, dispensationalism and futurist interpretations did not completely influence how

Wesleyan-Holiness Pentecostals read Revelation.¹⁴⁶ As noted above, these Pentecostals interpreted Revelation 2-3, Rev. 6.9-11, and Revelation 19-22 in light of their own suffering and the world's suffering. They identified with the suffering of the seven churches, associated their own pain with the pain of the souls under the altar, and hoped in the idea of final, eschatological justice to solve the problem of evil and suffering. There is much to be gained from Wesleyan-Holiness readings of Revelation, particularly along the lines of suffering and theodicy, which exceeds the dispensational, futurist framework.

3.3 Finished Work Publications

The Pentecost

In August 1908, two local Pentecostal missions, Apostolic Faith Mission and Good News Mission, joined to publish *The Pentecost*. Its founding editors were J.R Flower,¹⁴⁷ C.J. Quinn, and R.S. McBride, though in December 1908 Flower took over as the editor and Copley became associate editor. In 1909, the publication relocated from Indianapolis to Kansas City and in 1910 Copley took over the editorship. The publication contains teachings, letters from the mission field with updates and reports, testimonies of healing, directories of missionaries, and news of upcoming Pentecostal meetings. *The Pentecost* is limited in its engagement with Revelation,¹⁴⁸ as well as with suffering¹⁴⁹ and theodicy. However, it does make enough of a contribution toward a Pentecostal exploration of suffering and theodicy in the Apocalypse to merit a place within this reception history.

Pentecostals and Suffering and Theodicy

The Pentecost discusses suffering within the contexts of sickness, famine sufferers, and Christian suffering. Like many of the early Pentecostal periodicals, it does not offer elaborate theological

¹⁴⁶ Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment*, pp. 155-56, suggests that Pentecostal interpretations of Revelation were not monolithic, but diverse.

¹⁴⁷ J.R. Flower was an early pioneer for the Assemblies of God. For his various contributions, see G.B. McGee, 'Flower, Joseph James Roswell', in S.M. Burgess and E. M. Van Der Mas (eds.), *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), pp. 642-44.

¹⁴⁸ For a thorough list of places wherein *The Pentecost* references the Book of Revelation explicitly, see Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment*, p. 158, n. 4.

¹⁴⁹ For explicit mentions to various forms of suffering in *The Pentecost*, see *TP* 1.1 (August, 1908), p. 1; *TP* 1.2 (September, 1908), p. 1; *TP* 1.3 (November, 1908), p. 7; *TP* 1.4 (December, 1908), p. 15; *TP* (January-February, 1909), p. 3; *TP* 1.8 (July, 1909), p. 9; *TP* 1.9 (August, 1909), p. 7; *TP* 1.11 (October 15, 1909), pp. 2, 5; *TP* 2.2 (January 1, 1909), pp. 4, 8; *TP* 2.4 (March 1, 1910), pp. 4-6, 8; *TP* 2.5 (April 1, 1910), pp. 2-3, 5; *TP* 2.6 (May 1, 1910), p. 4; *TP* 2.9-10 (September-October, 1910), pp. 4-7, 9; *TP* 2.11-12 (November-December, 1910), pp. 3, 6-8, 10.

explanations as to why this suffering occurs. It simply acknowledges the prevalence of suffering and the mission of Jesus to redeem the world from suffering. ““There’s ever a song somewhere, and somewhere”, too, there is always a suffering heart. “The world is full of sorrow. Jesus said it would be so. The mission of Jesus was to redeem the world from sin and suffering.””¹⁵⁰ For these early Pentecostals, God was the answer to human suffering, not the cause. ‘One of Satan’s cleverest works has been the promulgation of the theory that God is the author of sickness and suffering.’¹⁵¹ *The Pentecost* portrays the early Pentecostals’ practical response to suffering in their efforts of sending aid to famine sufferers in various parts of Asia, their caring for orphans, and their constant efforts of praying for the sick.¹⁵²

As far as Christian suffering is concerned, *The Pentecost* portrays Pentecostals enthused to serve God in spite of it. ‘My desire is to do His whole will and glorify Him in service or suffering.’¹⁵³ This is due to their Pentecostal understanding of suffering, which informed them that the Pentecostal experience of Spirit baptism is also a baptism of suffering for Christ. ‘This baptism in fire is also a baptism of suffering ... A fellowship of suffering with Christ Jesus. Not only suffering persecution and trial for Jesus’ sake, but we are brought into such intimate heart union and sympathy with Him that it would seem one could not live under the anguish of soul.’¹⁵⁴ The Pentecostal experience was an experience of suffering the sufferings of Christ. This the Pentecostals did with enthusiasm because to suffer for Christ meant to know Christ, intimately.

Suffering and Theodicy in Revelation

The Pentecost engages the Book of Revelation from a dispensational point of view.¹⁵⁵ In terms of suffering and theodicy, *The Pentecost* uses Revelation to offer hope. It suggests that Pentecostals can ‘look away’ from the fallen creation and hope in the world to come.¹⁵⁶ J.R. Flower submits a teaching entitled ‘The Bride of Christ’ that furthers the notion of eschatological hope and expectation. Engaging with Revelation chapters 2, 3, and 21, he portrays the church as ‘an

¹⁵⁰ *TP* 2.2 (January 1, 1910), p. 8.

¹⁵¹ *TP* 2.5 (April 1, 1910), p. 5.

¹⁵² For examples of practical responses to suffering, see *TP* 1.1 (August, 1908), p. 1; *TP* (January-February, 1909), p. 3; *TP* 2.9-10 (September-October, 1910), p. 4.

¹⁵³ *TP* 1.3 (November, 1908), p. 7.

¹⁵⁴ *TP* 1.9 (August, 1909), p. 7.

¹⁵⁵ *TP* 1.5 (January-February, 1909), p. 7; *TP* 1.6 (April-May, 1909), pp. 7-8.

¹⁵⁶ *TP* 2.5 (April, 1910), p. 3.

overcoming company along every line.’¹⁵⁷ Flower appeals to the rapture of the church and the coming of Christ as God’s solution for the believer’s trouble, using Revelation 1.7 and 3.11 as his prooftexts. He states, ‘As the darkness of midnight is settling down upon us, as the warfare in the spirit is becoming more and more intense, the coming of our Jesus is brought nearer and nearer, and soon we know that we shall see Him and be like Him , for, we shall see Him as He is’.¹⁵⁸ Quite simply, *The Pentecost* uses Revelation to show that believers are overcomers and they can hope in Christ’s coming. This is as far as it went with Revelation to explain the problem of evil and suffering.¹⁵⁹

A song printed in *The Pentecost*, entitled ‘While the Years Roll On’ and arranged by Jan M. Kirk, uses language from the Apocalypse and engages how Pentecostals thought about suffering. It demonstrates the hope they had in Christ to right all that was wrong:

I have read of a wonderful city on high,
There the saints gather home with the Lord in the sky;
Twelve gates made of pearl ever open we’re told,
To that wonderful city that never grows old.

Our Savior we soon in that city shall meet,
And all of our loved ones again we shall greet.
There we’ll all sing glory and play on harps of pure gold,
The only song written that never grows old.

Saying blessing and wisdom and power,
Thanksgiving and honor and might evermore;
Unto God and the Lamb and the Spirit three-fold,
Who forever unfolding can never grow old.

In that city, our feet shall be sandaled with light,
Our robes washed with blood shall be dazzling and white;
There the fashions never change like the Hebrews we’re told,
Our sandals and garments never grow old.

In that city of light where live the redeemed,
There’s a strange tree that grows on both sides of the stream,
Twelve manner of fruit twelve times a year we’re told,
And ever fresh manna that never grows old.

Life is reckoned down here by youth, man and age,
We order a shroud for the child or the sage;
And they never die there in that city we’re told,

¹⁵⁷ *TP* 2.11-2 (November-December, 1910), p. 10.

¹⁵⁸ *TP* 2.11-2 (November-December, 1910), p. 11.

¹⁵⁹ This is not to say *The Pentecost* was trying to offer a traditional theodicy. It is just to say that this is as far as it went to rationalize matters pertaining to theodicy in Revelation.

But they live on forever and never grow old.

Summary

The Pentecost offers limited engagement with Revelation and suffering and theodicy. Where it discusses suffering, it does not offer elaborate theological explanations about suffering. It merely acknowledges the prevalence of suffering, the mission of Jesus to redeem the world from it, and the believers' response to aid in suffering – a practical theodicy – until Christ returns. It also purports that Spirit baptism is a baptism of suffering for Christ. This baptism brings believers into an intimate fellowship with Christ that cannot be experienced otherwise. Where *The Pentecost* engages Revelation and suffering and theodicy, it uses the messages to the seven churches (Revelation 2-3) and the texts describing the new heaven and new earth (Revelation 21-22) in order to offer hope in Christ's return and in the eschatological future that awaits those who overcome.

The Latter Rain Evangel

The Latter Rain Evangel began in 1908 under the leadership of William H. Piper,¹⁶⁰ the pastor of the Stone Church in Chicago, IL and former assistant to John Alexander Dowie.¹⁶¹ Piper later hired Anna Reiff, John Alexander Dowie's former secretary, as the editor. The publication was influenced by Dowie's *Leaves of Healing* and offers lectures, teachings, expositions, and updates about the Pentecostal movement. In 1939, *The Latter Rain Evangel* combined with the *Gospel Call*.¹⁶²

¹⁶⁰ For more on Piper, see E.L. Blumhofer, 'Piper, William Hamner', in S.M. Burgess and E.M. Van Der Mas (eds.), *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), pp. 989-90.

¹⁶¹ For more on Dowie, see E.L. Blumhofer, 'Dowie, John Alexander', in S.M. Burgess and E. M. Van Der Mas (eds.), *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), pp. 586-87.

¹⁶² See W.E. Warner, 'Periodicals', in S.M. Burgess and E.M. Van Der Mas (eds.), *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), pp. 976-77.

The Latter Rain Evangel offers a robust look at how early Pentecostals understood suffering¹⁶³ and theodicy.¹⁶⁴ It also contains many references to the Book of Revelation,¹⁶⁵

¹⁶³ For explicit mentions to various forms of suffering in *the Latter Rain Evangel*, see *LRE* 1.1 (October, 1908), pp. 5, 12, 21; *LRE* 1.2 (November, 1908), pp. 6, 11, 13, 22-23; *LRE* 1.3 (December, 1908), pp. 14, 21; *LRE* 1.4 (January, 1909), pp. 3, 6-9, 12-13, 15-16, 22; *LRE* 1.5 (February, 1909), pp. 16-19; *LRE* 1.6 (March, 1909), pp. 9, 15-17, 22; *LRE* 1.7 (April, 1909), pp. 2-3, 5, 10, 13, 18; *LRE* 1.8 (May, 1909), pp. 8-10, 14-15, 21, 23-24; *LRE* 1.9 (June, 1909), pp. 8, 23-24; *LRE* 1.10 (July, 1909), pp. 3-4, 13; *LRE* 1.11 (August, 1909), pp. 6, 19; *LRE* 1.12 (September, 1909), pp. 5, 9, 16, 22, 24; *LRE* 2.2 (November, 1909), pp. 14, 22; *LRE* 2.3 (December, 1909), pp. 4, 15-16; *LRE* 2.4 (January, 1910), pp. 3-5, 13-15, 23-24; *LRE* 2.5 (February, 1910), pp. 10, 12, 18, 22-23; *LRE* 2.6 (March, 1910), pp. 5-6, 8, 13, 18, 22; *LRE* 2.7 (April, 1910) pp. 13, 16, 21; *LRE* 2.8 (May, 1910), pp. 2, 7, 13-15; *LRE* 2.9 (June, 1910), p. 11; *LRE* 2.10 (July, 1910), pp. 10, 17, 20-21; *LRE* 2.11 (August, 1910), p. 9; *LRE* 2.12 (September, 1910), pp. 2, 9, 11, 14, 19, 22; *LRE* 3.1 (October, 1910), pp. 13-15; *LRE* 3.2 (November, 1910), pp. 2, 5, 10; *LRE* 3.3 (December, 1910), pp. 6, 20, 22; *LRE* 3.4 (January, 1911), pp. 5-6, 12, 16, 21; *LRE* 3.5 (February, 1911), pp. 7, 9, 15, 23; *LRE* 3.6 (March, 1911), pp. 2-3, 9-11, 16-17, 19-22; *LRE* 3.7 (April, 1911), p. 6-7, 13, 22-23; *LRE* 3.8 (May, 1911), pp. 3, 5, 7, 23-24; *LRE* 3.9 (June, 1911), pp. 3, 5, 8, 13, 20, 23-24; *LRE* 3.10 (July, 1911), pp. 13-16, 20; *LRE* 3.11 (August, 1911), pp. 3-4, 12, 16, 21; *LRE* 3.12 (September, 1911), pp. 5-6, 13, 15; *LRE* 4.1 (October, 1911), pp. 6-7, 21, 24; *LRE* 4.2 (November, 1911), pp. 12-13, 20, 24; *LRE* 3.4 (December, 1911), p. 11, 16, 18; *LRE* 4.4 (January, 1912), pp. 4-5, 8-10, 13, 20, 22; *LRE* 4.5 (February, 1912), pp. 15, 18, 23; *LRE* 4.6 (March, 1912), pp. 2, 4, 6-7, 9, 11, 18-19, 24; *LRE* 4.7 (April, 1912), pp. 6, 18; *LRE* 4.8 (May, 1912), pp. 10, 14, 18; *LRE* 4.9 (June, 1912), p. 8, 10; *LRE* 4.10 (July, 1912), p. 2; *LRE* 4.11 (August, 1912), p. 11, 17; *LRE* 4.12 (September, 1912), pp. 17, 21-22; *LRE* 5.1 (October, 1912), pp. 13-14, 18, 22; *LRE* 5.2 (November, 1912), pp. 11, 15, 18; *LRE* 5.3 (December, 1912), pp. 4, 11-13, 16-18, 22, 24; *LRE* 5.4 (January, 1913), pp. 6, 11, 14-17; *LRE* 5.5 (February, 1913), pp. 15, 17-19; *LRE* 5.6 (March, 1913), pp. 11, 22; *LRE* 5.7 (April, 1913), pp. 3-5, 10-11, 20; *LRE* 5.8 (May, 1913), pp. 7, 13-14, 16-17, 20, 24; *LRE* 5.9 (June, 1913), pp. 12-13, 17, 20, 23; *LRE* 5.10 (July, 1913), pp. 2-3, 10, 13, 18-19, 21; *LRE* 5.11 (August, 1913), pp. 3-10, 13, 22; *LRE* 5.12 (September, 1913), pp. 4, 11, 13-14, 16, 19; *LRE* 6.1 (October, 1913), pp. 8, 11, 15-16; *LRE* 6.2 (November, 1913), pp. 2-3, 8, 11-12, 16, 19, 22; *LRE* 6.3 (December, 1913), pp. 3-4, 11, 17; *LRE* 6.4 (January, 1914), pp. 3, 5, 9, 11, 18-19, 21, 24; *LRE* 6.5 (February, 1914), pp. 8, 10, 15; *LRE* 6.6 (March, 1914), pp. 16, 21; *LRE* 6.7 (April, 1914), pp. 2, 8, 15, 17-18, 21; *LRE* 6.8 (May, 1914), pp. 2, 8, 9, 14, 17, 19-21, 23; *LRE* 6.9 (June, 1914), pp. 3, 8, 20, 23; *LRE* 6.10 (July, 1914), pp. 7, 9, 11-12, 24; *LRE* 6.11 (August, 1914), pp. 6-7, 12, 14, 16-18, 20; *LRE* 6.12 (September, 1914), pp. 6-7, 9, 11, 21, 23; *LRE* 7.4 (January, 1915), pp. 12-14, 17, 20; *LRE* 7.5 (February, 1915), pp. 2-5, 9, 15, 20, 24; *LRE* 7.6 (March, 1915), pp. 2, 6, 16, 22; *LRE* 7.7 (April, 1915), pp. 2, 6-8, 13, 15-17; *LRE* 7.8 (May, 1915), pp. 11, 15-17, 19-20; *LRE* 7.9 (June, 1915), pp. 5, 11-13, 22; *LRE* 7.10 (July, 1915), pp. 4, 11, 15-16, 18-19, 22; *LRE* 7.11 (August, 1915), pp. 8, 17, 21; *LRE* 7.12 (September, 1915), p. 13; *LRE* 8.1 (October, 1915), pp. 7, 12, 15, 21; *LRE* 8.2 (November, 1915), pp. 4, 10-11, 13, 14, 18, 22; *LRE* 8.3 (December, 1915), pp. 7, 12-16, 21-22; *LRE* 8.4 (January, 1916), pp. 3, 12; *LRE* 8.5 (February, 1916), pp. 7-9, 11, 13; *LRE* 8.6 (March, 1916), pp. 6-9, 23; *LRE* 8.7 (April, 1916), pp. 3, 12-13, 16-20, 22-23; *LRE* 8.8 (May, 1916), pp. 5-7, 13, 18, 20; *LRE* 8.9 (June, 1916), pp. 2, 7, 15, 23; *LRE* 8.10 (July, 1916), pp. 5, 7-8, 10-12, 20, 22; *LRE* 8.11 (August, 1916), pp. 2, 5, 9, 14, 23; *LRE* 8.12 (September, 1916), pp. 2, 7-15, 17, 22-23; *LRE* 9.1 (October, 1916), pp. 3-4, 13, 15, 17; *LRE* 9.2 (November, 1916), pp. 6, 14-15; *LRE* 9.3 (December, 1916), pp. 11-13, 15; *LRE* 9.4 (January, 1917), pp. 5, 14-15, 22; *LRE* 9.5 (February, 1917), pp. 20; *LRE* 9.6 (March, 1917), pp. 6, 9, 18, 22-24; *LRE* 9.7 (April, 1917), pp. 7-8, 10, 18, 22; *LRE* 9.8 (May, 1917), pp. 11-12, 15-17, 23; *LRE* 9.9 (June, 1917), pp. 3-4, 8-10, 12-13, 15, 17-21, 24; *LRE* 9.10 (July, 1917), pp. 6, 19-20; *LRE* 9.11 (August, 1917), pp. 4, 16-17, 22; *LRE* 10.1 (October, 1917), pp. 3, 7, 18, 20; *LRE* 10.2 (November, 1917), pp. 8, 16, 19; *LRE* 10.3 (December, 1917), pp. 9-10, 13, 17-19, 22; *LRE* 10.5 (February, 1917), pp. 11-12, 14, 17, 19, 22; *LRE* 10.6 (March, 1918), pp. 9-11, 22; *LRE* 10.7 (April, 1918), pp. 2-4, 12-13, 15, 18; *LRE* 10.8 (May, 1918), pp. 9, 13, 20, 22; *LRE* 10.9 (June, 1918), p. 4; *LRE* 10.10 (July, 1918), pp. 13, 21, 23; *LRE* 11.1 (October, 1918), pp. 11, 13-14, 19; *LRE* 11.2 (November, 1918), p. 14; *LRE* 11.3 (December, 1918), pp. 2, 7, 13, 14; *LRE* 11.4 (January, 1919), pp. 5, 10, 17, 21; *LRE* 11.5 (February, 1919), pp. 6, 8, 13; *LRE* 11.6 (March, 1919), pp. 8, 15, 16, 23; *LRE* 11.7 (April, 1919), pp. 3-4, 7, 9, 18, 21-22; *LRE* 11.8 (May, 1919), pp. 13, 16-17, 21-23; *LRE* 11.9 (June, 1919), pp. 4-5, 7-10, 13-14, 17; *LRE* 11.10 (July, 1919), pp. 13, 16, 18; *LRE* 11.11 (August, 1919), pp. 7-9, 20-21, 23; *LRE* 11.12 (September, 1919), pp. 4, 7, 18, 24; *LRE* 12.1 (October, 1919), pp. 14, 17; *LRE* 12.2 (November, 1919), pp. 3, 11-12, 23; *LRE* 12.3 (December, 1919), pp. 3-5, 14, 19.

including significant engagement with the themes of suffering and theodicy in Revelation. The publication does not lack for references to WWI¹⁶⁶ or the Spanish flu,¹⁶⁷ suggesting that its engagement with suffering and theodicy, even in Revelation, was appropriate and due in part to the intense times in which they were living.

Pentecostals and Suffering and Theodicy

The Latter Rain Evangel does not differ from other early Pentecostal publications in the sense that it delineates suffering into several different kinds of suffering, namely suffering as sickness, mental depression,¹⁶⁸ famine, war, the consequences of sin, and Christian suffering. However, *The Latter Rain Evangel* is unique in that it offers some pieces that are useful in exploring a Pentecostal theology of suffering. These focus primarily on Christian suffering.

The first piece is a sermon by Wm. Hamner Piper entitled ‘But Also Suffer For His Name Sake’.¹⁶⁹ This sets the tone for how *The Latter Rain Evangel* would approach Christian suffering, that is, from the standpoint that Christian suffering produces a deeper spiritual life and intimacy with Christ that could not be had any other way.

There is another experience that most of us shrink from, which some more nearly being the essence of Christianity, and that is *suffering*. Most of us turn away from that. We are very desirous of having the glory and the joy, but when the suffering comes, we turn away. I believe nearly all the people who have these glory experiences will agree with me, that the development of real deep spiritual life comes not so much on the Mount of Transfiguration, as down in the valley fighting the demons ... So then, learn the lesson. Hold still! When the fire is burning do not run off and complain. Hold still and thank God that it is burning. The burning will cease when the dross is consumed and the gold is pure. When the way is dark, and everything looks black, recognize God in it somewhere.¹⁷⁰

A later piece, entitled ‘Crucifixion to Self’, suggests this as well:

Contrary to the cleansing of the heart which is done through faith, this deeper death to self is brought about through *suffering* ... When the soul passes through this deeper death to self it

¹⁶⁴ *The Latter Rain Evangel* never uses the term ‘theodicy’ in any explicit form. However, it does engage with God’s goodness and divine justice in light of suffering.

¹⁶⁵ For a thorough list of places wherein *Latter Rain Evangel* references the Book of Revelation explicitly see Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment*, p. 161-62, n. 26. Not included are references and quotations of Revelation in the 1919 issues. For these references and quotations, see *LRE* 11.4 (January, 1919), pp. 21-22; *LRE* 12.1 (October, 1919), pp. 4-5; *LRE* 12.3 (December, 1919), p. 17.

¹⁶⁶ For references to WWI, see *LRE* 7.4 (January, 1915), pp. 6, 13; *LRE* 7.7 (April, 1915), pp. 17, 20; *LRE* 8.9 (June, 1916), p. 15; *LRE* 8.10 (July, 1916), p. 11; *LRE* 10.7 (April, 1918), p. 10.

¹⁶⁷ For references to the Spanish flu, see *LRE* 11.2 (November, 1918), pp. 6, 13; *LRE* 11.4 (January, 1919), pp. 9, 24; *LRE* 11.5 (February, 1919), pp. 9, 12-13; *LRE* 11.11 (August, 1919), pp. 3, 10; *LRE* 12.2 (November, 1919), p. 20.

¹⁶⁸ *LRE* 5.12 (September, 1913), p. 19.

¹⁶⁹ *LRE* 1.4 (January, 1909), pp. 7-9.

¹⁷⁰ *LRE* 1.4 (January, 1909), p. 7-9.

enters a state of great spiritual understanding and comprehension; a state of almost incessant prayer, and of unlimited love toward all mankind; a state of indescribable compassion and wide-hearted sympathy; a state of deep calm cautiousness, of great simplicity of life and habits, and a deep insight into the things of God and concerning the future.¹⁷¹

These early Pentecostals understood that suffering was making them like their Lord. It was not an opportunity for self-pity.¹⁷² It was perfecting them, forming them, and preparing them to reign with Christ. W.J. Bennett notes this in an important piece entitled ‘Saved by Suffering’:

Suffering is not always as a punishment for breaking God’s law: indeed, it is often given as a moulding [*sic*] process, fashioning him into the likeness of his Master, who was made perfect through suffering ... So let us obey the call of Him who for our sakes lived a life of suffering which was ended by a death of shame, so that we might be counted worthy to suffer with Him until He calls us also to reign with Him.¹⁷³

In the latest of all these pieces,¹⁷⁴ one entitled ‘The Ministry of Sorrow’, G.D. Watson discusses suffering at length. Watson acknowledges suffering and sorrow as part of the human experience and suggests that all humans, both Christians and non-Christians, suffer alike. He elaborates, in a detailed way, how sorrow and suffering play a part of the human experience and the Christian experience. His elaboration encapsulates the early Pentecostal understanding of sorrow and suffering:

There is nothing on earth that is not in some way related to sorrow, or hedged in by it, or that does not partake of its color and tone. We are redeemed by sorrow. Our Savior, in pouring his precious blood for our everlasting salvation, said, ‘I am exceeding sorrowful, even unto death.’ Repentance is made up of many kinds of sorrow. The consecration of the believer is steeped in holy sorrow. Almost all prayer is saturated with various kinds of sorrow. The power of music depends on the sorrow that is in it. The poetry of the great masters, that holds our intellects spellbound, derives its mighty magic from the sad strains of sorrow that run all through it. It is the sorrow element in everything that seizes and holds the hearts of mankind beyond any other influence. It is sorrow that immortalizes battlefields, and monuments, and tombs, and great heroes, and martyrs. It is the sorrow piled up in the Westminster Abbey that draws thousands annually to walk through its halls with silent, uncovered heads. It is the sorrow in the Bible that makes it the most natural as well as the most divine book on earth and kings, philosophers, young men and maidens, beggars and lonely savages in the forest, are more deeply touched with the pathetic lives of the dear old weeping patriarchs than with

¹⁷¹ *LRE* 8.2 (November, 1915), p. 11.

¹⁷² *LRE* 8.6 (March, 1916), p. 7.

¹⁷³ *LRE* 8.12 (September, 1916), pp. 8-9.

¹⁷⁴ As the times marched on, so did early Pentecostal engagement with suffering. Suffering was an acute part of life in the early 20th century. It only makes sense that in 1919 an elaborated (and heartfelt!) piece on suffering appears in a Pentecostal journal. The Pentecostals had been through a lot – both as a movement and as human beings living through a great war and a pandemic. Their articles, sermons, lectures, songs, and literature naturally reflected the suffering they experienced.

the shallow, heartless noise of mere fleshly events. Sorrow is the universal language of earth, and more easily understood by human hearts than by any other one thing.¹⁷⁵

Watson's only explanation as to why this sorrow and suffering exists is that it came from the fall. Yet, Watson points out that if sorrow and suffering are brought under divine grace, it is redemptive and profitable for the Christian life:

Sorrow is the normal state of a world that is fallen, and yet under conditions of redemption. Sorrow on earth is the root out of which can be made to grow and blossom the sweetest joys of heaven ... Sorrow is a species of suffering with hope in it ... sorrow is the pathetic poetry of a fallen world in which hope still lingers. The heavenly life on earth is tintured all through with many kinds of sorrow ... we are redeemed by sorrow ... when sorrow comes under the power of divine grace, it works out a manifold ministry in our lives.¹⁷⁶

Watson goes on to offer five profitable things that sorrow accomplishes when brought under grace: (1) it breaks down hard natures and melts stubborn wills, (2) it weans us more effectively, (3) it widens the soul, (4) it reveals unknown depths, and (5) it causes the soul to learn obedience.¹⁷⁷

Watson does not appear to be offering a philosophical explanation for suffering and sorrow. Watson is just pointing out how God redeems suffering and works within it to benefit those who trust in him. This is consistent with how *The Latter Rain Evangel* approaches suffering and theodicy. It does not seek to offer a traditional theodicy. It simply recognizes that the Lord is at work in the chaos of a fallen world. In one particular article, entitled 'Recognizing the Lord's Hand in the Unusual', *The Latter Rain Evangel* engages the chaos of the World War. It states, 'The Lord is King over His plans, so let us not question this war. The Lord God of heaven lives and He will work out His will through the present chaos.'¹⁷⁸ In the same article, Pentecostals are urged to take the gospel to the nations of the world. This example reveals that early Pentecostals were determined to work amidst suffering, just like their Lord. They did this by preaching the gospel. They were determined to preach until the problem of suffering was resolved at the coming of Jesus. Their approach to theodicy was practical.

¹⁷⁵ *LRE* 11.11 (August, 1919), p. 21.

¹⁷⁶ *LRE* 11.11 (August, 1919), p. 21. In this article, Watson shows how suffering and sorrow are at the core of everything that is human.

¹⁷⁷ *LRE* 11.11 (August, 1919), pp. 21-23.

¹⁷⁸ *LRE* 10.10 (July, 1918), p. 10.

Suffering and Theodicy in Revelation

The Latter Rain Evangel engages significantly with Revelation as it pertains to suffering and theodicy. The publication approaches the text of Revelation dispensationally,¹⁷⁹ and there are frequent excurses and whole teachings committed to expounding of Revelation. The largest teaching on Revelation within the publication is a series of lectures given by D. Wesley Myland¹⁸⁰ which engages suffering as a main theme. Myland notes how sorrow, restoration, and victory are major themes within the text.¹⁸¹ He provides an entire lecture on the seven churches of Revelation 2-3¹⁸² which highlights the life of the overcomer. He suggests that in order for one to read Revelation correctly, the reader must have experienced the ‘overcoming life’ otherwise ‘he is an incompetent student, an ungraduated teacher’.¹⁸³ The ‘overcoming life’ includes overcoming suffering, based on Myland’s reading of the message to Smyrna:

Now He says, if you will overcome this sentimentalism of the self-life, self-saving, this shrinking for suffering – if you overcome this and die to that which does not like to suffer, and does not like hard duties and hard trials and persecutions, and will be faithful even unto death, I will give you protecting – protection for the second death, and you shall have the crown of life as the reward of your endurance.¹⁸⁴

Unique to *The Latter Rain Evangel’s* approach to suffering and theodicy in Revelation is its use of texts connected to Exodus. In an article entitled ‘He Endured as Seeing Him Who Is Invisible’,¹⁸⁵ R.L. Ericson says of the song of Moses in Revelation 15, ‘Oh when Moses hears that song in heaven he will never regret that he chose to suffer affliction than to sit on a

¹⁷⁹ See *LRE* 2.8 (May, 1910), p. 8; *LRE* 2.10 (July, 1910), p. 8; *LRE* 3.4 (January, 1911), pp. 5-12; *LRE* 4.5 (February, 1912), pp. 6-12.

¹⁸⁰ The first lecture of this series appears in *LRE* 3.3 (December, 1910), pp. 2-8, and the lectures continue until the last lecture in *LRE* 4.6 (March, 1912), pp. 13-18. In *LRE* 3.3 (December, 1910), pp. 2-8, Myland makes a significant contribution by laying out an early Pentecostal methodology for reading Revelation. He proposes the ‘comprehensive’ or ‘harmonic’ school of reading Revelation, admits a late dating, shows intertextual connections between Revelation and Genesis, and divides Revelation into seven consummations. Within these consummations, Myland recognizes the theodicean themes of judgment, rewards for the faithful, and eternal glory. This methodology is furthered in *LRE* 3.4 (January, 1911), pp. 5-12, wherein Myland divides Revelation up into seven beatitudes, seven songs, and seven overcomeths. He recognizes the songs and sorrows in Revelation, the antitheses in Revelation, and the themes of victory and restoration in Revelation. He identifies Patmos, illustratively, as a place of suffering. Furthermore, Myland also distinguishes Revelation as a ‘story’. This reveals an organized, self-conscious way of reading Revelation that takes suffering and theodicy into account as more than just a peripheral theme, but a main premise that should be considered in a Pentecostal reading of Revelation.

¹⁸¹ See *LRE* 3.4 (January, 1911), pp. 7-8.

¹⁸² Myland delineates seven aspects of reading these messages before reading them. For these aspects, see *LRE* 3.5 (February, 1911), pp. 3-4.

¹⁸³ *LRE* 3.5 (February, 1911), p. 3.

¹⁸⁴ *LRE* 3.6 (March, 1911), p. 3.

¹⁸⁵ *LRE* 6.11 (August, 1914), pp. 2-7.

throne'.¹⁸⁶ The connection between Revelation, Exodus and suffering is further discussed in an article entitled 'How to Sweeten the Bitter Waters', by Hardy W. Mitchell.¹⁸⁷ This article addresses those who have 'tasted the bitter waters of suffering and know what it means to cry to God and have them sweetened'¹⁸⁸ and draws from the children of Israel's crossing of the Red Sea in Exodus:

They sang a glorious song of victory and exalted the Lord for having triumphed over their enemies, but the echo of their voices had hardly died out before they came to the bitter waters, and is it not true that every person who experiences a great victory and a great blessing in his life will sooner or later come to bitter waters?¹⁸⁹

Mitchell connects the children of Israel's experience to the overcomers in the Book of Revelation, linking them with Christians who were suffering for the gospel:

Another thought is in the seventh of Revelation ... Who are the company who are on the sea of glass, praising and exalting God and His Son Jesus? They are the people who have journeyed out of the land of bondage and sin and come up to their inheritance through bitter waters. Who are the company who will worship God before the throne? These are they who have come up through great tribulation. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more. There are no doubt children of God and missionaries on the field who are hungry and suffering hardships and trials but thank God in that day we won't know any hardship. Then 'the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall lead them to the living foundations of waters; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes'.¹⁹⁰

Finally, the theme of suffering and theodicy in Revelation is dealt with acutely in an article entitled 'Pressure of Jewel Making' by Elizabeth Sisson.¹⁹¹ Sisson uses the concept of the pressure and fire it takes to create a jewel and connects to the bedazzlement language in Scripture, particularly the heavenly Jerusalem found in the last chapters of Revelation. She posits that trials and sufferings come upon the world because 'the Great Jeweler of the Universe'¹⁹² is bringing forth 'jewels for eternity' to deck the heavenly bride:

And as to Nature's call, there come earthquakes, convulsions, fire, crystallization, so to the command of the Divine Alchemist, there come upon different bits of earth-humanity, here and there, the convulsions, the cataclysms for making ruby-ship, diamond-hood, etc. – all the glowing resplendency of the multitudinous gems of the Palace City of the Universe; the heavenly Jerusalem. Read again the glowing descriptions of the walls of that city, its foundations 'garnished with all manner of precious stones', luxuriant in the description of its

¹⁸⁶ *LRE* 6.11 (August, 1914), p. 6.

¹⁸⁷ *LRE* 9.7 (March, 1917), pp. 22-24.

¹⁸⁸ *LRE* 9.7 (March, 1917), pp. 22.

¹⁸⁹ *LRE* 9.7 (March, 1917), pp. 22.

¹⁹⁰ *LRE* 9.7 (March, 1917), pp. 24.

¹⁹¹ *LRE* 10.1 (October, 1917), pp. 6-10.

¹⁹² *LRE* 10.1 (October, 1917), p. 6.

streets of gold, its marvelous gates, ‘every several gate one pearl’, its streets of transparent glass-gold, each separate jewel imprisoning the light of the glory of God, and scintillating it, in fiery beams of love, mercy, purity, wisdom and power; and all exultants of the Divine Alchemy of suffering and pressure upon earth worms! Marvelous transformations!¹⁹³

Sisson, consistent with *The Latter Rain Evangel’s* teaching on suffering, posits that Revelation teaches that Christian suffering perfects the believers, forms them, and prepares them to be fit to reign with Christ. Suffering is not wasted on ‘the earth worms’. Suffering transforms the earthworms into jewels that bedazzle the city of God.

Summary

The Latter Rain Evangel offers a robust look at how Pentecostals understood suffering and theodicy and particularly from texts in Revelation. Like other Pentecostal publications, it delineates suffering into various kinds of suffering, though it is unique in that it offers some unique pieces that are useful in exploring a Pentecostal theology of suffering. The first piece, ‘But Also Suffer for His Name Sake’, posits the theme that suffering produces a deeper spiritual life and intimacy with Christ. Another piece, ‘Crucifixion to Self’ posits this theme, as well, and suggests that suffering makes a Christian like their Lord. This is followed by a piece entitled ‘Saved By Suffering’ wherein it is noted that suffering molds and fashions the believer to be like Christ. Finally, in an article entitled ‘The Ministry of Sorrow’, suffering is discussed at length and, in particular, what suffering accomplishes for Christians when it is brought under divine grace. In *The Latter Rain Evangel’s* engagement with suffering and theodicy, there is little attempt to offer a traditional theodicy. The periodical simply recognizes that the Lord is present and at work in the chaos, which the early Pentecostals attempted to emulate. They focused their energies on preaching the gospel to the suffering world at large, a practical approach to theodicy.

The Latter Rain Evangel’s engagement with suffering and theodicy in the Apocalypse hinges mainly on D. Wesley Myland’s exposition of Revelation which engages the message of the seven churches (Revelation 2-3), intertextual connections between Moses/the Exodus and the overcomer in Revelation 7 and 15, and Elizabeth Sisson’s comparison between the process by which jewels are made and the bedazzled language in the last chapters of Revelation (19-22). These theological engagements with Revelation are consistent with what *The Latter Rain Evangel* teaches regarding suffering and theodicy in that they portray suffering as a formative process for the believer, culminating in an eternal reign with Christ. These are set in the

¹⁹³ *LRE* 10.1 (October, 1917), p. 7.

periodicals to encourage the early Pentecostals onward in their mission to preach the gospel and to give them the hope that God will be faithful despite their unique suffering and the suffering of the world at large, experienced intensely in World War I and the Spanish flu pandemic.

Word and Witness

Word and Witness was first published by E.N. Bell¹⁹⁴ while he pastored in Malvern, AR. It was the primary publication of the Church of God in Christ (white).¹⁹⁵ In the December 1913 issue, Bell called for a ‘General Convention of Pentecostal Saints and Churches of God in Christ’ to take place in Hot Springs, AR from April 2 to 12, 1914.¹⁹⁶ This convention resulted in the formation of the AOG. Bell then gave the *Word and Witness* to the new denomination. Issues of the *Word and Witness* include Pentecostal teaching, updates from the mission field, and announcements about up-and-coming Pentecostal meetings and testimonies.

Word and Witness considers suffering¹⁹⁷ and theodicy to a limited, yet meaningful extent, while also engaging the Book of Revelation¹⁹⁸ to do so.

Pentecostals and Suffering and Theodicy

Word and Witness speaks of suffering as sickness, demonic oppression, conditions due to famine, and troubles caused by WWI.¹⁹⁹ In one testimony, the *Word and Witness* refers to God saving and healing ‘suffering humanity’.²⁰⁰ In this sense of suffering, these early Pentecostals believed that God worked through them to relieve those suffering from sin, sickness, famine,²⁰¹

¹⁹⁴ E.N. Bell was the first general chairman (general superintendent) of the General Council of the Assemblies of God. For more on Bell, see W.E. Warner, ‘Bell, Eudorus N.’, in S. M. Burgess and E.M. Van Der Mas (eds.), *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), p. 369.

¹⁹⁵ The term ‘white’ was used to distinguish the Church of God in Christ from Bishop C.H. Mason’s denomination, the Church of God in Christ (COGIC), which was primarily black. See W.E. Warner, ‘Church of God in Christ (White)’, in S.M. Burgess and E.M. Van Der Mas (eds.), *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), p. 537.

¹⁹⁶ *WW* 9.12 (December 20, 1913), p. 1.

¹⁹⁷ For explicit mentions to various forms of suffering in *Word and Witness*, see *WW* 8.6 (August 20, 1912), pp. 1, 3; *WW* 8.8 (October 20, 1912), p. 3; *WW* 9.1 (January 20, 1913), p. 2; *WW* 9.2 (February 20, 1913), p. 1; *WW* 9.3 (March 20, 1913), pp. 2-3; *WW* 9.6 (June 20, 1913), pp. 2, 6; *WW* 9.8 (August 20, 1913), pp. 1, 2, 4; *WW* 9.9 (September 20, 1913), pp. 1-4; *WW* 9.10 (October 20, 1913), pp. 1, 2, 4; *WW* 9.11 (November 20, 1913), p. 3; *WW* 9.12 (December 20, 1913), pp. 3-4; *WW* 10.1 (January 20, 1914), pp. 1-3; *WW* 10.3 (March 20, 1914), p. 4; *WW* 10.4 (April 20, 1914), pp. 2, 4; *WW* (May 20, 1914), p. 3; *WW* 12.5 (May, 1915), pp. 4-6; *WW* 12.8 (August, 1915), pp. 2, 6; *WW* 12.9 (September, 1915), pp. 3, 6; *WW* 12.11 (November, 1915), p. 1, 3.

¹⁹⁸ For explicit references and quotations of Revelation, see Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment*, p. 170, n. 87.

¹⁹⁹ *WW* 10.10 (October, 1914), p. 1.

²⁰⁰ *WW* 10.5 (May 20, 1914), p. 3.

²⁰¹ *WW* 10.4 (April 20, 1914), p. 4. Here it is noted how the Pentecostals were busy raising support and relief for over 100,000 ‘sufferers’ in North India: ‘Will you not pray that God will not only send them money but also that He

and war. In light of WWI and the suffering it was causing in various parts of the world, the *Word and Witness* says, ‘God has mightily used the Pentecostal Movement in sending out hundreds of missionaries and now in the great emergency, He holds us responsible to stand back of them and suffer with them and also share with them our substance that they may not lack in this great hour of need. Will we rise in holy reverence and gladly respond to the need?’²⁰² This shows a practical response to suffering – a practical theodicy – and not a classical theodicy that offers a theoretical explanation for the reason humanity suffers.

The *Word and Witness* also speaks of Christian suffering. In this sense of suffering, the early Pentecostals believed that God had called them *to* suffering, just as Christ had suffered. This was the persecution that comes from doing the work of the gospel. In an article entitled ‘Answered Prayer’, Florence L. Burpee from Sioux City, IA says, ‘The Bride must share His sufferings as well as his glory’.²⁰³ This simple quote sums up how Pentecostals saw Christian suffering – an inevitable part of the Christian faith, required if one is to reign with Christ.

Suffering and Theodicy in Revelation

The *Word and Witness* reads the Book of Revelation dispensationally, anticipating the rapture at any moment.²⁰⁴ Eschatological tensions were high. The early Pentecostals were hopeful that the day of the Lord would come soon and that their suffering would turn into glory. Revelation 3.21 is used to support this hope. ‘Suffering and hardship and danger belong to the life of a soldier ... But dear ones, God wants you to share in his glory at the coming of the Lord in that great day. They shall sit with Jesus in His throne, Rev. 3:21’.²⁰⁵ In 1915, another article appeared referring to Rev. 3.12. It summarizes the messages of the seven churches as portraying God’s intent for his people to overcome and to reign with him. ‘From the various messages given to the seven churches, we gather that it is the express and earnest desire of Him who holdeth the seven stars in His hand, that His people become full overcomers so that they may share in His glory.’²⁰⁶

As the world continued to worsen toward the coming of WWI, Evangelist L.C. Hall from Chicago, IL posited an article entitled ‘The Great Crisis Near at Hand’. In it, a theme relevant to

will raise up from among the servants of Christ those who will go and live among these famine smitten people and distribute help to them in the name of our Lord?’

²⁰² *WW* 10.10 (October, 1914), p. 1.

²⁰³ *WW* 12.9 (September 1915), p. 3.

²⁰⁴ *WW* 9.10 (October 20, 1913), p. 1.

²⁰⁵ *WW* 9.3 (March, 20, 1913), p. 1.

²⁰⁶ *WW* 10.5 (May, 1915), p. 4.

theodicy – God’s vindication for his suffering people – is discussed from Revelation 8-18 and 5.12-13. Hall offers a poem²⁰⁷ to exhort readers:

Ye Saints of Christ,
Fresh courage take.
The Battle rages hard.
The hosts of hell
Would heaven shake,
Its kingdom would retard.

Though shot and shell
Around us fall,
And demons grin with glee,
We’ll charge his forts
In Jesus’ name
‘Till everyone shall flee

and when the smoke of battle has forever settled behind the Eternal Hills of God, and the last echo of arms has died in the distance, and the ‘Prince of Peace’ appears upon the scene to reign supreme, we will join the angelic hosts and shout: ‘WORTHY IS THE LAMB THAT WAS SLAIN TO RECEIVE POWER AND RICHES AND WISDOM AND STRENGTH AND HONOR AND GLORY AND BLESSING’ ... John in the Revelation tells us (Rev. 5:13) he heard ‘*Every creature* which is in heaven and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, saying, ‘*Blessing and honor and glory and power be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever [sic] and ever*’ ... *The Great Crisis* will be passed and the faithful safe forever. Hallelujah!²⁰⁸

These articles shows that the *Word and Witness* engaged with suffering and theodicy from Revelation and looked to the seven churches to do so. Pentecostals saw themselves in the seven churches, feeling the call to overcome their own suffering so that they could reign with Christ. Their victory, according to the *Word and Witness*, was predicated upon the Lamb’s victory, seen in Revelation 5.

Summary

The *Word and Witness* delineates suffering the same way other early Pentecostal publications do, differentiating it in its various forms. These forms include sickness, demonic oppression, conditions due to famine, troubles caused by WWI, and Christian suffering. The *Word and Witness* demonstrates a practical theodicy by showing the early Pentecostals sending out missionaries to bring relief to the world’s suffering (as opposed to a traditional, theoretical explanation for the world’s suffering). The *Word and Witness* also speaks of Christian suffering,

²⁰⁷ This poem segues into exhortation without a clean break. This may have been intentional or an editing error. Be that as it may, I have presented it as it appears in the issue.

²⁰⁸ *WW* 5.11 (November 20, 1913), p. 1.

showing that early Pentecostals had been called to suffer just as Christ suffered. This was an inevitable part of the Christian faith and necessary to reign with Christ.

The *Word and Witness* engages with the Book of Revelation concerning suffering and theodicy. It focuses primarily on Revelation 3 and the messages to the seven churches. The early Pentecostals felt the call to overcome suffering just as the seven churches were called to overcome suffering. In overcoming suffering, they would reign with Christ as the seven churches would if they overcame. The *Word and Witness* also engages Revelation 5 to put forth the notion that Christian victory and glory is possible because of the Lamb's victory and glory.

The Christian/Weekly/Pentecostal Evangel

Today, the AOG's *Pentecostal Evangel* is one of the premier Pentecostal publications in the world. The evolution of *The Pentecostal Evangel* began in 1913 when it was begun by J.R. and Alice Flower and called *The Christian Evangel*. In 1915, the name changed to *The Weekly Evangel*, highlighting that it was a weekly publication. In 1918, the publication became more of a bi-weekly publication and the title changed back to *The Christian Evangel*. In 1919, the publication changed its name once more and it became known as the *Pentecostal Evangel*.²⁰⁹ *The Christian/Weekly/Pentecostal Evangel* offered field reports from missionaries, prayer requests, testimonies, questions and answers, Sunday School lessons, Pentecostal teachings, and even advertisements for Pentecostal meetings and Pentecostal literature. It also offers insight into how

²⁰⁹ In this reception history, I will be citing the publication based on its name in the year of the respective citation.

Pentecostals understood suffering²¹⁰ and theodicy²¹¹ and how they approached the Book of Revelation.²¹²

²¹⁰ For explicit mentions to various forms of suffering in *The Christian/Weekly/Pentecostal Evangel*, see CE 1.1 (July 19, 1913), p. 3; CE (August 9, 1913), p. 7-8; CE (October 25, 1913), p. 8; CE (November 29, 1913), p. 7; CE (December 20, 1913), p. 7; CE 2.13 (March 28, 1914), p. 1; CE (April 11, 1914), p. 7; CE 2.19 (May 9, 1914), pp. 7; CE 49 (July 11, 1914), pp. 1-2; CE 50 (July 18, 1914), pp. 3-4; CE 51 (July 25, 1914), p. 3; CE 52 (August 1, 1914), p. 3; CE 53 (August 8, 1914), p. 2; CE 54 (August 15, 1914), pp. 1, 3-4; CE 55 (August 22, 1914), pp. 1, 4; CE 56 (August 29, 1914), p. 4; CE 57 (September 5, 1914), p. 2; CE 58 (September 12, 1914), pp. 1, 2, 4; CE 59 (September 19, 1914), p. 4; CE 60 (September 26, 1914), pp. 1, 4; CE 61 (October 3, 1914), pp. 1, 4; CE 62 (October 10, 1914), pp. 3-4; CE 63 (October 17, 1914), p. 4; CE 64 (October 24, 1914), pp. 3-4; CE 65 (October 31, 1914), p. 4; CE 66 (November 7, 1914), pp. 1, 4; CE 67 (November 14, 1914), pp. 2, 4; CE 68 (November 21, 1914), pp. 2-4; CE 70 (December 12, 1914), p. 2; CE 71 (December 19, 1914), p. 2; CE 72 (December 26, 1914), p. 3; CE 73 (January 9, 1915), p. 1; CE 74 (January 16, 1915), p. 1; CE 75 (January 23, 1915), pp. 1, 4; CE 76 (January 30, 1915), p. 3; CE 77 (February 13, 1915), pp. 1, 3; CE 79 (February 27, 1915), pp. 3-4; WE 81 (March 13, 1915), p. 4; WE 83 (March 27, 1915), pp. 1, 3-4; WE 84 (April 3, 1915), pp. 2, 4; WE 86 (April 17, 1915), p. 4; WE 87 (April 24, 1915), p. 1; WE 88 (May 1, 1915), pp. 2-4; WE 89 (May 8, 1915), pp. 2-4; WE 90 (May 15, 1915), pp. 2-3; WE 91 (May 22, 1915), p. 3; WE 92 (May 29, 1915), p. 1; WE 95 (June 19, 1915), p. 3; WE 96 (June 26, 1915), p. 3; WE 98 (July 10, 1915), p. 3; WE (July 17, 1915), p. 3; WE 100 (July 24, 1915), pp. 2-3; WE 102 (August 7, 1915), pp. 1, 3; WE 104 (August 21, 1915), pp. 1-2, 4; WE 105 (August 28, 1915), p. 1; WE 107 (September 11, 1915), pp. 1, 4; WE 108 (September 18, 1915), p. 4; WE 109 (September 25, 1915), p. 3; WE 112 (October 23, 1915), pp. 2-3; WE 113 (October 30, 1915), p. 3; WE (November 6, 1915), p. 2; WE 115 (November 13, 1915), p. 1; WE 116 (November 20, 1915), p. 1; WE 118 (December 4, 1915), p. 3; WE 120 (December 18, 1915), pp. 1, 3; WE 121 (January 1, 1916), pp. 6-7, 12, 15; WE 122 (January 8, 1916), pp. 7, 10; WE 123 (January 15, 1916), pp. 5, 7-8, 10, 14-15; WE 125 (January 29-February 5, 1916), pp. 3, 5-6, 7, 13-14; WE 126 (February 12, 1916), p. 15; WE 127 (February 19, 1916), pp. 7, 15; WE 128 (February 26, 1916), pp. 6, 8, 15; WE 129 (March 4, 1916), p. 15; WE 130 (March 11, 1916), p. 12; WE 131 (March 18, 1916), pp. 8-10; WE 132 (March 25, 1916), p. 10; WE 133 (April 1, 1916), pp. 8, 15; WE 134 (April 8, 1916), pp. 2, 8; WE 135 (April 15, 1916), pp. 5, 10, 13-14; WE 136 (April 22, 1916), pp. 9, 12; WE 137 (April 29, 1916), pp. 9, 15; WE 138 (May 6, 1916), pp. 11, 14; WE 139 (May 13, 1916), p. 11; WE 140 (May 20, 1916), p. 15; WE 142 (June 3, 1916), pp. 10, 15; WE 143 (June 10, 1916), p. 15; WE 144 (June 17, 1916), pp. 2, 9; WE 145 (June 24, 1916), pp. 3, 15; WE 147 (July 8, 1916), p. 15; WE 149 (July 22, 1916), pp. 3, 12; WE 150 (July 29, 1916), pp. 3, 15; WE 151 (August 5, 1916), pp. 6, 8, 12; WE 152 (August 12, 1916), pp. 3, 7, 9, 13; WE 153 (August 19, 1916), p. 15; WE 154 (August 26, 1916), pp. 6-7, 9, 10-11, 13; WE 155 (September 2, 1916), pp. 5, 9, 12; WE 156 (September 9, 1916), pp. 2, 4, 7, 11; WE 157 (September 16, 1916), p. 15; WE 158 (September 23, 1916), p. 9-11, 14-15; WE 159 (September 30, 1916), pp. 6, 9, 11; WE 160 (October 7-October 14), pp. 10, 12; WE 161 (October 21, 1916), pp. 3, 12; WE 162 (October 28, 1916), pp. 3-4, 6, 9, 12, 14, 16; WE 163 (November 4, 1916), p. 2-3, 6-7; WE 164 (November 11, 1916), pp. 3-4, 6, 9; WE 165 (November 18, 1916), pp. 2, 4, 9, 10; WE 166 (November 25, 1916), p. 2; WE 167 (December 2, 1915), pp. 10, 15; WE 168 (December 9, 1916), p. 3-4, 6, 9, 12; WE 169 (December 16, 1916), p. 5; WE 170 (December 23, 1916), pp. 2, 4, 12; WE 171 (January 6, 1917), pp. 14, 16; WE 172 (January 13, 1917), pp. 4, 7, 11, 16; WE 173 (January 20, 1917), pp. 2, 5, 7, 13-14, 16; WE 174 (January 27, 1917), pp. 3-4, 7; WE 175 (February 3, 1917), pp. 3, 11, 14; WE 176 (February 10, 1917), pp. 5-7, 12, 14; WE 177 (February 17, 1917), pp. 2, 7, 10, 15; WE 178 (February 24, 1917), pp. 7, 15; WE 179 (March 3, 1917), pp. 11, 13, 19; WE 180 (March 10, 1917), pp. 9, 12, 15; WE 181 (March 17, 1917), pp. 2-3, 5, 10-11; WE 182 (March 24, 1917), pp. 10-11, 14; WE 183 (March 31, 1917), pp. 5, 9; WE 184 (April 7, 1917), pp. 2-3; WE 184a (April 10, 1917), p. 6; WE 186 (April 21, 1917), pp. 5, 7, 13; WE 187 (April 28, 1917), p. 5; WE 188 (May 5, 1917), pp. 3, 5, 8, 12; WE 189 (May 12, 1917), pp. 3, 13; WE 190 (May 26, 1917), p. 10; WE 191 (June 2, 1917), pp. 2, 6, 10, 12, 15; WE 192 (June 9, 1917), pp. 7, 13, 15; WE 194 (June 16, 1917), p. 5; WE 195 (June 23, 1917), p. 15; WE 196 (June 30, 1917), p. 6; WE 197 (July 7, 1917), p. 6; WE 198 (July 14, 1917), pp. 7, 12, 16; WE 200 (July 28, 1917), pp. 6, 10, 12, 15; WE 201 (August 1, 1917), WE 202 (August 11, 1917), p. 13; WE 203 (August 18, 1917), pp. 7, 9-10; WE 204 (August 25, 1917), pp. 7, 13, 15; WE 205 (September 1, 1917), p. 6; WE 206 (September 8, 1917), p. 10; WE 207 (September 15, 1917), pp. 4-5, 13; WE 208 (September 29, 1917), pp. 1, 4-5, 12; WE 209 (October 6, 1917), pp. 2, 5, 8-9, 15; WE 210 (October 13, 1917), pp. 5, 9, 13; WE 211 (October 20, 1917), p. 7; WE 212 (October 27, 1917), pp. 2, 4-5, 9, 12; WE 213 (November 3, 1917), pp. 4, 10, 12; WE 214 (November 10, 1917), pp. 6, 10; WE 215 (November 17, 1917), pp. 5, 12; WE 216 (November 24, 1917), p. 2; WE 217 (December 1,

Pentecostals and Suffering and Theodicy

Suffering was understood in different ways within *The Christian/Weekly/Pentecostal Evangel*.

These ways include sickness, disease, famine, demonic oppression, and Christian suffering.

WWI²¹³ and the Spanish flu²¹⁴ are also discussed in significant measure. In one article, entitled ‘The European War’, F. Bartleman refers to the world as ‘suffering’ and ‘dying’ and says of the calamity caused by the war:

Some good will be wrought out of it for some innocent people, in the midst of the awful evil. But the misery will be something awful in its total for multitudes of others. The innocent suffer with the guilty. This seems unavoidable in large measure in the fallen condition. In the aggregate may we not hope that God will ultimately get glory. The nations must be punished.²¹⁵

1917), pp. 3, 9; *WE* 218 (December 8, 1917), pp. 4, 14; *WE* 219 (December 15, 1917), pp. 3, 14; *WE* 220 (December 22, 1917), pp. 5, 10; *WE* 221 (January 5, 1918), p. 4; *WE* 222 (January 12, 1918), pp. 4, 12; *WE* 223 (January 19, 1918), p. 5; *WE* 224 (January 26, 1918), pp. 6, 14; *WE* 225 (February 2, 1918), p. 4; *WE* 226 (February 9, 1918), p. 2; *WE* 227 (February 16, 1918), pp. 3, 9; *WE* 228 (February 23, 1918), pp. 12-13; *WE* 230 (March 9, 1918), p. 1; *WE* 231 (March 16, 1918), p. 10; *WE* 232 (March 23, 1918), pp. 2, 11; *WE* 233 (March 30, 1918), pp. 3, 6-8, 15; *WE* 234-235 (April 6, 1918), pp. 7, 12; *WE* 236-237 (April 20, 1918), pp. 2, 8; *WE* 238-239 (May 4, 1918), p. 12; *WE* 240-241 (May 18, 1918), pp. 2, 13; *CE* 242-243 (June 1, 1918), pp. 5-7; *CE* 244-245 (June 15, 1918), pp. 8, 11, 14; *CE* 246-247 (June 29, 1918), p. 8; *CE* 248-249 (July 27, 1918), pp. 10, 13; *CE* 255 (September 21, 1918), p. 2; *CE* 256-257 (October 5, 1918), p. 8, 10, 13; *CE* 258-259 (October 19, 1918), pp. 3, 6-9; *CE* 260-261 (November 2, 1918), p. 10; *CE* 262-263 (November 16, 1918), pp. 9, 15; *CE* 266-267 (December 14, 1918), pp. 3, 10, 13; *CE* 268-269 (December 28, 1918), p. 12; *CE* 270-271 (January 11, 1919), pp. 10, 12; *CE* 272-273 (January 25, 1919), p. 14; *CE* 274-275 (February 8, 1919), p. 15; *CE* 276-277 (February 22, 1919), pp. 1-2, 10; *CE* 278-279 (March 8, 1919), pp. 8-9; *CE* 282-283 (April 5, 1919), pp. 5, 8, 11; *CE* 284-285 (April 19, 1919), p. 2; *CE* 286-287 (May 3, 1919), p. 13; *CE* 288-289 (May 17, 1919), pp. 1, 8, 11, 12; *CE* 290-291 (May 31, 1919), pp. 5, 7-8; *CE* 292-293 (June 14, 1919), pp. 3, 15; *CE* 294-295 (June 28, 1919), pp. 7-8, 10; *CE* 296-297 (July 12, 1919), p. 2; *CE* 298-299 (July 26, 1919), p. 2; *CE* 302-303 (August 23, 1919), pp. 4-8; *CE* 304-305 (September 6, 1919), pp. 1-2; *CE* 306-307 (September 20, 1919), pp. 7, 9; *CE* 308-309 (October 4, 1919), pp. 2, 4; *PE* 310-311 (October 18, 1919), p. 6; *PE* 314-315 (November 15, 1919), p. 6; *PE* 316-317 (November 29, 1919), pp. 4, 12.

²¹¹ The term ‘theodicy’ is never used explicitly in these publications. However, the early Pentecostals considered suffering often enough for readers to understand how Pentecostals perceived the goodness of God in light of such suffering.

²¹² For a thorough list of places wherein the *Christian/Weekly/Pentecostal Evangel* references the Book of Revelation explicitly, see Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment*, p. 173, n. 107. Not included in this list are references and quotations of Revelation in the 1913 and 1919 issues. For these references, see *CE* (October 18, 1913), p. 7; *CE* 270-271 (January 11, 1919), pp. 2, 5; *CE* 272-273 (January 25, 1919), p. 5; *CE* 274-275 (February 8, 1919), p. 5-6, 8; *CE* 278-279 (March 8, 1919), pp. 2, 16; *CE* 280-281 (March 22, 1919), pp. 4-5; *CE* 282-283 (April 5, 1919), p. 10; *CE* 284-285 (April 19, 1919), p. 2; *CE* 286-287 (May 3, 1919), pp. 1, 6-7; *CE* 288-289 (May 17, 1919), p. 9; *CE* 290-291 (May 31, 1919), p. 8; *CE* 292-293 (June 14, 1919), p. 9; *CE* 294-295 (June 28, 1919), p. 6; *CE* 296-297 (July 12, 1919), pp. 5, 9; *CE* 298-299 (July 26, 1919), p. 2; *CE* 300-301 (August 9, 1919), p. 7; *CE* 302-303 (August 23, 1919), p. 8; *CE* 306-307 (September 20, 1919), p. 9; *CE* 308-309 (October 4, 1919), p. 11; *PE* 310-311 (October 18, 1919), p. 5; *PE* 312-313 (November 1, 1919), p. 22; *PE* 314-315 (November 15, 1919), pp. 8-9, 11; *PE* 320-321 (December 27, 1919), pp. 6, 10.

²¹³ For references to WWI, see *CE* 54 (August 15, 1914), p. 1; *WE* 98 (July 10, 1915), p. 3; *WE* 102 (August 7, 1915), p. 1; *WE* 173 (January 20, 1917), p. 2.

²¹⁴ For references to the Spanish flu, see *CE* 258-259 (October 19, 1918), p. 4; *CE* 266-267 (December 14, 1918), p. 12; *CE* 274-275 (February 8, 1919), pp. 6, 8, 13, 15; *CE* 308-309 (October 4, 1919), p. 11.

²¹⁵ *WE* 98 (July 10, 1915), p. 3.

Bartleman's observation reveals several things that remain consistent throughout the publication in regard to these early Pentecostals' approach toward suffering: (1) the innocent suffer with the guilty, (2) suffering is unavoidable in this life, (3) suffering occurs because the world is fallen, and (4) God will bring justice to account for suffering. Additionally, Bartleman's statement constitutes early Pentecostals' approach to theodicy. It is not theoretical and only goes as far to say that suffering occurs because the world is fallen (due to sin). It seeks no rationalization beyond such. Bartleman ends his article on WWI by suggesting, 'It's all madness. Man cannot save himself. The Prince of Peace must do it.'²¹⁶ Bartleman reveals what is consistent among early Pentecostals and that is the coming of Jesus was the early Pentecostals' great hope during crisis and suffering.²¹⁷

A poem entitled 'Amen' from a 1916 issue further demonstrates that the early Pentecostals' theodicy resisted theoretical explanation. It also goes further in demonstrating that theodicy was built on a simplistic faith in God's eschatological justice to make up for life's suffering:

I cannot say
Beneath the pressure of life's cares
to-day
I joy in these; but I can say
That I had rather walk this rugged way,
If Him it please

I cannot feel
That all is well, When dark'ning clouds
conceal
The shining sun; but then I
know
God lives and loves; and say, since it is
so,
Thy will be done.

I cannot speak
In happy tones; the tear-drops on my
cheek
show I am sad; but I can speak
Of grace to suffer with submission meek
Until made glad.

I do not see
Why God should e'en permit some

²¹⁶ *WE* 98 (July 10, 1915), p. 3.

²¹⁷ See F. Havergal's poem, 'Evening Tears and Morning Songs', in *WE* (January 22, 1916), p. 14, and Dora Ogle's poem, 'He Is Coming Soon', in *WE* 158 (September 23, 1916), p. 14.

things to be,
When He is love; but I can see,
Though often dimly, through the mystery
His hand above.

I do not know
Where falls the seed that I have tried
to sow
With greatest care; but I shall
know
The meaning of each waiting hour below,
Sometime, somewhere!

I do not look
Upon the present, nor in Nature's book,
To read my fate; but I do look
For promised blessings in God's Holy
Book;
And I can wait.
Amen.²¹⁸

This poem displays the fact that Pentecostals had no theoretical explanation for suffering, but it also displays their admittance of not being able to obtain these explanations in this life. Yet, they were not looking for them. They entrusted their fate to God in simplistic faith and took a posture of patience in suffering until the time when God would make things right.

Pertaining to Christian suffering, *The Christian/Weekly/Pentecostal Evangel* understood it as inevitable yet beneficial. The closer one was to the Lord, the more suffering they would experience. Yet, this suffering would make them more like Jesus. Mrs. A.R. Flower posits:

The more real our union becomes with Jesus, the more we shall know suffering, for he was a man of sorrow, and acquainted with grief. There is always a lack somewhere in those lives that have suffered little. You miss the mellowness, the ripeness, the fragrance; this only comes into the lives of those who have known the power of his consolation, reserved for those who suffer with him. Accept then the cross he permits with a heart of thankfulness. Glory unspeakable lies beyond.²¹⁹

Additionally, an article entitled 'In the Furnace' says:

The joy in His service is such that any pain entailed is an honor; it brings us a little bit nearer understanding what He suffered for us ... That is why you who never suffer for Him are wrong. It seems hard to us sometimes that on top of our difficulties and pain we should have

²¹⁸ *WE* 145 (June 24, 1916), p. 14.

²¹⁹ *WE* 211 (October 20, 1917), p. 7. Mrs. Flower's observation is consistent with an article by Mary E. Thomas entitled 'Testing Times' wherein Mary discusses the trials and hardships that come to a believer who receives Spirit baptism. See *WE* 89 (May 8, 1915), p. 3.

the ‘hardship’ of being hampered for opportunity, but you are lacking to Him more than us. The cost to us is little, but what was it to Jesus?²²⁰

These above quotes suggest that the early Pentecostals saw Christian suffering as meaningful and transformational – necessary if one is to know Christ with profound depth.²²¹

Suffering and Theodicy in Revelation

The Christian/Weekly/Pentecostal Evangel offers a dispensational²²² reading of the Book of Revelation from a historicist²²³ and futurist perspective.²²⁴ It often integrates the judgments of Revelation with what was taking place in the Pentecostals’ own day-and-age, particularly WWI and the Spanish flu.²²⁵ In an article from October 1919, when the Spanish flu was at its height, a missionary to India by the name of Alfred O. Lewer says, ‘I mean the influenza, well it has come out here to this land, and thousands have died (of course the people as usual say that it is a foreign sickness come from the foreigner). But to me it seems as if it is Rev. 6.7-8.’²²⁶ Despite the suffering and death caused by the plague (and what Lewer assumed was the fourth seal judgment), the missionary continued to pray for the sick and ‘tell them of Jesus’. This commitment to preaching demonstrates the Pentecostal spirit of doing gospel work when apocalyptic tensions were high and when suffering was great. It also reveals that Pentecostals approached the problem of suffering practically. In another article entitled ‘What Will the Harvest Be’, F. Bartleman uses Revelation 6 to describe WWI and its effect:

This war is not a holy war. It is the result of pride, greed, jealousy, hatred, hypocrisy, etc. The men or set of kings, leaders, war lords, capitalists, politicians, diplomats, manufacturers, bankers, etc. who are responsible for the present war, with its awful suffering for men, women and children, its effect on humanity in the hindering of the Gospel, the sending of men to hell, etc., will have as a hot place in the regions of the damned as old Nero or any of the demons will ever have. The crime of the ages is now being perpetrated upon us ... It

²²⁰ *WE* 163 (November 4, 1916), p. 7.

²²¹ The meaningfulness of suffering is expressed in a parable offered by B.E. Newcome entitled the ‘The Story of the Bamboo’. See *CE* (August 9, 1913), p. 7.

²²² For examples of dispensational and historicist readings of Revelation, see *WE* 130 (March 11, 1916), p. 7; *WE* 240-241 (May 18, 1918), p. 9; *CE* 242-243 (June 1, 1918), p. 5; *CE* 300-301 (August 9, 1919), p. 7. The Scofield Bible was significant in influencing dispensational readings of Revelation, as can be seen in the number of advertisements for the Scofield Reference Bible throughout the publication. For example, see the full page ad for the Scofield Reference Bible in *PE* 312-313 (November 1, 1919), p. 31. For an outline that provides a Pentecostal reading of Revelation, see *WE* 196 (June 30, 1917), p. 4.

²²³ *The Christian/Weekly/Pentecostal Evangel* often suggests that the church was in the Laodicean Age of Revelation 3. See *CE* 70 (December 12, 1914), p. 1; *WE* 134 (April 8, 1916), p. 7.

²²⁴ *CE* 70 (December 12, 1914), p. 1.

²²⁵ *WE* 98 (July 10, 1915), p. 3.

²²⁶ *CE* 308-309 (October 4, 1919), p. 11.

really seems as though the horses of Rev. 6, war, famine, pestilence and death, were already going forth, so great is the magnitude and horror of this conflict.²²⁷

In light of the various forms of suffering taking place in the world, *The Christian/Weekly/Pentecostal Evangel* used Revelation as instruction to guide its readers. Revelation 7.14-17 is used as a text to call for non-resistance in light of the war, exhorting Pentecostals to be like the martyrs from Revelation:

Of course I have not included the many religious persecutions which down the ages have been the inevitable accompaniment of every new and powerful movement; and yet these very persecutions have set the seal of God's approval in the most striking way on the doctrine of Christian non-resistance. Those early non-resisters, mind you, were the same martyrs, of whom, in these days of *inherited* religion, the boast is so often heard, that 'their blood was the seed of the church!' Their sublime endurance under the most exquisite sufferings should not only draw tears from stones, but *silence forever our contemptible excuse for crawling cowardice!*²²⁸

Moreover, the messages to the seven churches in Revelation 2-3 are used as texts to exhort early Pentecostals to overcome suffering²²⁹ and Revelation 14 is used to encourage Pentecostals not to fear death, but to follow the Lamb in his suffering and overcome triumphantly, even in death.²³⁰

The Christian/Weekly/Pentecostal Evangel also engages with the promise of the heavenly city, hoping in the coming of Christ to make right the suffering of their day. This is seen within a song entitled 'When the Beautiful Gates Will Unfold' by William Burton McCafferty, which uses symbols from Revelation to inspire hope in God's eschatological justice:

I am thinking today of that city so fair,
Of whose glory the prophets have told,
Where together we'll dwell in those mansions so bright,
When the beautiful gates shall unfold.

Chorus:

Soon the domes of that city light we shall see,
And its splendor eternal behold.
There in fellowship sweet, we each other shall greet,
When the beautiful gates shall unfold.

O that city so fair I am longing to see,
And to travel the streets of pure gold,
There to sing with the ransomed, the victor's sweet song,
When the beautiful gates shall unfold.

²²⁷ *WE* 102 (August 7, 1915), p. 1.

²²⁸ *WE* 187 (April 28, 1917), p. 5.

²²⁹ *WE* 71 (December 19, 1914), p. 3; *WE* 116 (November 20, 1915), p. 1; *WE* 124 (January 22, 1916), p. 6; *WE* 142 (June 3, 1916), p. 9.

²³⁰ *WE* 71 (December 19, 1914), p. 3; *WE* 117 (November 27, 1915), p. 2.

In that home of the blest, many lov'd ones will be,
With the saints and the prophets of old,
And the martyrs we'll see who have 'suffered with Him,'
When the beautiful gates shall unfold.

There no sighing is heard, for now sorrow known,
And no longer hearts sad and cold;
We shall enter that bliss, by the blood of the Lamb,
When the beautiful gates shall unfold.²³¹

This song reveals that *The Christian/Weekly/Pentecostal Evangel* used Revelation as a text to provide hope²³² amidst global suffering and to encourage Pentecostals to overcome, for suffering, even their own suffering, would end in bliss.

Summary

The Christian/Weekly/Pentecostal Evangel spoke about suffering in various ways which included the suffering taking place under WWI and the Spanish flu. In one article, F. Bartleman reveals a Pentecostal approach to suffering: (1) the innocent suffer with the fallen, (2) suffering is unavoidable in this life, (3) suffering occurs because the world is fallen, and (4) God will bring justice to account for suffering. This is as far as *The Christian/Weekly/Pentecostal Evangel* goes in explaining suffering, revealing that their approach to theodicy is not rationalistic; it does not offer a theodicy in the traditional sense. However, early Pentecostals were not looking to do this. They entrusted their fate to God, remained patient in suffering, and hoped in God to make things right through his coming justice. They believed that suffering, particularly their own suffering, could be meaningful and transformational and it would lead to knowing Christ more profoundly.

The Christian/Weekly/Pentecostal Evangel uses the Book of Revelation to engage with suffering and theodicy. It integrates the judgments in Revelation 6 into what was taking place in their own day, namely through WWI and the Spanish flu, demonstrating that Pentecostals did gospel work while apocalyptic tensions were high. This reveals that their approach to theodicy was more practical than traditional. *The Christian/Weekly/Pentecostal Evangel* also uses the Book of Revelation to give instructions to its readers in order to guide them in their times of suffering. It uses Rev. 7.14-17 as a call for non-resistance, it encourages its readers not to fear death using Revelation 14, and Revelation 2-3 (the messages to the seven churches) is used to call early Pentecostals to overcome their own suffering. Finally, imagery and symbols from

²³¹ *WE* 203 (August 18, 1917), p. 9.

²³² See *WE* 162 (October 28, 1916), p. 9, wherein *The Christian/Weekly/Pentecostal Evangel* posits that the coming of Christ is the message of Revelation and believers are to hope in such message.

Revelation are used in song to provide hope in Christ's coming and eschatological justice amidst global suffering and Christian persecution.

Summary of the Finished Work Stream

After surveying the publications within the Finished Work stream, eight essential conclusions emerge:

First, Pentecostals differentiated between various forms of suffering. These forms of suffering include the effects of WWI, the Spanish flu, sickness, famine, demonic oppression, and Christian suffering that the Pentecostal movement experienced from preaching the gospel.

Second, these early Pentecostals believed that Spirit baptism is a baptism of suffering. This suffering, namely persecution, brings believers into an intimate fellowship with Christ that cannot be experienced otherwise.

Third, early Pentecostals offer no real theodicy in the traditional sense, nor do they use the Apocalypse to offer such an explanation. F. Bartleman posits the closest thing to a Pentecostal approach to suffering and theodicy: (1) the innocent suffer with the fallen; (2) suffering is unavoidable in this life, (3) suffering occurs because the world is fallen, and (4) God will bring justice to account for suffering. Bartleman's approach resists a rationalistic explanation. Instead, it exhorts Pentecostals to entrust their fate to God, remain patient in suffering, and hope in God to make things right through his coming justice.

Fourth, early Pentecostals are observed offering a practical theodicy. They send out missionaries, raise money for famine relief, and are unrelenting in praying for the sick and taking care of orphans.

Fifth, Revelation 2-3 emerges as the dominant text the Pentecostals use in their consideration of suffering. The Pentecostals use these texts to call Pentecostals to overcome their various challenges by relating their own suffering to the suffering experienced by the seven churches. They saw themselves in company with the seven churches and considered Jesus' call for the seven churches to overcome a call for themselves.

Sixth, Pentecostals maintained a staunch conviction of non-resistance in the face of WWI. Revelation 7.14-17 is used by the Pentecostals to exhort readers to suffer like the martyrs in Revelation instead of taking up arms.

Seventh, Revelation 19-22 emerges as an important text. Pentecostals used it to show that suffering has meaning and that it can be a formative process for the believer. They also used it to suggest that ultimate hope and relief from suffering is found in Christ's return and in the forthcoming new heaven and new earth wherein Christ's eschatological justice would be experienced.

Eighth, though dispensational and futurist readings of Revelation were dominant within Finished Work interpretations, there are times when Revelation is read in non-dispensational ways as it pertains to suffering and theodicy, as noted in how they treated Revelation 2-3, Rev. 7.14-17, and Revelation 19-22.²³³

3.4 Conclusion

A survey of both Wesleyan-Holiness and Finished Work publications on suffering and theodicy in the Apocalypse reveals that these two traditions were strikingly similar in their understanding of such. While these two traditions do indeed express their differences on other matters, such as healing and eschatology,²³⁴ they align quite seamlessly here. Both traditions recognize that suffering has various forms and that there is also suffering unique to the Christian that their movement experienced for preaching the gospel. All suffering considered, including the suffering caused by WWI and the Spanish flu pandemic, neither tradition ever went beyond the explanation that suffering was the result of fallen humankind and sin. The Pentecostals' efforts to explain suffering were not theoretical, but practical. Both traditions display practical theodicy through: (1) the efforts of missionaries who went to foreign lands, (2) the care of orphans, (3) constant prayer for the sick, and (4) relentless gospel work that always took place in the face of deep, unexplained suffering.

Furthermore, both streams relied heavily on Revelation 2-3 and the messages of the seven churches in Revelation. They considered themselves part of this company and heard Jesus' call for the seven churches to overcome as a call for themselves. Though they would suffer with these churches, they would share the same promises Christ made to them as overcomers, which was reigning with Christ in the eschaton.

²³³ Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment*, p. 190, recognizes interpretive space amongst Finished Work readings that 'allowed for interpretations that compared Revelation to economic hardship, World War I, and the Influenza Epidemic'.

²³⁴ See Archer, '*I Was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day*', p. 117.

Moreover, both traditions attributed benefits to suffering. There was unanimous consensus that if Christ did not remove the suffering, the believer could grow closer to the Lord in their suffering and come to discover Christ in a more intimate way. Hence, suffering was at times considered a formative experience, though such a consideration was never an attempt at making rational sense of the problem of suffering and evil.

Additionally, Pentecostals believed that God sees the world's suffering and that he hears the cry of those who suffer unjustly. Both traditions prioritized Revelation 19-22 and read it as a text which promises God's final eschatological justice as a solution for their own unique suffering, as well as the world's suffering. This justice would be realized at the coming of Christ and would carry on into the marriage supper of the Lamb and into the new heaven and new earth.

Finally, both the Wesleyan-Holiness and Finished Work stream vary in the degree in which they read Revelation dispensationally.²³⁵ In spite of where each publication falls on the interpretive continuum, dispensationalism is not always in control of early Pentecostal readings.²³⁶ Important texts like Revelation 2-3, Rev. 6.9-11, Rev. 7.14-17, and Revelation 19-22 are read in ways that exceed dispensationalism, particularly in the areas of suffering and theodicy.

Hearing the voices of these early Pentecostal traditions and retrieving their understanding of suffering and theodicy in the Apocalypse enables readers to explore the Apocalypse as an informative text that can direct Pentecostal orthodoxy, orthopraxy, and orthopathy in regard to suffering, especially to widespread war, global famine, pandemic, and Christian persecution. Seeing that both Pentecostal traditions found rich theological insight pertaining to suffering and theodicy in the Apocalypse, it can be suggested that a narrative reading of the Apocalypse will complement such insight.

In the next chapter, I shall provide this narrative reading of the Apocalypse, focusing on texts that engage suffering and theodicy explicitly, and the implicit texts that are indispensable for this reading.

²³⁵ Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment*, p. 190, suggests the early Pentecostal publications have 'a scaling interpretive continuum' for reading Revelation dispensationally. '*The Apostolic Faith* scaled far away from dispensational readings. *The Bridegroom's Messenger*, *The Latter Rain Evangel*, and *The Church of God Evangel* stood near the center of the scale ... *The Pentecostal Holiness Advocate* and *The Christian Weekly Evangel* scaled far toward the dispensational side.'

²³⁶ See Archer, '*I Was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day*', pp. 117-18.

NARRATIVE/LITERARY ANALYSIS: SUFFERING AND THEODICY IN THE APOCALYPSE

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will provide a narrative reading of the Apocalypse, focusing on texts that engage suffering and theodicy. I will focus on suffering from the standpoint of human suffering, particularly suffering experienced by those faithful to Jesus. I will focus on theodicy by examining texts related to themes associated with theodicy.¹ In doing so, I will offer a close reading of the narrative that pays attention to the elements of the story, discourse, and the formation of the implied hearers. My close reading will follow the structure of the Apocalypse which is the prologue, the four main divisions, and the epilogue. After each section, I will offer various implications which explain how the reoccurring themes of suffering and theodicy emerge continuously, uniting the entire narrative.

4.2 Structure

The precise structure of the Apocalypse² has various possibilities due to its complex literary composition.³ One literary peculiarity emerges, however, that seems to reveal a narrative

¹ Because the entire narrative of Revelation pertains to suffering, many texts that do not explicitly speak of suffering are, nonetheless, related to suffering. In this narrative reading, I will include these peripheral texts on suffering so the explicit texts on suffering can be fully heard.

² Lioy, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 91, notes that the literary structure suggests that the purpose of the Book of Revelation is to show that God, through Jesus, will defeat cosmic evil, condemn the evil doer, vindicate the righteous, fulfill his promises, and accomplish his purpose in history.

³ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 2, contends that the Apocalypse is perhaps the most literarily complex volume in the entire NT. Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, p. 1, notes the complexity of the narrative while at the same time suggesting the Apocalypse remains one of the most unified works in the NT. Leithart notes, 'For all its complexity and diversity, it is a unified text with a single overall plot, an internally coherent pattern of images, a worldview of symbols and beliefs and teachings and demands'. See P.J. Leithart, *Revelation 1-11*, vol. 1 (ITC; New York, NY: Bloomsbury, 2018), p. 4. Aune also notes the Apocalypse is complex and even goes so far to say that it is more

structure.⁴ This is the phrase ἐν πνεύματι upon which the entirety of the Apocalypse hinges. This phrase is a structural marker which takes the hearers through the visions, while at the same time uniting the Apocalypse around the work of the Spirit. The four ἐν πνεύματι phrases are enveloped by a prologue and an epilogue. The structure of the Apocalypse emerges as follows:

I. Prologue (1.1-8)

II. ἐν πνεύματι – On Patmos on the Lord’s Day (1.9 – 3.22)

III. ἐν πνεύματι – In Heaven (4.1 – 16.21)

IV. ἐν πνεύματι – In the Wilderness (17.1 – 21.8)

V. ἐν πνεύματι – A Great, High Mountain: New Jerusalem (21.9 – 22.5)

VI. Epilogue (22.6-21)⁵

complex than nearly every other apocalypse. The complexity suggests that it was written over a period of years, versus days, weeks, or months. See D.E. Aune, *Revelation 1-5* (WBC 52a: Dallas, TX: Word, 1994), p. xci. See also M.C. Tenney, *Interpreting Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), p. 32.

⁴ Smalley notes that no scholarly consensus about the structure of the Apocalypse exists, yet a narrative approach to the book is ‘entirely legitimate’ as long as it takes into consideration the book’s theology and interpretation. See S.S. Smalley, *The Revelation to John: A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), p. 19.

⁵ Following this structure is in keeping with the work of other Pentecostal scholars. See Waddell, *The Spirit of the Book of Revelation*, p. 138; Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, pp. 2-8; R. Herms, ‘Invoking the Spirit and Narrative Intent of John’s Apocalypse’, in Kevin L. Spawn and Archie T. Wright (eds.), *Spirit and Scripture: Exploring a Pneumatic Hermeneutic* (London: T&T Clark, 2012), pp. 106-108; Archer, ‘*I Was in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day*’, p. 119; Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment*, pp. 194-95. Others who maintain that ἐν πνεύματι plays a key structural role in Revelation include F.D. Mazzaferri, *The Genre of the Book of Revelation from a Source-Critical Perspective* (New York, NY: de Gruyter, 1989), pp. 302-303; Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, p. 3; J.R. Michaels, *Revelation* (IVPNTC; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), p. 26; W.R. Kempson, ‘Theology in the Revelation of John’ (PhD dissertation, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1982), pp. 83-86, 103-12. G.E. Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972), pp. 14-17, proposes a similar structure based on ‘come and see’, as noted by Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment*, p. 195, n. 1. Tenney, *Interpreting Revelation*, p. 32, suggests that one must examine the Apocalypse’s ‘joints’ to understand how the author put it together, and suggests the ἐν πνεύματι phrases are such ‘joints’. In 1994, C.R. Smith examined a number of ways the Apocalypse has been thought to be structured by serious Apocalypse scholars. He concludes that the ἐν πνεύματι phrases serve as the ‘broad’ outline for the Apocalypse and that this outline does not conflict with the proposed structures of A. Yarbro Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1976), pp. 13-29, and Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World*, pp. 175-76. See C.R. Smith, ‘The Structure of the Book of Revelation in Light of Apocalyptic Literary Conventions’, *NovT* 36.4 (1994), pp. 373-93. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, p. c, offers a structure similar to the ἐν πνεύματι phrases, though it varies because he proposes two main sections, 1.9-3:22 and 4.1-22.9, which are framed by the prologue (1.1-8) and the epilogue (22.6-21). Tõniste acknowledges the ἐν πνεύματι structure, however, he varies it slightly by designating 19.11-21.8 as its own section, even though it does not begin with ἐν πνεύματι. See K. Tõniste, *The Ending of the Canon: A Canonical and Intertextual Reading of Revelation 21-22* (LNTS 526; New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2016), pp. 53-55. Tõniste concludes that the author refrained from using ἐν πνεύματι in 19.11-21.8 because this section concludes the vision of Babylon’s fall (Revelation 17-18) and the judgment introduced in 4.1. However, Tõniste’s conclusion does not particularly explain why the author of Revelation could not have used ἐν πνεύματι, especially in a text that depends on it for key transitions. In further support of isolating 19.11-21.8 as its own section, Tõniste suggests that the use of γέγονεν/γέγοναν in 16.17 and 21.6 marks the end of a sequence and, thereby, concludes the judgments and suggests

While there are other structural markers and literary devices within the Apocalypse that attest to its literary sophistication,⁶ the ἐν πνεύματι structural marker would be apparent to initial hearers⁷ as a transition into new, main sections of the text.⁸ This suggests that the Spirit is a central component of the message that is offered to God's suffering people.

4.3 Literary Genre

As hearers encounter the text, they are met immediately with the word Ἀποκάλυψις ('apocalypse' or 'revelation') (1.1). While it is possible that this indicates the genre of the book,⁹ the Apocalypse resists a strict category of genre due to its eclectic nature and unconventional

the beginning of a new scene. He cites Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, p. 7, to support this notion. See Töniste, *The Ending of the Canon*, p. 53, n. 38. Yet, Bauckham still maintains four main sections and not a fifth. See Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, p. 3. Contra to the notion that ἐν πνεύματι is a key structural feature is P. Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), p. 96, who says, 'Is the fact that the words "in the spirit" recur 4 times in the 22 chapters of a prophecy, a truly determining one?' C. Koester suggests that the ἐν πνεύματι phrases are significant though they are better understood as a 'key supportive role' than a 'dominant structural marker'. See C.R. Koester, 'Continuing the Dialogue on Interpretation of Revelation: Responses and Reflections', *JPT* 24 (2015), p. 40. See M. Kuykendall, 'The Twelve Visions of John: Another Attempt at Structuring the Book of Revelation', *JETS* 60.3 (2017), pp. 534-42, for various external and internal approaches to structuring Revelation, of which Kuykendall includes the ἐν πνεύματι structure amongst the 'extensive possibilities'.

⁶ See Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, pp. 2-8.

⁷ Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, pp. 1-2, suggests three essences of hearing the Apocalypse: (1) that which is obvious and would be recognized upon a 'first' or initial hearing of the text, (2) that which would not likely be recognized upon an initial hearing and recognized later in a rereading, and (3) hidden meaning that could only be seen through diligent and meticulous readings. Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 2, notes that the ἐν πνεύματι structure would be heard upon an initial hearing.

⁸ Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment*, p. 195, points out that each ἐν πνεύματι brings a change in setting. This creates 'a sense of unity' in the text around the Spirit.

⁹ G. Linton challenges the notion that the term Ἀποκάλυψις is being used by the author of the Apocalypse to indicate the genre of the narrative. See G. Linton, 'Reading the Apocalypse as an Apocalypse', in E.H. Lovering Jr. (ed.), *SBL Seminar Papers 1991* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1991), pp. 161-86. Archer, *I Was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day*, p. 121, suggests that the use of Ἀποκάλυψις is not an indication of genre because the author does not use the word again. Thompson notes that the attempt at literary classification is a modern one. See L.L. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire* (New York, NY: Oxford Press, 1990), p. 18. One difficulty that arises concerning Revelation's designation as a bona fide apocalypse is deciding the definition of what 'apocalyptic' is. John J. Collins' definition of apocalyptic is, 'a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world'. This definition has won the wide support of scholars. See J.J. Collins, 'Towards the Morphology of a Genre: Introduction', *Semeia* 14 (1979), p. 9. Acceptance of Collins' definition has not been without contest. See J.J. Collins, 'What is Apocalyptic Literature?', in J.J. Collins (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Apocalyptic Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 1-16, for a fuller examination.

apocalypticism.¹⁰ Beyond its apocalyptic¹¹ elements,¹² the Apocalypse contains prophetic (1.3; 22.7, 10, 18, 19)¹³ and epistolary¹⁴ characteristics. Moreover, the Apocalypse is an intertext owing to its profuse interaction with the OT.¹⁵ Furthermore, it defies exact literary boundaries. It could be thought of as a ‘hybrid’¹⁶ genre – an apocalyptic, prophetic, epistolary document that

¹⁰ While the Apocalypse seems to fit Collins’ definition of apocalyptic, there are differences between the Apocalypse and other familiar apocalypses, a few of them being: (1) John ascribes his name to the apocalypse, (2) it does not present itself as an ancient prophecy of a dead hero, (3) there is more symbolism in the Apocalypse than other apocalypses, (4) the Apocalypse is not a closed book but rather an open book, (5) the Apocalypse never quotes *directly* from the OT, and (6) the Apocalypse is placed into the framework of a letter. See J.K. Newton, *The Revelation Worldview: Apocalyptic Thinking in a Postmodern World* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2015), chap. 2, Kindle; Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, pp. 15-16; P. Patterson, *Revelation* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2012), p. 25.

¹¹ Liroy, *The Book of Revelation*, pp. 39-43, suggests that Revelation stands in the tradition of apocalyptic literature and maintains unique apocalyptic characteristics such as dualism (dualism in the sense that the universe is made up of good and evil), significant attention to the ‘terminus of history’, bizarre visions, otherworldly symbols such as diverse creatures, and numerology.

¹² For a fuller examination of apocalyptic elements, see Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World*, p. 23, who notes, ‘Revelation employs stock images, conventional *topoi* or places, scriptural figures, and proofs, as well as literary techniques developed in apocalyptic literature’. See also T. Longman III, *Revelation Through Old Testament Eyes: A Background and Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic), pp. 17-19.

¹³ Koester notes that the superscription (1.1-3) and the oracle (1.7) place Revelation within the tradition of biblical prophecy. See C.R. Koester, *Revelation: Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (ABYC; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), p. 108. Fanning believes that prophecy is ‘most central’ to what John has written. He suggests this for three reasons: (1) the author calls his work a prophecy five times, (2) the author notes that his commission is to prophesy (10.11), and (3) the author connects his work to the OT prophets by using explicit statements (10.7; 11.18; 22.6, 9), by phrasing his ‘letters’ to the churches as oracles, and by ‘modeling’ his own commission like unto Ezekiel’s (10.8-11). See B.M. Fanning, *Revelation* (ZECNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2020), p. 31.

¹⁴ Charles, *The Revelation of St. John*, p. 8, contends that the entire Apocalypse, from 1.4 to the close, is an epistle. Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, pp. 14-15, agrees and posits that this feature even has interpretive significance. For instance, because each church’s situation was significant/unique, the hearers would understand Revelation from seven different perspectives, though sharing one common perspective. Contra Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, p. lxxiii, who suggests that the claim the entire Apocalypse is an epistle is made without analysis of the text.

¹⁵ For a fuller discussion on Revelation’s intertextuality and its relationship with OT texts, see S. Moyise, *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation* (JSNTSup 115; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995); J-P. Ruiz, *Ezekiel in the Apocalypse: The Transformation of Prophetic Language in Revelation 16,17-19,10* (EUSST 376; Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1989); G.K. Beale, *The Use of Daniel in Jewish Apocalyptic Literature and in the Revelation of St. John* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984). M. Fletcher engages U. Eco, *The Name of the Rose* (London, England: Vintage, 2004), p. 492, to portray Revelation’s process of using ‘texts of the past’. She says, ‘Of all New Testament (NT) books, this sense of “already encountered” is most striking when reading Revelation, with OT texts infusing it at all levels’. See M. Fletcher, *Reading Revelation as Pastiche: Imitating the Past* (LNTS 571; New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2017), p. 1.

¹⁶ M.J. Gorman, *Reading Revelation Responsibly: Uncivil Worship and Witness: Following the Lamb into the New Creation* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011), pp. 13, 29, uses the term ‘hybrid’ genre and further explains it as ‘a mixed breed’. He goes so far to say that John was writing as a poet, prophet, visionary, and theologian. Töniste, *The Ending of the Canon*, p. 49, notes that Revelation is concerned with ‘issues of theodicy and justice’, and points out that this has affected how some scholars have considered the genre, causing them to deliberate if Revelation might include Jewish sapiential tradition.

circulated around the seven churches of Asia.¹⁷ Such a genre would prepare the hearers for the unusual and bewildering experience they will encounter in the text,¹⁸ even the symbols¹⁹ and imagery within its visions.²⁰

4.4 Prologue (1.1-8)

As the hearers enter the prologue, they discover that it is rife with pertinent information which prepares them for the chaotic world of the Apocalypse.²¹ As it pertains to suffering and theodicy,

¹⁷ Gorman, *Reading Revelation Responsibly*, p. 13, notes that most scholars agree that Revelation is a combination of an apocalypse, prophecy, and letter. Gorman is consistent with Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, p. 2. See also Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment*, pp. 196-97; Patterson, *Revelation*, p. 25; G. Osborne, *Revelation* (BECNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), p. 12. Koester, *Revelation*, pp. 104-12 acknowledges this combination of genres by giving three distinct sub-sections to his section entitled 'genre': (1) apocalypse, (2) prophecy, and (3) letter. Beale varies slightly suggesting that apocalyptic is an 'intensification' of prophecy and that there is already too much distinction that is drawn between prophecy and apocalypse. See G.K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), p. 37.

¹⁸ Owing to the genre, J.L. Blevins, 'Revelation 1-3', *RevExp* 87 (1990), p. 615, notes that reading Revelation requires the reader to use their senses: sight, hearing, and feeling. 'Thus one cannot come to a text in Revelation as one would in Mark or Romans.' Because of this, Blevins argues, that John offers his visions in 'dramatic form'.

¹⁹ Barr, 'Doing Violence', pp. 106-07, notes that the visions of the Apocalypse are particularly violent, and this violence extends to the conquest of evil in a bloody, violent, 'immoral extreme'. Barr notes that, while this may be the case, the visions are set in contrast to the 'innocent suffering of Jesus and those who hold the testimony of Jesus'. Thus, the visions portray a cosmic battle between good and evil, 'a war only won through suffering'.

²⁰ V.S. Poythress, 'Genre and Hermeneutics in Rev. 20:1-6', *JETS* 36.1 (1993), p. 51-52, points out that literalistic interpreters differ, one-to-the-next, on the 'rigidity' of their literalism. One rule which literalistic interpreters employ is 'literal if possible'. Poythress notes that these interpreters may fare well using this rule as a 'first approximation' in other NT narratives. However, the deployment of this rule in the Apocalypse mistreats the Apocalypse by failing to recognize its apocalyptic genre in which visionary and symbolic language are germane and the narrative's 'natural form'.

²¹ The prologue is the first place the hearers encounter Ἀποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ('the apocalypse of Jesus Christ'). Perhaps the hearers would understand this phrase to mean the Apocalypse is 'about' Jesus Christ. Or, perhaps, they would understand this phrase to mean that the Apocalypse is 'from' Jesus Christ. The hearers may not draw a hard-and-fast line between the two possibilities. The genitive construction resists the sense of either/or and maintains the sense of both/and. Most commentators argue for a subjective genitive construction ('from' Jesus Christ). See J. Fekkes III, *Isaiah and the Prophetic Traditions in the Book of Revelation: Visionary Anecdotes and Their Development* (JSNTSup 93; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), p. 106; Koester, *Revelation*, p. 211; Longman, *Revelation*, p. 33. Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 87, is decidedly against choosing between 'from' or 'about', suggesting that choosing is 'advocating a false choice'. Thus, the Apocalypse 'from' Jesus Christ is 'about' Jesus Christ and the Apocalypse 'about' Jesus Christ is 'from' Jesus Christ. See also J.L. Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, p. 62. Moreover, the hearers learn that the vision has come through a precise sequence of individuals within the Apocalypse: Jesus Christ, God, 'his' angel, John, and ends with God's servants receiving it. Though Jesus Christ is mentioned first, the hearers would likely understand the order of the sequence to be God to Jesus Christ to 'his' angel to John to 'his' servants. See Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment*, p. 197. At this point, hearers would notice the first evidence of God and Christ working together within the book. See Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 52. John, who is presented as the author of Revelation, appears to have been well-known as a prophetic leader amongst the community of the Apocalypse. There is a strong possibility that this is John the Elder who wrote the other Johannine documents. See Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 89; Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 28. For arguments against John the Elder being the author of the Apocalypse see, A. Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1984), pp. 25-53. Collins sees good reason to doubt the

there are three things the hearers encounter that would be relevant in vv. 1-2: First, the possibility of urgency in the message as the contents within δεῖ γενέσθαι ἐν τάχει ('must soon take place').²² Second, the first use of μαρτυρέω ('witness'). This term is introduced from the outset as John is described as one who ἐμαρτύρησεν ('bore witness')²³ to the word of God and to the μαρτυρίαν ('testimony')²⁴ of Jesus Christ and all that he saw (1.2).

opinions of Justin Martyr and Irenaeus, both of whom say John the Apostle wrote the Apocalypse. She concludes that, though it cannot be known for sure who the 'John' of the Apocalypse is, it is clear 'John' was a prophet delivering a message from God. There are a few interpretive options for what τοῖς δούλοις ('servants') could be understood to mean in 1.1. It could refer to Christian prophets, as δούλους is used in 10.7. However, that it exclusively refers to prophets in 1.1 is unlikely because in 10.7 the accusative δούλους is in simple apposition with the accusative τοὺς προφήτας, clarifying what δούλους should mean in this particular passage. The dative δούλοις is used in 11.18 where τοῖς προφήταις is found in apposition to it, clarifying, again, the servants refer to τοῖς προφήταις. Another place where δούλος is found in connection with the role of prophet is in 15.3 where Moses is referred to as the τοῦ δούλου τοῦ θεοῦ ('servant of God'). Yet, in other places δούλους stands on its own without any specification of precise connection to a prophet, such as in 19.4 where Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 930, suggests that the δούλους are the 'saints', 'those fearing the Lord', and 'the great and the small'. Being the case, then, it is possible that the τοῖς δούλοις in 1.1 refers to all of God's people in the Apocalypse, to which Johnson notes that the title δούλους is a 'beautiful title of honor'. See A.F. Johnson, 'Revelation', in F.E. Gaebelein (ed.), *Hebrews Through Revelation* (EBC 12; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981), p. 417. Considering the possibilities, a middle ground can be established with which Thomas seems to side. Because the title is used of God's people in general, it can be applied to the entire community of hearers in the Apocalypse. But, since the word is used in relation to prophets and the prophetic, it must be minded that these communities are prophetic. See Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 88.

²² Koester, *Revelation*, p. 212, thinks it is possible that this phrase might create some sense of expectation that God might soon vindicate his people and defeat evil. He makes this observation by noting the various uses of ἐν τάχει (1.1; 22.6) and ταχύς (2.16; 3.11; 11.14; 22.7, 12, 20) coupled with the use of ἐγγύς (1.3; 22.10). Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 185, also makes a connection. He draws a parallel between ἐν τάχει in 1.1 and ἐγγύς in 1.3 to Daniel 2, positing the notion that this language refers to the imminent future which inaugurates the kingdom, made possible through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

²³ The concept of μάρτυς ('witness') language comes from the court of law. See Koester, *Revelation*, pp. 212-13. Witnesses often testified at the expense of their own lives. See Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, p. 63. It is unlikely that hearers would automatically associate μάρτυς with a person who is killed because of their testimony. See B. Witherington III, *Revelation*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 66-67. Nevertheless, the possibility existed for a witness to suffer. Given that the Johannine community was familiar with John's experience on Patmos, it not hard to suspect that the community would have associated John's witness with suffering. This notion is supported by A. Trites, 'Μάρτυς and Martyrdom in the Apocalypse: A Semantic Study', *NovT* 15 (1973), pp. 72-80, who suggests that, diachronically, μάρτυς could mean one of three things in the Apocalypse: (1) a witness in a court of law with no expectation for death, (2) one who testified of their faith in court and suffered the penalty of death as the result, or (3) death that comes from witness.

²⁴ In chapter one, witness language is used twice in 1.2 and again in 1.5 where Jesus is described as ὁ μάρτυς, ὁ πιστός ('the faithful witness').

Third, John's greeting to the 'seven' prophetic communities in Asia Minor (v. 4),²⁵ which consists of a familiar NT formula,²⁶ χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη ('grace to you and peace').²⁷ The significance of this greeting would not be lost on the hearers. Perhaps they would recall that from Jesus Christ's fullness we have received grace upon grace and that grace, ultimately, comes from Jesus (Jn 1.16). They also would likely recall that Jesus promised his disciples peace when informing them of the trouble they would experience after his departure (Jn 14.27) or that Jesus proclaimed peace to his disciples after his resurrection (Jn 20.19, 26).²⁸ This is relevant to suffering and theodicy because such a mention of peace would encourage the hearers in whatever trouble they are currently experiencing, perhaps causing them to anticipate the prospect of trouble ahead in the narrative. Whatever the hearers think, here they would observe that the giving of grace and peace comes from 'him who is and who was and who is to come',²⁹ and from 'the seven Spirits',³⁰ and from 'Jesus Christ'. Perhaps it would also be relevant for the hearers that the number seven has reappeared here in reference to the seven Spirits before the throne and that the seven Spirits are associated with grace. If the hearers have understood 'seven' to represent perfection or completion, could its association with the Spirit suggest the fullness of the Spirit? Such fullness would likely remind of Zech. 4.1-14, where a seven branched lampstand is encountered by Zechariah in the Temple and the central message of this vision becomes, 'Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord' (Zech. 4.6). If the hearers are reminded

²⁵ In one sense, the seven churches in Asia Minor refer to the seven historical churches in Asia Minor that are addressed in chapters two and three. In another sense, the seven churches in Asia Minor refer to all of the Johannine churches in the Johannine community of Asia Minor. K.H. Rengstorf, 'ἑπτὰ', *TDNT*, II, pp. 632-33, acknowledges the influential role ἑπτὰ ('seven') holds in Revelation, being a number that infers 'the perfection of the divine work'. In light of this, Rengstorf holds the view that the seven churches refer to all of the Johannine churches in Asia Minor. See also Y. Simoens, *Apocalypse de Jean; Apocalypse de Jésus Christ* (Paris: Éditions Facultés Jésumites de Paris, 2008), p. 16. I.T. Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1919), p. 423, goes as far to say that, while the book is written to the Asiatic churches, John's purpose is reach beyond these churches to the entire world.

²⁶ Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, p. 29.

²⁷ See V. Hasler, 'εἰρήνη', *EDNT*, I, p. 304. Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, p. 65, suggests another possible meaning for εἰρήνη is a fervent expectation of the messianic age and God's justice that makes right 'the topsy-turvy world'.

²⁸ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, pp. 91-92.

²⁹ Osborne, *Revelation*, pp. 60-61, notes that such a title for God suggests his complete control and power over time and space.

³⁰ Mention of the 'seven Spirits' would likely cause the hearers to hear an allusion to Zechariah's vision in Zechariah 4. For a list of scholars who understand the seven Spirits to be the Holy Spirit, see Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment*, p. 198, n. 16. Granted the hearers have already understood 'seven' to be 'the perfection of the divine work' or completion, it is possible, at this point, they might understand its association with the Spirit suggests the fullness of the Spirit.

of Zech. 4.6, then it is not going too far to suggest that they might anticipate that power of the Holy Spirit will play a key role in bringing forth the grace and peace that comes from the throne of God and from Jesus Christ.³¹

In 1.5, the first text of explicit reference concerning suffering appears in the narrative. The hearers are told three things about Jesus Christ. He is: ὁ μάρτυς, ὁ πιστός, ὁ πρωτότοκος τῶν νεκρῶν καὶ ὁ ἄρχων τῶν βασιλέων τῆς γῆς ('the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings on earth'). Jesus receives the most developed description of the three divine persons mentioned. Perhaps the hearers would consider four things. First, faithful witness is associated with Jesus' death. Such an association would likely cause the hearers to recall Jesus' brutal death (Jn 19.1-30) and the suffering that led up to it. While the hearers are contemplating his suffering and death, they would likely notice the second thing: Jesus is the firstborn of the dead. He overcame death in spite of his suffering – he is alive. The hearers would be reminded of Jesus' triumphant resurrection, even his post-resurrection ministry (Jn 20.1-22.25). Third, it would be impossible for the hearers to overlook that Jesus is the 'firstborn' of the dead. Perhaps this would cause the hearers to suspect that others are to follow.³² Who could they be? Will those who are to follow have died as he died, in their faithful witness? While the hearers are contemplating this, they would consider the fourth thing: Jesus' reign. They would likely wonder if Jesus' faithful witness in death and being the firstborn of the dead is associated with him being the ruler of the kings of the earth. That Jesus is a king is not a new idea for the hearers for in the FG he is revealed as the King of Israel (Jn 1.49).³³ However, now the hearers learn that his reign has extended to be over all the kings of the earth!

This threefold description of Jesus would likely cause the hearers to consider three things in regard to their own situation. First, 'witness' being associated with death brings additional meaning for understanding 'witness'. This gives the hearers reason to associate 'witness' with death anywhere else it will appear in the narrative. Second, 'firstborn' of the dead suggests that the others who follow could experience death in their own witness but would also be raised to

³¹ Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, p. 163, notes that Zech. 4.1-14 is the key OT passage for how John understands the role of the Spirit as it pertains to God's activity in the earth. The Spirit is how God, in spite of the coming beast, establishes his rule in the earth.

³² Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 92.

³³ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, pp. 92-93.

life with Jesus.³⁴ Third, those who die and rise with Jesus will somehow participate in his rule over the kings on the earth.³⁵ Contemplation on the description of Jesus becomes a doxology of honor in 1.5b-6:

Τῷ ἀγαπῶντι ἡμᾶς καὶ λύσαντι ἡμᾶς ἐκ τῶν ἀμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν ἐν τῷ αἵματι αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἐποίησεν ἡμᾶς βασιλείαν, ἱερεῖς τῷ θεῷ καὶ πατρὶ αὐτοῦ, αὐτῷ ἡ δόξα καὶ τὸ κράτος εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας [τῶν αἰώνων]. ἀμήν.

To him who loves us and has loosed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

This doxology reveals three things about Jesus: (1) he loves us,³⁶ (2) he has loosed us from our sins by his blood, and (3) he has made us a kingdom of priests to God. The hearers would likely understand that Jesus' love is what caused him to free us from our sins by his blood.³⁷ Perhaps these three acts of Jesus would cause the hearers to form an association between Jesus' love, his suffering death, their own redemption from sin, and their service to him in his kingdom.³⁸ The hearers would begin to wonder, at this point, if (and even how) this might play out as the narrative continues forward.

³⁴ Schüssler Fiorenza believes that Jesus' titles in 1.5 do not represent a formula that refers to his death, resurrection, and exaltation. Rather, his titles demonstrate how the author expresses Christ's relationship to the community. 'He is the eschatological witness upon whom the Christians can rely; he is the inaugurator and the representative of the new creation; finally he is the ruler who has all kingship and power.' See E. Schüssler Fiorenza, 'Redemption as Liberation: Apoc 1:5f and 5.9f', *CBQ* 36 (1974), p. 223.

³⁵ See R.H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (NICNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), pp. 48-49. He suggests that Jesus stands as a 'model' for the community of the Apocalypse which is undergoing suffering and is soon to undergo more. Jesus, the model of suffering witness, died. Yet, he has overcome death and now reigns as the king of the earth. It is likely the hearers would find this description encouraging and a reason to persevere. Though they share in Jesus' suffering, they will overcome and share in his reign.

³⁶ This is the first place in the narrative where the hearers are introduced to the love of Jesus. Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 64, notes 'an atmosphere of divine love for his suffering people permeates the book'. Ladd, *Revelation of John*, p. 122, says that God's love is put forth at a point when 'the early Christians were facing possible persecution when it would seem that God's love was obscured and only evil was dominant'. Hence, the hearers would likely understand the redemptive work of Jesus to be the assurance of God's love.

³⁷ Fanning, *Revelation*, p. 82, points to the 'unusual' combination of a present verb/substantival participle, τῷ ἀγαπῶντι ἡμᾶς ('the one who loves us'), with an aorist/substantival participle, καὶ λύσαντι ἡμᾶς ('and freed us'). Fanning suggests that this combination shows Jesus' ongoing disposition toward the people that caused him to undergo the cross in order to free them from sin.

³⁸ 'Made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father' would likely be understood by the hearers as echoing Exod. 19:6. Hence, the hearers would likely be reminded of the Exodus wherein God calls the Israelites to be a 'kingdom of priests and a holy nation' after he brought them out of Egypt and delivered them from the suffering they experienced under the hand of Pharaoh – thus making the Israelites, a 'counterkingdom', as Resseguie, *The Revelation to John*, p. 67, suggests. See also Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 193-94; Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 36; Koester, *Revelation*, p. 217.

After the doxology, the hearers encounter the first of two prophetic utterances in 1.7-8.³⁹ This first utterance is a promise that Jesus will come with the clouds and every eye will see him,⁴⁰ even those who pierced him (1.7a).⁴¹ Jesus' coming is the first image that emerges after the doxology that is relevant to suffering and theodicy. Such an image would likely remind the hearers of Danielic imagery (Dan. 7.13) which suggests that Jesus will have an eschatological kingship.⁴² Moreover, it would remind of the Johannine texts wherein Zech. 12.10 – which says, 'when they look on me, on whom they have pierced' – was used in fulfilment of Jesus' death (Jn 19.37).⁴³ Here, the fulfilment of Zech. 12.10 is shown to extend past the cross as it now suggests the vindication for Jesus' death to occur at his appearing.⁴⁴ As the hearers continue, the rest of 1.7 indicates that all the tribes of the earth wail on account of him. There are several ways the hearers could interpret this: (1) they could understand this wailing to be a mourning of repentance from those who have been indifferent toward Jesus and his sufferings, (2) they could understand this to mean the mourning that accompanies the judgment that Jesus is to bring upon those who have opposed him,⁴⁵ or (3) they could understand that those who have opposed Jesus are not lamenting for themselves, but rather for Jesus who suffered in his death.⁴⁶

³⁹ D.R. Seal, 'Hearing the Lector's Voice: The Reception and Delivery of the Oracles in Revelation 1:7-8', *ABR* 68 (2020), pp. 89-99, notes the poetic nature of Rev. 1.7-8 and argues that it offers it a 'distinct sound compared to the surrounding text'. Seal even goes as far to say that the poetic nature of 1.7-8 gives it an 'authoritative quality' when read aloud. He maintains that when the 'lector' would read this oracle, he would impersonate the prophet (John), manifesting the presence of God in the community.

⁴⁰ Leithart, *Revelation 1-11*, p. 95, suggests that 1.7 is about the defeat of the beast to come and the eventual vindication and glorification of the saints. 'The good news of Revelation is not merely the death and vindication of the Son; it is the death and vindication of the saints *in him*.'

⁴¹ This promise is emphasized in an inclusio that frames the beginning (1.7a) and the end of the book (22.7, 12, 20). Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, p. 68, believes that this inclusio establishes a 'major theme' in the text, God's justice.

⁴² Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 196, posits that this text is the fulfilment of Dan. 7.13 and emphasizes Jesus' eschatological kingship.

⁴³ M.J.J. Menken, 'John's Use of Scripture in Revelation 1:7', *In die Skriflig* 41.2 (2007), p. 290, makes note that John combines Dan. 1.13 and Zech. 12.10, suggesting that 1.7 is a dialectic or a 'paradox'. He notes, 'Jesus is the one who will come with the clouds, but He does so as the pierced one. The eschatological ruler and judge is the same as the crucified one.' He maintains that this dialectical language prepares the hearers for the Lion/Lamb dialectic that the hearers will encounter in 5.5-6.

⁴⁴ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 95.

⁴⁵ See Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 51; Ladd, *Revelation of John*, pp. 28-29; Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 95. For a full discussion of interpretive possibilities, see Osborne, *Revelation*, pp. 69-70. After weighing the possibilities of penitential grief versus consternation, Osborne draws no hard-and-fast line between the two options. He suggests that the ambiguity is intentional because the conversion of the nations and the judgment of the nations develop together and onward into the narrative. He believes it is possible that the phrase 'every eye will see him' might have a double meaning: (1) seeing Christ at the moment of conviction for sin and (2) seeing Christ at the Parousia.

⁴⁶ Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 38.

In 1.8, hearers are met with the second prophetic utterance, Ἐγὼ εἰμι τὸ Ἄλφα καὶ τὸ ὤ, λέγει κύριος ὁ θεός, ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος, ὁ παντοκράτωρ ('I am the Alpha and the Omega' says the Lord God, 'who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty'). This utterance provides the second image after the doxology that is relevant to suffering and theodicy. Ἐγὼ εἰμι is a familiar Johannine phrase in the Fourth Gospel (FG) in connection with Jesus.⁴⁷ Yet, here, Ἐγὼ εἰμι is referring to the Lord God and is one of only two times where God, himself, speaks in the Apocalypse.⁴⁸ The hearers would likely recognize the weight behind this exceptional statement. 'Alpha' and 'Omega'⁴⁹ are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet.⁵⁰ This statement serves as a merism, offering two opposites to emphasize that which falls in between. This would likely suggest to the hearers that the Lord God stands *before* and *after* all things, confirming his ultimate sovereignty and power over all things.

The prologue closes with the Lord God calling himself ὁ παντοκράτωρ ('the Almighty'),⁵¹ the third image after the doxology which is relevant to suffering and theodicy. The hearers would understand this term as reinforcing God's sovereign control they have already learned about as well as further emphasizing his rulership over both life, death, and the events that take place in between.⁵² As the hearers proceed into the first ἐν πνεύματι section of the narrative, they have been made aware of the reality of God's supreme power and providence in control of the affairs of the earth.

⁴⁷ See Jn 4.26; 6.20, 35, 41, 48, 51; 7.34, 36; 8.12, 18, 23, 24, 28, 58; 10.7, 9, 11, 14; 11.25; 12.26; 13.19; 14.6; 15.1, 5; 17.14, 16, 24; 18.5, 6, 8.

⁴⁸ See Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, p. 27.

⁴⁹ Bauckham points out the phrases 'Alpha and Omega' (1.8; 21.6; 22.13), 'first and the last' (1.17; 22.13), and 'beginning and the end' (21.6; 22.13) are equivalent, used both in connection with God and Christ and identify Christ with God. For a fuller discussion, see Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, pp. 25-28, 54-58.

⁵⁰ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 199.

⁵¹ Reddish points out that ὁ παντοκράτωρ is John's favorite title for God (4.8; 11.17; 15.3; 16.7, 14; 19.6, 15; 21.22). See M.G. Reddish, *Revelation* (SHBC; Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2001), p. 38.

⁵² See Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 96, who refers to ὁ παντοκράτωρ as an 'exclamation point' which emphasizes God's unrivaled status. See also, W. Michaelis, 'παντοκράτωρ', *TDNT*, II, pp. 914-15, who says the term refers to God's supremacy over all things and is linked with the concept of divine omnipotence.

4.5 ἐν πνεύματι – On Patmos on the Lord’s Day (1.9 – 3.22)

Revelation 1.9-20

As the narrative shifts to the first ἐν πνεύματι section, the narration changes to the first person, Ἐγὼ Ἰωάννης (‘I, John’), and John identifies himself for the third time, alluding to himself as the narrator (1.9):

Ἐγὼ Ἰωάννης, ὁ ἀδελφὸς ὑμῶν καὶ συγκοινωνὸς ἐν τῇ θλίψει καὶ βασιλείᾳ καὶ ὑπομονῇ ἐν Ἰησοῦ, ἐγενόμην ἐν τῇ νήσῳ τῇ καλουμένῃ Πάτμῳ διὰ τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ.

I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

Perhaps the first thing the hearers would notice in regard to suffering and theodicy is that John refers to himself as both their ἀδελφὸς (‘brother’) and συγκοινωνὸς (‘participant’). The idea of brother holds a spiritual meaning in Jn 21.23, which the hearers would likely understand here.⁵³ The term συγκοινωνὸς (‘participant’) broadens this spiritual closeness to a mutual fellowship.⁵⁴ But in what? There are three things: θλίψει (‘tribulation’), βασιλείᾳ (‘the kingdom’), and ὑπομονῇ (‘patient endurance’). Perhaps these three terms would be understood by the hearers as related⁵⁵ as a unit, being governed by ἐν τῇ.⁵⁶ As such, perhaps the hearers would recognize an ABA chiasm within the unity of these nouns with βασιλείᾳ functioning as the central term:

A1 θλίψει (‘tribulation’ or ‘suffering’)

B βασιλείᾳ (‘kingdom’)

A2 ὑπομονῇ (‘patient endurance’)

⁵³ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 54, suggests that ἀδελφὸς also reveals a common situation together.

⁵⁴ The term συγκοινωνὸς has the root κοινωνία (‘fellowship’). See Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 49.

⁵⁵ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 200, notes that the use of the dative case in each noun with the use of only one article suggests that θλίψει, βασιλείᾳ, and ὑπομονῇ are a unit.

⁵⁶ See Granville Sharp’s rule in D.B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), p. 271. See also A.T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1934), pp. 784-85. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, pp. 75-76, also suggests that the three terms would be understood as a unit, though he thinks the ἐν Ἰησοῦ which follows is a ‘later gloss’.

The idea of tribulation would likely remind the hearers of Jn 16.21 where Jesus tells his disciples that they would suffer tribulation, such as the various difficulties of life that come from being his disciples.⁵⁷ The idea of ὑπομονή is introduced here for the first time in the narrative.⁵⁸ Just what this steadfast resistance will entail is yet to be totally determined, but at this point the hearers would take note that such is essential for those who are to be part of God's kingdom. In light of this understanding, the chiasm could suggest to the hearers that θλίψει ('tribulation' or 'suffering') and ὑπομονή ('patient endurance') is part of sharing in the βασιλεία ('kingdom'). Perhaps the use of ἐν Ἰησοῦ ('in Jesus') would suggest to the hearers that Jesus was an example of sharing in the kingdom through suffering and patient endurance⁵⁹ in his own life and death. The words ἐν Ἰησοῦ also portray intimate fellowship with Jesus, thus suggesting that tribulation and patient endurance for the kingdom's sake is done in intimate fellowship⁶⁰ and union⁶¹ with Jesus.⁶² The hearers would also notice the switch from Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (1.2, 5) to Ἰησοῦ (1.9). The emphasis on Ἰησοῦ places the focus on Jesus' human life of tribulation and endurance which the hearers might begin to suspect is their example to follow.

Next, the hearers encounter the island of Patmos as the setting where John receives the visions of the Apocalypse.⁶³ They learn John's situation on Patmos⁶⁴ was διὰ τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ ('on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus'). Careful hearers would notice that this is the second time the construction, τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν

⁵⁷ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 51, posits that θλίψει refers to the 'difficulties and afflictions of everyday life that result from faithfulness to Christian principles' which also 'extends to include that final period of intense affliction which precedes the establishment of the millennial kingdom'.

⁵⁸ Koester, *Revelation*, p. 250, discusses ὑπομονή ('patient endurance'), suggesting that it means 'resisting untruth' and contains 'expressions of love in service to others'. This takes place either directly in face of hostility or amidst subtle threats which distort the Christian message.

⁵⁹ See Osborne, *Revelation*, pp. 80-81.

⁶⁰ Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 49, suggests that this intimate fellowship is eternal life. Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 81, notes the repetitious use of ἐν in the formula ἐν τῇ θλίψει ... ἐν Ἰησοῦ indicates that all suffering is participation in Christ and sharing in his glory.

⁶¹ Ladd, *Revelation of John*, p. 30 understand this to mean a spiritual union in the Lord.

⁶² Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 201, suggests that it is through this suffering and patient endurance that John and his audience presently reign together in a veiled manner.

⁶³ It is thought that, though John received the visions on Patmos, John was no longer on Patmos when he recorded them. See Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, p. 77; Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John*, p. 434.

⁶⁴ It is commonly thought that John was sent to Patmos for political banishment. Tacitus records that prisoners were sent to various islands in the Aegean Sea for punishment. See Tacitus, *Annals* 3.68; 4.30. Reddish, *Revelation*, p. 39, notes that Tacitus does not specifically mention the island of Patmos as a place of punishment. However, Reddish maintains that Revelation provides evidence that Patmos was a penal island.

μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ is used in the narrative. In 1.2, where this construction first appears, it refers to the content of John's preaching.⁶⁵ If the hearers understand διὰ in the above construction to function as causal,⁶⁶ meaning 'because of' or 'on account of',⁶⁷ they would likely conclude that John has been sent to Patmos *because* of his witness.⁶⁸ Such a notion may cause the hearers to think that John's location on Patmos has entailed some form of suffering. In v. 10, the first ἐν πνεύματι ('in the Spirit')⁶⁹ marker appears. Mention of the Spirit would remind the hearers of the seven Spirits before the throne. This phrase would present the hearers with a paradox: John is on Patmos but he is also in the Spirit. This paradox does two things: (1) it *connects* John's geographical location with his spiritual location and (2) it *contrasts* John's geographical location with his spiritual location.⁷⁰ Though John is on the island, he is also in the Spirit. Owing to what the hearers have learned up to this point, they would understand three things from this ἐν πνεύματι phrase: (1) the activity that takes place 'in the Spirit' is connected to the activity of the seven Spirits from v. 4, (2) the Spirit is a significant part to the revelation of Jesus Christ as this revelation takes place in the Spirit, and (3) John's visions are divinely inspired as they are associated with the Spirit.⁷¹ Thus, the Spirit is centrally involved in John's tribulation on Patmos.

Next, the hearers learn that John encounters a voice that sounds like a trumpet, a voice that tells him to write what he sees in a book and send it to the seven churches (v. 11). As John turns to see the voice speaking to him, he sees seven golden lampstands⁷² and one like a son of man

⁶⁵ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 55.

⁶⁶ Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, p. 368-69

⁶⁷ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 202, notes that διὰ plus the accusative expresses cause and consequence and never purpose, thereby objecting to the notion that John's presence on Patmos is 'for the purpose' of receiving the visions or to preach. For four ways to understand why John was present on Patmos, see Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, pp. 79-82. Aune agrees with Beale, that it is 'most probable' that John has been exiled to Rome versus having gone there to preach. See also Reddish, *Revelation*, p. 39. Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 99, notes that understanding John to be on Patmos because of exile fits the theme of suffering that runs throughout the book. The clause διὰ τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ (or a similar variation of such) will again appear in 6.9 and 20.4, wherein the διὰ is most naturally understood as causal, explaining reason and consequence and not purpose.

⁶⁸ Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, p. 102, suggests that John's exile to Patmos points to some form of 'Roman repression'.

⁶⁹ Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 51, understands ἐν πνεύματι in association with the Holy Spirit. See also Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment*, p. 201.

⁷⁰ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 100.

⁷¹ See Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment*, pp. 200-201.

⁷² The hearers later learn the lampstands are the churches (v. 20).

(vv. 12-20)⁷³ standing in the midst of them (vv. 12-13). John offers a number of descriptions of this individual (vv. 13-16).⁷⁴ The description relevant to suffering and theodicy is a *ῥομφαία* ('sharp two-edged sword') which proceeds from out of his mouth.⁷⁵ Though the *ῥομφαία* coming out of his mouth is listed as one of the later details in the description, the hearers would likely imagine it to be the visual and theological center of Jesus' description.⁷⁶ Such an image would likely remind the hearers of Isa. 11.4 and 49.2.⁷⁷ Perhaps they would wonder if these two texts from Isaiah are converging here to mean that Jesus is the divine judge, who speaks prophetically, executing his messianic mission as the eschatological judge.⁷⁸

The hearers learn that John's response to seeing the vision of the resurrected Jesus is to fall before him as though dead (v. 17). This was a typical response for encountering the divine (Ezek. 1.28; Dan. 8.17; Mt. 17.6). The simile *ὡς νεκρός* ('as though dead') would likely be perceived by the hearers to have additional significance because Jesus places his hand right hand on John and tells him that he is the 'living one' who 'died' but is now 'alive forever' (v. 18). Perhaps the hearers would understand this image to portray Jesus resurrecting John to life.⁷⁹ This is relevant to suffering and theodicy because such a scene would illustrate that Jesus is the one who is able to give life because he, himself, has conquered Death and Hades.⁸⁰

The inaugural vision of Jesus closes in vv. 19-20 with Jesus commanding John to write. This is followed by an explanation of the mystery of the seven stars⁸¹ and seven lampstands (cf. vv.

⁷³ Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, p. 82, notes the significance and importance of 1.12-20 in connection with the entirety of the narrative's plot. In spite of the conflict and suffering that occurs throughout the narrative, he notes that 1.12-20 'establishes a strong primacy effect' which 'establishes who rules and who is sovereign'.

⁷⁴ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 103, makes the observation that these descriptions are OT texts which converge in new and creative ways, forming a vision of the Son of Man. Simply observing one apart from the others, or simply understanding them in their OT contexts, does not do justice to how John uses them here.

⁷⁵ The *ῥομφαία* ('two-edged sword') is seen elsewhere in Revelation 1.16; 2.12, 16; 6.8; 19.15, 21.

⁷⁶ See Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, p. 75.

⁷⁷ See Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, pp. 211-12; Koester, *Revelation*, p. 253. W. Michaelis, '*ῥομφαία*', *TDNT*, VI, pp. 993-98, suggests *ῥομφαία* portrays the idea that Christ is the eschatological judge of the nations.

⁷⁸ See Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 60; Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, p. 433.

⁷⁹ See Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, pp. 79-80. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, p. 100, notes that Jesus placing his right hand on John serves a 'literary function'. Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 75, refers to this gesture as 'prophetic communication'.

⁸⁰ See G.R. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation* (Eugene, OR; Wipf & Stock, 1974), p. 68.

⁸¹ Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John*, p. 440, believes that the placement of the seven stars in the right hand of Jesus represents 'safekeeping'. See also Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 59, who understands the stars' placement in Jesus' hands to be Jesus' sovereign control. The consensus amongst commentators seems to express sovereign control, even care and protection, by Jesus over the churches. See Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 211; Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 55. For the identity of the seven stars which are the *ἄγγελοι* ('angels') of the seven churches see Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 107; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, pp. 217-19.

13, 16). The hearers learn that the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches and that the seven lampstands are the seven churches. The hearers would likely recall vv. 12-13 and remember that Jesus was in the midst of these lampstands.⁸² Such an image would suggest that Jesus is present among his churches.⁸³ The presence of Jesus would be an encouragement to the hearers and cause them to anticipate that, whatever the situation of the churches, Jesus' presence and ministry is among them. Perhaps the presence of Jesus would even reassure the hearers, suggesting that Jesus has sovereign control over his churches no matter what things soon take place (1.1) in the narrative.⁸⁴ This being the case, the presence of Jesus suggests that 'John does not offer us a philosophical argument about the existence of God; he does not give us a well-reasoned defense of a just and merciful God in the midst of human suffering and agony'.⁸⁵ John's imagery, instead of being a rational attempt to reconcile suffering and the goodness of God, simply confirms that Jesus is with his church and that the people of God do not face suffering alone. Thus, Revelation is not a traditional theodicy of any sort. Rather, it explores how God's active agency joins the hearers in their sorrow, which is similar to how early Pentecostals understood Revelation.

Revelation 2-3

Without a break, the narrative progresses into Jesus' prophetic messages⁸⁶ to the seven churches.⁸⁷

⁸² Caird says, 'It is of the utmost importance for John's theology that the first statement he makes about the heavenly Christ is that he saw him among the lamps'. See G.B. Caird, *The Revelation of Saint John* (BNTC; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publisher, 1966), p. 25.

⁸³ See Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, p. 75.

⁸⁴ I. Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John* (BNTC; London: Continuum, 2006), p. 44, comments on the close proximity of Jesus to the seven churches. Despite their trials and suffering, Jesus' nearness assures the suffering community of his abiding interest in them and faithful activity among them.

⁸⁵ Reddish, *Revelation*, p. 45.

⁸⁶ Michaels, *Revelation*, p. 64, maintains that John's writings to the seven churches are not 'letters' but 'the oracles of a prophet'. Archer, *I Was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day*, pp. 134-35, n. 67, concurs with Michaels and designates them as prophetic messages. In keeping with my Pentecostal reading, I will follow Archer and refer to them as prophetic messages.

⁸⁷ These prophetic messages are seven individual messages to seven individual churches. The messages share a common structure and common elements. Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, pp. 108-109, identifies seven common elements: (1) each prophetic message begins with the command to 'write' to the angel of the church, (2) each prophetic message contains a description of Jesus from 1.9-20, (3) each prophetic message contains words of Jesus' intimate knowledge of his churches (*οἶδα*), (4) five of the prophetic messages contain a call for repentance, (5) each prophetic message contains a promise to those who overcome, (6) each prophetic message includes the refrain, 'he who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches', and (7) the hearers would be drawn into the visual imagery of Jesus standing in the midst of the lampstands, mentally making their way around Jesus as the prophetic messages are heard. See also Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, p. 83-84. R.L. Muse, 'Revelation 2-3: A Critical Analysis of Seven Prophetic Messages', *JETS* 29.2. (1986), pp. 147-61, argues that 'the basic character' of the

Smyrna

The first church of relevance concerning suffering and theodicy is the church in Smyrna.⁸⁸ The message to Smyrna is the second and shortest prophetic message Jesus offers to the seven churches. As Jesus addresses this church, the hearers would soon find it ironic that that this church, which they will learn suffers so explicitly, is located in a city whose name, *Σμύρνα* ('Smyrna'), also means 'myrrh' – a common element used in death and burial that was associated with tears, sorrow, and bitterness.⁸⁹ Perhaps this philological association anticipates their tribulations and hardship.

The message begins with Jesus, once again, referring to himself as 'the first and the last' (cf. 1.17-18) in association with his death and resurrection (v. 8). The use of the aorist, *ἔζησεν* ('came to life'), seems to emphasize the point at which he came to life at his resurrection.⁹⁰ Moreover, the contrasting titles 'first and the last' and the one 'who died and came to life' would remind of 1.18 and portray Jesus' sovereign control, even over death.⁹¹ Jesus informs the church that he is

messages to the seven churches is prophetic. He asserts this notion through the tone of the messages as well as the comfort and criticism employed to speak to the churches. He goes as far to suggest that the messages are more closely tied to prophetic and pastoral functions than to apocalyptic and wisdom traditions. D.E. Aune, 'The Form and Function of the Proclamations to the Seven Churches (Revelation 2-3)', *NTS* 36.2 (1990), pp. 182-204, suggests that these messages belong to 'imperial edict' genre, the 'mode' of which is the 'paranetic salvation-judgment oracle'. He identifies seven common 'stereotypical' features: (1) the adscriptio, (2) the command to write, (3) the *Τάδε λέγει* formula, (4) the Christological predictions, (5) the *Οἶδα*-clause, (6) the proclamation formula, and (7) the promise of victory. See Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things*, pp. 60-74, who delineates three main issues taking place within the seven churches: the problem of assimilation (Ephesus, Pergamum, and Thyatira), the problem of persecution (Smyrna and Philadelphia), and the problem of complacency (Sardis and Laodicea). He suggests that the prophetic messages addressing these issues establishes a context whereby the hearers can ponder the meaning of the visions. Perhaps the messages would 'awaken the complacent, strengthen the persecuted, and bring those tempted to a renewed sense of faithfulness'. Contra A.H.Grové, 'Revelation 2 and 3 – Uniformly Structured or Not', *Scriptura* 73 (2000), pp. 193-210, who maintains that each message has an individual pattern.

⁸⁸ Though I have not included Ephesus, it is worth noting that Ephesus is in conflict with false teachers and evil doers. In spite of this conflict, the church of Ephesus has demonstrated *τὴν ὑπομονήν* ('patient endurance'). This term has already been associated with tribulation and the kingdom (1.9). Therefore, it would be no surprise to the hearers that the Ephesians' patient endurance has been for Jesus' name sake (v. 3). The use of *διὰ τὸ ὄνομά μου* ('for my name's sake') would reveal that they have stood up to persecution and tribulation, suggesting hard times. See Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 114.

⁸⁹ C.J. Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in Their Local Setting* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), p. 76.

⁹⁰ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 125, suggests that 1.18 emphasizes Jesus' death as a past event, however 2.8 emphasizes Jesus' continued life. Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment*, p. 142, notes the reversal of the words 'alive and 'died that takes place in 1.18 (*καὶ ὁ ζῶν, καὶ ἐγενόμην νεκρὸς*) and 2.8 (*ὃς ἐγένετο νεκρὸς καὶ ἔζησεν*) surmising that the reversal 'assures the church that the living Jesus is in their midst'.

⁹¹ Osborn, *Revelation*, pp 128-29, notes that these titles suggest that Christ is the eternal one and guarantees 'vindication for his suffering followers'.

aware of the *πτωχείαν* ('poverty'),⁹² and *θλίψιν* ('tribulation'), and *βλασφημίαν* ('slander') they've had to endure.⁹³ The position of the pronoun *σου* ('your'), found at the beginning of these challenges listed, brings these three challenges into a single harmony of what comprises the church's suffering.⁹⁴ The hearers would be well reminded of the FG wherein Jesus informs his disciples that they will have tribulation (Jn 16.33). Despite their trials, Jesus sees the church of Smyrna as rich.⁹⁵ Perhaps this description is an indication of their healthy spiritual well-being amidst their suffering.

Next, Jesus reveals to the Smyrnaean church that he knows the identity of their persecutors,⁹⁶ identifying them as 'a synagogue of Satan' (v. 9). In this first mention of Satan in the Apocalypse, the hearers are put on notice that Satan is associated with the persecution in Smyrna and that Satan is actually the source behind their suffering. The mention of Satan would cause the hearers to perceive looming, cosmic opposition which would likely result in even further suffering ahead.⁹⁷

Jesus' command *μηδὲν φοβοῦ* ('do not fear') would not be unfamiliar to the hearers,⁹⁸ perhaps reminding of the inaugural vision where John falls at the feet of Jesus and Jesus commands him not to fear (1.17). It would also remind of Jesus' words to the terrified disciples not to fear as he walks on the water (Jn 6.19-20). Such associations would indicate that this command is accompanied by the presence of Jesus.⁹⁹ This notion would be an encouragement

⁹² The cause of their poverty is unknown. See Koester, *Revelation*, p. 274.

⁹³ Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 81, notes that, though Jesus knows about the situation, he does not relieve the situation – there is no immediate intervention. 'Why no more than this?', he asks. Beasley-Murray ascertains that John provides no answer. 'His whole book is written in the conviction that the Church of Christ has the vocation of suffering with its Lord, that it may share in his glory in the kingdom he has won for mankind.'

⁹⁴ Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 129.

⁹⁵ 'Rich' carries a negative meaning in the Apocalypse (cf. 3.17-18; 6.15; 13.16; 18.3, 15, 19), though here it is positive. See Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 126.

⁹⁶ For more on the identity of those who are part of the synagogue of Satan, see P.L. Mayo, *Those Who Call Themselves Jew: The Church and Judaism in the Apocalypse of John* (PMTS 60; Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2006), chap. 2, Kindle. Mayo notes that the opponents are not all of the Jews in Smyrna and Philadelphia, only those who slander the church. Mayo is clear that John is not anti-Jewish or antisemitic. Rather, John claims the title of a 'true Jew' for those who are faithful to the Lamb, suffering with him.

⁹⁷ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 128.

⁹⁸ D.A. DeSilva, 'The Strategic Arousal of Emotions in the Apocalypse of John: A Rhetorical-Critical Investigation of the Oracles of the Seven Churches', *NTS* 54.1 (2008), pp. 90-114, considers how 'a heuristic use of classical rhetorical theorists' discussion of appeals to the emotions' would enable the hearers to discern three principal pairs of emotions in the oracles to the seven churches. One of these pairs is fear and confidence. He posits that the Glorified Christ's response, 'do not fear what you are about to suffer' is intended to reduce the church in Smyrna's fear and nurture confidence as he recalls his own conquest of death. Christ also attempts to diminish the danger by explaining the short duration of the suffering and promising safety from 'a far more fearsome evil'.

⁹⁹ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 129; Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 132.

going into what the hearers discover next: the church is μέλλεις ('about') to πάσχειν ('suffer'). The use of μέλλεις suggests that suffering is immanent.¹⁰⁰ Its association with the word πάσχειν would likely remind of the Passover, particularly in relation to all that Jesus suffered (Jn 13.1; 18.28-29; 19.14).¹⁰¹ Could these words convey to the hearers the intensity of the suffering in store for God's people in Smyrna? The hearers do not have to guess as to the nature of this suffering: the διάβολος ('Devil') is going throw some of them into prison. The hearers would likely be struck that John uses the word διάβολος here instead of Σατανᾶς (cf. v. 9). Perhaps the switch in the description of their cosmic opponent would further emphasize the character of the 'adversary' behind the people of God's suffering: he is a 'slanderer' and the father of lies (Jn 8.44). While contemplating the Devil's menacing character, at the same time, the thought of prison would alert the hearers to the real possibility of death,¹⁰² especially if they associate it with John the Baptist's imprisonment in the FG (Jn 3.24). The hearers learn that the imprisonment spoken of here will last ten days¹⁰³ and the purpose of this tribulation in prison is: ἵνα πειρασθῆτε ('that you may be tested').¹⁰⁴ At this point, the hearers would recall the three Israelite children (Dan. 1.12, 14) who refused to eat the Babylonian food and were tested for ten days with vegetables and water. Perhaps they would connect the witnesses of the Israelite children to the witnesses of the people of God in Smyrna and consider that this witness has

¹⁰⁰ See W. Radl, 'μέλλω', *EDNT*, II, pp. 403-04, who notes that the use of μέλλεις in the Apocalypse not only suggests future suffering, it also connotes an anticipated future, the new aeon, and blessings which are the objects of Christian hope (cf. 1.9; 2.10; 3.10; 6.11; 8.13; 10.7; 12.4; 17.8).

¹⁰¹ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 129.

¹⁰² Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 133.

¹⁰³ For various ways the ten days have been interpreted by various commentators see R.L. Thomas, *Revelation 1-7: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1992), pp. 168-71. Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 130, notes that ten is always a negative number throughout the Apocalypse (cf. 12.3; 13.1; 17.3, 7, 12, 16). Hence, the hearers will soon come to realize that ten would be signaling an ominous situation on the horizon for the people of God in Smyrna. J.C. Thomas also posits that the ten days of imprisonment anticipates that the Devil and Satan will be cast into the bottomless pit for 1000 years (20.1-3) and, later, into the lake of fire forever (20.10). Toward the end of the narrative (20.3), John refers to the Devil as 'Διάβολος καὶ ὁ Σατανᾶς' (the Devil and Satan). By the time the hearers make it to this point in the narrative, it is possible they would likely connect these names to 2.9-10, where John has previously (and intentionally) used both names. Perhaps the hearers might make a connection, contrasting the church in Smyrna's situation with the final situation of their adversary, which is much worse. This would suggest eschatological vengeance on the cosmic adversary and slanderer of the church (cf. 12.9) who is responsible for throwing the people of God into prison.

¹⁰⁴ Perhaps the hearers would notice the use of the ἵνα clause plus the passive πειρασθῆτε. Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 242, considers πειρασθῆτε to be a divine passive. If this is the case, the hearers would likely understand that God will make use of the church in Smyrna's suffering for the purpose of strengthening them. It would also suggest that God is in control of their destiny. See Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 242; Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 133.

brought about their tribulation.¹⁰⁵ Despite their test, Jesus exhorts them to γίνου πιστὸς ἄχρι θανάτου ('be faithful unto death'). The mention of faithfulness would remind them of Jesus' faithful witness in 1.5. Thus, the idea of faithfulness takes on added dimension: faithful witness means being faithful ἄχρι ('unto')¹⁰⁶ death. Yet, the faithful are promised the crown of life¹⁰⁷ and those who conquer are promised they will not be hurt by the 'second death'¹⁰⁸ (v. 11).¹⁰⁹ The hearers would understand these rewards are given to them for conquering their suffering and tribulation¹¹⁰ and are eternal in scope.¹¹¹

By the end of this message, careful hearers would notice that this message follows a chiasmic structure. In the center, the hearers are exhorted not to fear what they are suffering and have yet to suffer:

- A1 Jesus' opening exhortation (2.8)
- B1 Warning about earthly persecution (2.9)
- C. Exhortation to not fear suffering (2.10a)
- B2 Warning about cosmic persecution (2.10b)
- A2 Jesus' closing exhortation (2.10c-11)¹¹²

The exhortation in this chiasmic structure would encourage the hearers, further reinforcing the command to not fear owing to the presence of Jesus amidst their trials.

Pergamum

The second church of relevance concerning suffering and theodicy is the church at Pergamum to whom Jesus introduces himself as having a sharp two-edged sword (v. 12). This would likely cause the hearers to recall the imagery of the sword which proceeds from the mouth of Jesus in

¹⁰⁵ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 131.

¹⁰⁶ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 131, notes that the ἄχρι ('unto') suggests completion of a task in Revelation (cf. 2.25, 26; 12.11; 15.8; 17.17; 20.3, 5). These uses of ἄχρι further ahead in the narrative would further explain the meaning of ἄχρι here, suggesting that the church in Smyrna's faithfulness has the potential to carry on until it culminates at death.

¹⁰⁷ Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 67, understands the genitive τῆς ζωῆς in the phrase τὸν στέφανον τῆς ζωῆς ('the crown of life') epexegetically, suggesting the crown is eternal life.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Rev. 20.4.

¹⁰⁹ Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, p. 90.

¹¹⁰ Archer, *I Was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day*, p. 145, notes 'The promise of life, the church learns, is not found in escaping tribulation but by being faithful *in* tribulation'. See also Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, p. 90.

¹¹¹ Ladd, *Revelation of John*, pp. 44-45.

¹¹² Koester, *Revelation*, p. 279.

the inaugural vision (1.16), setting this message in the context of Jesus' prophetic communication and eschatological justice.¹¹³

In v. 13 Jesus acknowledges three things about the church in Pergamum: (1) where they live, (2) that they hold fast to his name, and (3) that they did not deny 'my faith' in the days of Antipas:

Οἶδα ποῦ κατοικεῖς, ὅπου ὁ θρόνος τοῦ Σατανᾶ, καὶ κρατεῖς τὸ ὄνομά μου καὶ οὐκ ἤρνησω τὴν πίστιν μου καὶ ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις Ἀντιπᾶς ὁ μάρτυς μου ὁ πιστός μου, ὃς ἀπεκτάνθη παρ' ὑμῖν, ὅπου ὁ Σατανᾶς κατοικεῖ.

I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. Yet you hold fast my name, and you did not deny my faith even in the days of Antipas my faithful witness, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.

It is possible the hearers would be struck again to see the name of Satan appear, especially among this church. They would not be able to help but think that, having just afflicted Smyrna, Satan is also afflicting Pergamum. Careful hearers would notice an inclusio which mentions Satan at the beginning of the verse, ὅπου ὁ θρόνος τοῦ Σατανᾶ ('where Satan's throne is'), and the end of the verse, ὅπου ὁ Σατανᾶς κατοικεῖ ('where Satan dwells'). This inclusio would likely indicate that there is an intense Satanic presence in the city, considering his throne is there.¹¹⁴ It appears that Satan's residency in Pergamum is placed into contrast with the residency of the Pergamum saints by the repeated use of κατοικέω ('dwell') to portray that both Satan and the Pergamum saints are living in the same place and that the two do not mix!¹¹⁵ Yet, Jesus commends them in that they κρατεῖς τὸ ὄνομά μου ('hold fast my name') and οὐκ ἤρνησω τὴν πίστιν μου καὶ ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις Ἀντιπᾶς ('did not deny my faith in the days of Antipas'). The aorist ἤρνησω ('deny') indicates that there was a particular instance when the saints in Pergamum confessed the name of Jesus and did not deny their faith.¹¹⁶ This would perhaps remind of John the Baptist who 'confessed, and did not deny, but confessed' that he was not the Christ (Jn 1.20).

¹¹³ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 133, notes that the double-edged sword would indicate to the hearers the seriousness of Jesus' prophetic message. Koester, *Revelation*, p. 286, suggests the sword represents judicial power and authority to vindicate the faithful. Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 140, sees a connection between Roman justice and the imagery of justice in Isa. 11.4, suggesting that Jesus is the true judge, not the Roman officials.

¹¹⁴ For more on the description of 'Satan's throne' see Koester, *Revelation*, pp. 286-87; Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches*, pp. 84-85.

¹¹⁵ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 247, notes that these clauses are used to complement each other, suggesting that light and darkness cannot dwell together. 'A witnessing church will be a persecuted church.'

¹¹⁶ Archer, 'I Was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day', p. 147. Charles, *The Revelation of St. John*, p. 62, suggests that the aorist refers to a past time of 'definite persecution'. See also Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John*, pp. 458-59.

If this is the case, it might not be going too far to suggest that the hearers would associate the faithfulness of John the Baptist with the faithfulness of the saints in Pergamum.

At this point, more is offered about Antipas: he is ὁ μάρτυς μου ὁ πιστός μου ('my [Jesus'] faithful witness'). More than likely the hearers would connect this language to Rev. 1.5 where Jesus is called ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστός ('the faithful witness')¹¹⁷ to understand that Antipas stands in close relationship with Jesus. Perhaps the word πιστός would recall the only instance in the FG where Jesus exhorts Thomas to believe instead of disbelieve (Jn 20.27). Or, imaginably, it would remind of where John has previously discussed how faith is what overcomes the world (1 Jn 5.4-5). If the hearers are reminded of these instances, they would likely see Antipas as someone who chose to believe on Jesus and, through that belief, overcame the world. While they contemplate Antipas' faithfulness, considering what faithfulness looks like in the Apocalypse, they learn that Antipas was faithful in his death, as he was ἀπεκτάνθη ('killed')!¹¹⁸ It would likely strike the hearers to learn that his death happened among the church – παρ' ὑμῶν ('among you'). Such a statement reinforces the idea of suffering for faithful witness as a real and immediate prospect. Jesus concludes his prophetic message to the church at Pergamum, saying:

τῷ νικῶντι δώσω αὐτῷ τοῦ μάννα τοῦ κεκρυμμένου καὶ δώσω αὐτῷ ψῆφον λευκὴν, καὶ ἐπὶ τὴν ψῆφον ὄνομα καινὸν γεγραμμένον ὃ οὐδεὶς οἶδεν εἰ μὴ ὁ λαμβάνων.

To the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it.

This eschatological promise contains two items for the overcomer: (1) hidden manna and (2) a white stone with a new name written on it that no one knows except the receiver. In regard to the hidden manna, it is possible that hearers would have been familiar with Jewish tradition that suggests manna would once again be provided for God's people in the messianic kingdom.¹¹⁹ Or perhaps they would connect eating manna from heaven with eating Jesus' flesh, which brings

¹¹⁷ Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 85, notes that the word μάρτυς gets associated with Antipas' death and that such an association 'encouraged' the word toward being understood in the sense of one who is put to death for their faith, even if that is not what John explicitly intended for the word.

¹¹⁸ Ladd, *Revelation of John*, p. 47, notes that Antipas' example suggests that faithfulness in martyrdom is effective witness to the Lord.

¹¹⁹ Reddish, *Revelation*, p. 62, notes that hearers would be familiar with Jewish tradition that suggests manna will once again be provided for God's people (2 Bar. 29.4-8). Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 252, suggests that the hidden manna is a portrayal of end-time fellowship with Christ.

eternal life (Jn 6.29-58).¹²⁰ In regard to the white stone, there are a couple of connections the hearers would likely make. First, the color white would remind of Jesus because his head and hair were previously described as white (1.14). This imagery would suggest that the overcomer stands in solidarity with Jesus. Second, the word *καινὸν* ('new') makes its first appearance in the narrative here.¹²¹ The hearers might understand 'new' as an allusion to portions of Isaiah where God promises to renew his people and all creation (Isa. 43.18-19, 65.17, 66.22).¹²² As such, Jesus' eschatological promises would assure the hearers that those who follow the example of Jesus and Antipas by remaining faithful to the point of death will discover eschatological justice and a reward from the Lord.

Thyatira

The third church of relevance concerning suffering and theodicy is the church of Thyatira.¹²³ As the prophetic message begins, the hearers first notice that Jesus refers to the *ἔργα* ('works') of the church at Thyatira twice (v. 19):

Οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα καὶ τὴν ἀγάπην καὶ τὴν πίστιν καὶ τὴν διακονίαν καὶ τὴν ὑπομονὴν σου, καὶ τὰ ἔργα σου τὰ ἔσχατα πλείονα τῶν πρώτων.

I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first.

Moreover, it would not likely be lost on the hearers that *σου* stands in the emphatic position, before the first *τὰ ἔργα*. This syntax suggests that Jesus is *intensely* aware of the good works

¹²⁰ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 141.

¹²¹ The hearers will come to find out that this mention of 'new' inaugurates a universe of 'new' realities: new things (21.5), New Jerusalem (3.12; 21.2); new heaven and earth (21.1); new songs (5.9; 14.3).

¹²² See R.W. Wall, *Revelation* (UBC; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1991), p. 76. Whether the name is referring to Jesus' new name or the believer's new name does not take away from the fact that the promise is eschatological and provides hope for new things in the future, which would have been encouraging to the hearers who are suffering or yet to suffer. Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 142, posits that it is Jesus' new name. Longman, *Revelation*, p. 142, suggests it is the overcomer's new name.

¹²³ Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches*, p. 106, suggests that Thyatira is the least of the churches. He says, 'the longest and most difficult of the seven letters is addressed to the least known, least important and least remarkable of the cities.' His justification in asserting this lies in the scanty historical information available about Thyatira. It seems much was not recorded due to, what he believes, is the city's insignificance. Charles, *The Revelation of St. John*, pp. 67-68, confirms Thyatira's historical insignificance yet vouches for the importance of this prophetic message among the seven. The message to Thyatira sits as the centerpiece of the prophetic messages. Careful hearers would recognize this oddity. Perhaps they would understand this to mean that Jesus' messages are not just to the elite churches, but also to those which are counted among the average. See Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 62.

taking place in Thyatira.¹²⁴ These works are specifically ἀγάπην (love), πίστιν (faith), διακονίαν (service), and ὑπομονήν (endurance). If Jesus first speaks of their works in the general sense (ἀγάπην, πίστιν) and then narrows these works into a specific sense (διακονίαν, ὑπομονήν),¹²⁵ love could be thought of as being demonstrated in service and faith thought of as being demonstrated in endurance.¹²⁶ The mention of faith would remind the hearers of a number of things: (1) that Jesus has been described as the faithful witness (1.5), (2) the exhortation for the saints in Smyrna to be faithful unto death (2.10), and (3) Antipas who is Jesus' faithful witness (2.13). The mention of endurance would remind the hearers of John's example (1.9) and the church in Ephesus' example (2.2-3). Therefore, Jesus' commendation of the Thyatirians' faith working through patient endurance would be a point of convergence that brings Jesus, John, Antipas, and the churches of Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, and Thyatira together. This convergence would suggest to the hearers that the theme of faith working through endurance will likely be a prominent one in what lies ahead.

In v. 20, Jesus begins to give words of rebuke concerning a woman who is given the name Jezebel¹²⁷ and who calls herself a prophetess. The hearers learn that Jesus gave this woman time to repent,¹²⁸ but she continues to refuse.¹²⁹ In vv. 22-23, Jesus explains how he intends to act against Jezebel, those who commit adultery¹³⁰ with her,¹³¹ and her children:¹³²

¹²⁴ Such an intimate commendation of good works would likely cause the hearers to brace because an intense exhortation was oftentimes 'anchored' in encouragement. See Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 152.

¹²⁵ Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John*, p. 465, suggests that love and faithfulness are spoken of first in general terms and then narrowed to their specific uses – love manifesting itself in service and faithfulness manifesting itself in patient endurance.

¹²⁶ See Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 154-55.

¹²⁷ The name 'Jezebel' is not likely the woman's birth name, rather a pejorative nickname assigned to her to compare her and her deeds to one of Israel's great enemies, Jezebel the wife Ahab. See 1 Kgs 16.31; 18.4, 13, 19; 21.5-15, 25; 2 Kgs 9.7, 22.

¹²⁸ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 148, notes that the time Jesus gave the woman called Jezebel to repent is not the same as tolerating her, which the Thyatirians had done.

¹²⁹ The refusal of the woman called Jezebel to repent introduces the hearers to blatant defiance in the Apocalypse, preparing the hearers for the vision of the great prostitute and the fall of Babylon in Revelation 17-18.

¹³⁰ Koester, *Revelation*, p. 299, posits that adultery is a metaphor for idol worship and participating in practices that are 'inconsistent' with the Christian faith. Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 150, notes, however, that this adultery language would include participation in illicit sexual activity.

¹³¹ See C.R. Heister, 'Jezebel's Punishment in Revelation 2: Research and Trends', *CBR* 20.2 (2022), pp. 186-99, suggests that, while the woman called Jezebel's punishment may be sexual and gender specific, her identity 'does not stop at her gender'. Heister appeals to needing more readings which focus on her 'otherness'.

¹³² Just who are the woman called Jezebel's children? Koester, *Revelation*, pp. 299-300, suggests that they are those Christians who have followed her ways. Archer, *I Was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day*, p. 151, suggests her children are members of the church based on the use of τοὺς ἐμοὺς δούλους ('my servants') in v. 20, noting particular emphasis on 'my'. Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 151, suggests that those who commit adultery are unfaithful

ἰδοὺ βάλλω αὐτὴν εἰς κλίνην καὶ τοὺς μοιχεύοντας μετ' αὐτῆς εἰς θλίψιν μεγάλην, ἐὰν μὴ μετανοήσωσιν ἐκ τῶν ἔργων αὐτῆς, καὶ τὰ τέκνα αὐτῆς ἀποκτενῶ ἐν θανάτῳ.

Behold, I will throw her onto a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation, unless they repent of her works, and I will strike her children dead.

The hearers would likely take notice of how the word θλίψιν ('tribulation') is employed in this passage. Prior to its appearance here, 'tribulation' has been used to describe the suffering of the faithful (1.9; 2.9, 10), which has come by the hands of Satan and those who do evil to God's people.¹³³ Yet, here tribulation and suffering comes to the woman called Jezebel¹³⁴ and her children by the hands of Jesus, if they do not repent. Perhaps this suffering would cause the hearers to be reminded of the judgment upon Ahab's 70 sons who were killed after the death of Jezebel (2 Kgs 9.30-10.17), causing them to anticipate God's righteous judgment against persistent ungodliness. Such a notion of judgment would likely suggest three things in the thinking of the hearers: (1) Jesus ultimately acts in judgment against unrepentant sin, (2) retributive judgment from God causes suffering for those upon whom it is enacted, and (3) they can anticipate unrepentant sin and God's retributive judgment against it in the narrative ahead.

As Jesus begins to exhort those in the church who do not follow Jezebel, he refers to the teachings of Jezebel as τὰ βαθέα τοῦ Σατανᾶ ('the deep things of Satan') (v. 24).¹³⁵ The mention of Satan here in the middle of the messages of the seven churches would be of significance for the hearers, perhaps indicating that their trials and suffering are, ultimately, cosmic and backed by the accuser of God's people.¹³⁶ Despite their cosmic opponent and the tribulation he inflicts upon the people of God, the hearers, once again, are exhorted to be faithful amidst trials as Jesus charges the church in Thyatira to κρατήσατε ('hold fast') what they have¹³⁷ until he comes (v.

members of the Johannine community. He concurs with Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 75, that the woman called Jezebel's children are those who participate in the sin of their 'spiritual mother'.

¹³³ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 150.

¹³⁴ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 150, posits that the ideas of κλίνην ('sickbed') and θλίψιν μεγάλην ('great tribulation') denote severe punishment that includes 'intense suffering'.

¹³⁵ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 266, treats this genitive construction as an adjectival genitive, translating it 'satanic depths'. Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 145, suggests that this statement can either be (1) sarcastic and meant to ridicule the woman called Jezebel and her followers for claiming to be learning the 'deep things of God' or (2) literal to suggest that the woman called Jezebel's followers practiced paganism.

¹³⁶ Resseguie, *The Revelation of St John*, pp. 93-94. The hearers will discover cosmic affliction throughout the duration of the narrative (2.9, 13; 3.9; 12.1-9; 20.2-3, 7-8).

¹³⁷ What they have more than likely refers to their love and faith which is manifested in service and patient endurance (v. 19).

25). Such language recalls the faithfulness of the Pergamum church despite the killing of Antipas (2.13), and even the faithfulness of Jesus as he holds the churches in his right hand (2.1).

In v. 26, Jesus promises rewards to the faithful for conquering and keeping his works until the end. Perhaps careful hearers would notice an ABA chiasm in vv. 25-26 which demonstrates how one is to conquer:

A1 πλὴν ὃ ἔχετε κρατήσατε ἄχρι[ς] οὗ ἂν ἴξω

B καὶ ὁ νικῶν

A2 καὶ ὁ τηρῶν ἄχρι τέλους τὰ ἔργα μου

A1 Only hold fast what you have until I come

B The one who conquers

A2 and the one who keeps my works until the end

If the καὶ that precedes ὁ τηρῶν ἄχρι τέλους τὰ ἔργα μου is understood epexegetically (ascensively),¹³⁸ it would suggest that ὁ νικῶν ('the one who conquerors') is 'namely' he or she who keeps Jesus' words until the end. The similarity between the words κρατήσατε ('hold fast') in v. 25 and keep and τηρῶν ('keep') v. 26 would likely indicate that these two commands are iterations of one another, emphasizing what it means to conquer.

Jesus offers a two-fold reward to the one who conquers. The first is authority over the nations, a possible allusion to Ps. 2.8-9. This striking statement underscores the enormity of this reward: the faithful will share in Jesus' eschatological rule.¹³⁹ The second promise to the one who conquerors is that Jesus will give them the τὸν ἀστέρα τὸν πρωϊνόν ('morning star'). Would the hearers discern this promise to be an allusion to Dan. 12.3 and perhaps the immortality of the God's people?¹⁴⁰ Or would they suspect that they will have to wait until later in the narrative to discern what this promise means?¹⁴¹ In any case, the hearers would conclude the message to

¹³⁸ Both Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 77, (who calls this an 'explanatory' conjunction) and Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 165, understand the καὶ to be epexegetical.

¹³⁹ Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, p. 94, notes that the conquerors' rule with Jesus is not achieved through domination but through suffering.

¹⁴⁰ See Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, p. 94.

¹⁴¹ While there are a number of possibilities, it should not be overlooked that, later in the narrative Jesus identifies himself as the ὁ ἀστὴρ ὁ λαμπρὸς ὁ πρωϊνός ('bright morning star') in context with a reference to David (22.16). When hearers discover this, perhaps it would further clarify the meaning here and indicate that the morning star could be a reference to Messianic rule. Thus, having the morning star could be understood as a reference to sharing in the Messiah's reign. See Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, pp. 157-58; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 268-69.

Thyatira reveals that Jesus will reward the faithful who resist Satan's cosmic attack and the tribulation he inflicts.

Philadelphia

The fourth church of relevance concerning suffering and theodicy is the church in Philadelphia.¹⁴² At the outset of this prophetic message, Jesus describes himself as the holy one, the true one,¹⁴³ and having the key of David,¹⁴⁴ who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one will open. The key of David would likely remind the hearers of 1.18, where Jesus announces that he has the keys of Death and Hades. Thus, the hearers would enter this message with the thought fresh in their minds that Jesus has power over death, perhaps causing them to anticipate tribulation. As the message moves forward, Jesus informs the church that he knows

¹⁴² Though I have not included Sardis, it is important to note that there are three rewards offered to the conqueror in Jesus' prophetic message to this church: (1) they will be clothed in white garments, (2) their name will never be blotted out of the book of life, and (3) Jesus will confess their name before his Father and before his angels (3.5). In this prophetic message, wearing white becomes connected to close association with Jesus and would likely cause the hearers to anticipate the prospect of wearing white as the narrative moves forward (3.18; 4.4; 6.11; 7.9, 13).

¹⁴³ The hearers would likely notice that Jesus uses terms from the Hebrew Bible to describe himself. The first of these self-designations, 'the holy one' (Ps. 16.10; Isa. 1.4; 37.23; Hab. 3.3) is connected to the second self-designation, 'the true one' (Exod. 34.6; Num. 14.18; Isa. 65.16) by means of asyndeton. The hearers will soon learn that asyndeton is not the only reason that these two self-designations should be understood in close connection with one another. As they continue forward in the narrative, they will discover these two designations are used in tandem to describe God (6.10). As designations for God, they also attest to the deity of Jesus in the prophetic message to Philadelphia and, thus, to his sovereignty and power to protect and vindicate those in the church.

¹⁴⁴ The hearers would likely understand the key of David to be a reference to Isa. 22.22, wherein Eliakim, as the chief steward of Hezekiah's house, held the 'key of David' and possessed full authority to allow access to the king and his kingdom. As such, the hearers would understand that Jesus, alone, has the authority to allow entrance into the New Jerusalem. Keener notes, 'This means that Jesus is not only the "root of David" (5.5; 22.16), but the majordomo, the one who controls entrance into the royal palace, a position of the highest authority in the kingdom (Isa. 22.15-25, esp. 22.22; Isa 45.1-2; Ezek. 44.2). See C.S. Keener, *Revelation* (NIVAC; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), p. 150.

their works (v. 8):¹⁴⁵ they have kept Jesus' word and have not denied his name¹⁴⁶ despite having little power.¹⁴⁷ In regard to keeping his words, the hearers would likely recall that, in the Johannine literature, keeping Jesus' words are associated with loving Jesus and being obedient to him (Jn 14.15, 23-24; 15.10; 1 Jn 2.3-5). They would also recall that the Apocalypse begins with a blessing for those who keep Jesus' words (1.3). Moreover, the thought of not denying his name would remind the hearers of the church of Pergamum during the days of Antipas (2.13) as well as, perhaps, John the Baptist who confessed Jesus and did not deny him (Jn 1.20). Here, ἐτήρησάς ('having kept') and not ἠρνήσω ('having denied') appear in the aorist tense, perhaps suggesting there was a definite moment when the church in Philadelphia obeyed Jesus out of their love for him and did not deny his name. Thus, the obedience of the church in Philadelphia is similar to the patient endurance of Ephesus (2.3) and Thyatira (2.19) because they loved Jesus and bore trials for Jesus' name.¹⁴⁸

In v. 9, the hearers encounter a double use of the interjection ἰδοὺ ('behold'), conveying emphasis¹⁴⁹ and drawing explicit attention to what follows. It could also suggest that both

¹⁴⁵ Before Jesus articulates these works, he informs the church in Philadelphia that he has set before them a θύραν ἠνεωγμένην ('open door') which no man can shut. Commentators see various interpretive possibilities for the open door. H.B. Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John* (New York, NY: The Macmillan Company, 1907), p. 53, suggests that the open door suggests a door of evangelization, seeing the metaphor of a door is used this way numerous times in the NT (1 Cor. 16.9; 2 Cor. 2.12; Col. 4.3). Contra Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, p. 236, who refers to this view as 'doubtful' due to the fact that missionary activity does not fit the context. A second view is suggested by Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 72. He posits that the open door is privilege to the heavenly throne room, allowing those in Philadelphia to see their situation from a heavenly perspective. A third possibility is that the open door refers to entrance into the New Jerusalem based on the facts that (1) the preceding verse speaks about the Messianic kingdom which Jesus controls entrance into and (2) the ὅτι clause in v. 8 demonstrates why Jesus has put the open door in front of them. See Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, p. 236; Osborne, *Revelation*, pp. 188-89; Longman, *Revelation*, p. 70; Reddish, *Revelation*, p. 74; Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John*, p. 480; Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 101. A final possibility is that the open door would recall Jn 10.7-10 where Jesus says he is the door of the sheep and that those who enter in through him might be saved. If so, then the door in this passage would be understood as entrance into eternal life. See Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, pp. 173-74.

¹⁴⁶ Commentators make use of the two aorist verbs in this passage: ἐτήρησάς ('kept') and ἠρνήσω ('denied') (v. 8). The question is whether the use of the aorist points to a definite event in which the Philadelphian church kept Jesus' word and did not deny his name or whether it is a summary of the church's own faithfulness. For the former see Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 189. For the latter, see Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 101.

¹⁴⁷ Their 'little power' may refer to a number of ideas. Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 174, suggests that this language in the Johannine literature is associated with the inability to accomplish something. Ladd, *Revelation of John*, p. 60, suggests that little power means that the church was small, poor, and not influential. Wall, *Revelation*, p. 84, understand little power as meaning 'social powerlessness'.

¹⁴⁸ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, pp. 174-75.

¹⁴⁹ See H. Goldstein, 'ἰδοὺ', *EDNT*, II, p. 173, which suggests that a single use ἰδοὺ of can do a number of things: (1) awaken attention, (2) introduce something new, (3) emphasize the importance of something, and (4) act as a summons to a more careful consideration. Be it the case, a double use of ἰδοὺ would all the more beckon the attention of the hearers in Philadelphia.

clauses within the verse are connected.¹⁵⁰ In the first clause, the hearers encounter the term τῆς συναγωγῆς τοῦ Σατανᾶ ('synagogue of Satan') again (cf. 2.9), likely drawing their remembrance back to the situation of the church in Smyrna, serving as a textual link to connect both churches. Perhaps the hearers would think that those in Philadelphia have a situation similar to those in Smyrna. The appearance of the name Σατανᾶς would cause the hearers to consider that the church in Philadelphia is involved in a cosmic conflict, reminding of Pergamum, Satan's throne in Pergamum (2.13), and Antipas and those in Pergamum who did not deny the faith.

With the second ἰδοὺ, the hearers learn that Jesus will make those of the synagogue of Satan προσκυνήσουσιν ('kneel down')¹⁵¹ before their feet.¹⁵² Perhaps the prospect of this would cause the hearers to recall Isa. 60.1-22 wherein the kings of the nations come to Jerusalem and bow down to them (cf. Isa. 45.14). They might also recall Isa. 43.3-4 where God proclaims his love for his people. Thus, the phrase 'kneel down' might be understood to portray God vindicating the church in Philadelphia for the trouble they endured at the hands of the synagogue of Satan. Next, Jesus promises to keep the church of Philadelphia from τῆς ὥρας τοῦ πειρασμοῦ ('the hour of trial') that is coming on the whole world because¹⁵³ they have kept his word about patient endurance (v. 10).¹⁵⁴ It is probable that the mention of patient endurance would remind the hearers again of the church of Ephesus (2.2-3) and the church of Thyatira (2.19), even John who has been their partner in endurance in Jesus (1.9). Moreover, the ideas of keeping Jesus' word and patient endurance converge here showing that there is a close connection between the two. Thus, the hearers would likely think of those in the narrative up to this point who have suffered

¹⁵⁰ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 145, suggests that the second use of ἰδοὺ in v. 9 picks up on the first use in v. 9, offering a commentary on the previous verse (v. 8). Thus, the synagogue of Satan would be connected to the challenges that the church was having. This would make sense as the synagogue of Satan caused much affliction for the church in Smyrna.

¹⁵¹ Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, p. 238, translates προσκυνήσουσιν as 'grovel'.

¹⁵² Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 191, suggests that such a strong expression would be heard as vindication and eschatological exultation, possibly that the people of God in Philadelphia will participate in the judgment of their enemies.

¹⁵³ The first grammatical decision that hearers would likely make is determining if the ὅτι clause which opens the passage modifies v. 9 or if it modifies what proceeds it in v. 10. See Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, pp. 102-103, suggests it is most likely that, here, ὅτι functions to modify what proceeds it.

¹⁵⁴ For more on Jesus' word of endurance, see Koester, *Revelation*, p. 325, who suggests it is either (1) Christ's call for Christians to persevere or (2) the message about Christ's own perseverance. Koester supports the former as a more suitable option.

because of their faithful obedience, such as Jesus (1.5), the church in Smyrna (2.10), and Antipas (2.13).¹⁵⁵

At this point the hearers would likely wonder about τῆς ὥρας τοῦ πειρασμοῦ ('the hour of trial'). Perhaps this would cause them to anticipate a time of judgment to come later on in the narrative.¹⁵⁶ Whatever they would think, they would understand that God is not going to try¹⁵⁷ the faithful in this hour of trial but will rather try τοὺς κατοικοῦντας ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ('those who dwell on the earth').¹⁵⁸ Jesus 'will keep'¹⁵⁹ those who have kept his word. Hearers would not have to wonder just how Jesus would 'keep' or protect them.¹⁶⁰ The Johannine community would not be unfamiliar with the idea of being kept from trial. Careful hearers would observe that v. 10 is in continuity with Jn 17.15 in that both are the only places in the Johannine corpus wherein τηρέω is used with ἐκ.¹⁶¹ In Jn 17.15, Jesus promises to keep his disciples from 'the evil one'. As such, the hearers could well understand Jesus' promise as being one that offers spiritual protection from cosmic forces that could be somehow associated with this hour of trial. Perhaps hearers would come to anticipate this protection as the narrative unfolds.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁵ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 179.

¹⁵⁶ See Reddish, *Revelation*, p. 77. Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 193, notes the consensus reading of scholarship is that the hour of trial refers to a time of judgment that comes later in the narrative. Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 92, expounds on this, noting that these woes take various forms, can occur at any time in history, and are 'proleptic' of the final, established kingdom of God. See also Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 180.

¹⁵⁷ Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 193, connects the 'tests' to the wrath of God that is to be poured out in the various judgments that will occur later in the narrative.

¹⁵⁸ Though apocalyptic does refer positively to 'those who dwell upon the earth' (1 En. 60.5; 4 Ezra 6.26), it also refers to them negatively (1 En. 65.6, 10; 67.8; 2 Bar. 54.1; 70.2; 4 Ezra 3.34-35; 6.18). The hearers will soon come to learn that 'those who dwell on their earth' (v. 10) will only refer to the wicked and/or those who are God's enemies in the Apocalypse, as this phrase is only used in a negative sense throughout the narrative (6.10; 8.13; 11.10; 13.8, 14; 17.8).

¹⁵⁹ See R. Kratz, 'τηρήσω', *EDNT*, III, p. 355, who suggests τηρήσω' refers to eschatological reward owing to faithfulness in the letters to the seven churches.

¹⁶⁰ Dispensational eschatology teaches that v. 10 suggests 'removal from the earth prior to the "hour of trial"'. See Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, p. 287, who maintains that this view is 'well supported.' For another proponent of this dispensational view, see J.F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Chicago, IL: JFW Publishing Trust, 2008), p. 87. Contra Koester, *Revelation*, p. 325-26; Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, pp. 238-40; Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 240; Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 92, who correctly determine that protecting the church of Philadelphia from the hour of trial does not mean removing them from the earth prior to it.

¹⁶¹ In his case on why 3.10 cannot refer to the rapture, Gundry points out the parallel between Jn 17.15 and 3.10 and says, 'How then can τηρέω ἐκ refer to the rapture or to the result of the rapture when in its only other occurrence the phrase opposes an expression which would perfectly describe the rapture?' See R.H. Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), p. 64. See also Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, pp. 290-91.

¹⁶² See Koester, *Revelation*, p. 326; Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 103; Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 92, who suggest that protection does not mean total alleviation from suffering. Rather, protection would be heard as preservation in suffering and exemption from God's wrath.

As the hearers come to v. 11, Jesus announces that he is coming soon. This is a familiar statement by this point in the prophetic messages as it has been announced three other times prior to this verse (2.5; 2.16; 3.3). Here Jesus exhorts them to continue to κράτει ('hold fast') to what they have until this coming. With this instruction being so close to the mention of the hour of trial, hearers would likely see the two in connection with one another. The idea of the saints in Philadelphia holding fast would likely remind of Jesus holding onto the seven churches (2.1), the church in Pergamum who holds to Jesus' name in spite of the cosmic trials present there, and the church in Thyatira who is to hold onto their good works despite their own challenge (2.25). These ideas seem to converge here, suggesting to the hearers that the Philadelphians are to be prepared to maintain their faithful witness to Jesus until he appears. Such faithfulness ensures that no one will seize their crown. The appearance of the crown, last mentioned in the prophetic message to Smyrna where the people of God were promised a crown of life for faithfulness until death (2.10), would cause the hearers to gasp, signaling that similar persecution and trial is ahead for the faithful in Philadelphia.

In v. 12, the familiar promise to the conqueror is made. This promise is two-fold: (1) Jesus will make the conqueror a pillar in the temple of God¹⁶³ and (2) the conqueror will have exclusive names written upon them. These names are: (1) the name of God, (2) the name of the city of God, and (3) Jesus' name:¹⁶⁴

γράψω ἐπ' αὐτὸν τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ θεοῦ μου καὶ τὸ ὄνομα τῆς πόλεως τοῦ θεοῦ μου, τῆς καινῆς Ἱερουσαλὴμ ἢ καταβαίνουσα ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ μου, καὶ τὸ ὄνομά μου τὸ καινόν.

I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name.

Careful hearers would likely notice that an ABA pattern emerges here:¹⁶⁵

A1 τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ θεοῦ μου

B τὸ ὄνομα τῆς πόλεως τοῦ θεοῦ μου

¹⁶³ Perhaps the promise of being made a pillar would remind the hearers of Ps. 27.4 and cause them to consider that they will have a place of permanence in the presence of God. Perhaps they would think of Eliakim in Isa. 22.22-25, who was set as a 'peg' amongst his father's house. Whatever the situation in Philadelphia, and whatever the imagery brings to mind, the hearers would likely suspect that the conquerors' place in the Kingdom was permanent, established, and secure.

¹⁶⁴ For more on these names see Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, pp. 94-95; Fanning, *Revelation*, p. 179; Koester, *Revelation*, p. 327.

¹⁶⁵ See Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 199.

A2 τὸ ὄνομά μου τὸ καινόν

A1 the name of my God

B the name of the city of my God

A2 my own new name

It might not be going too far to suggest that the hearers would observe that the names of God and Jesus frame in the city of God.¹⁶⁶ What could this mean? Perhaps it demonstrates security and safety to them, as they are fixated between God and Jesus. Perhaps it hints at, both visually and literarily, protection and establishment for a church that has held fast in spite of persecution.¹⁶⁷ Such a promise would encourage the church in Philadelphia to continue holding fast in their trials while placing their hope in the eschatological return of Jesus.

Laodicea

The fifth church of relevance concerning suffering and theodicy is Laodicea. The first thing that would stand out to the hearers in this message is the way that Jesus identifies himself:

ὁ ἀμήν, ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστὸς καὶ ἀληθινός, ἡ ἀρχὴ τῆς κτίσεως τοῦ θεοῦ

the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation¹⁶⁸

The phrase ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστὸς καὶ ἀληθινός would likely remind of how Jesus identified himself to the church in Philadelphia as 'the true one' (3.17) as well as John's description of Jesus at the beginning of the narrative, 'the faithful witness' (1.5). Such ideas would likely cause the hearers to think of standing in the truth of Jesus, through faithful witness, and the price that has come for it, such as trial and death. Perhaps they would think of Jesus or Antipas, even the church in Smyrna or more recently, the Philadelphians.¹⁶⁹ Owing to these associations, the hearers would suspect that Jesus' emphasis on his faithful witness, which entails his sufferings, might be an acute contrast to the situation in Laodicea!¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁶ Eventually the hearers will learn about the heavenly city (Revelation 21).

¹⁶⁷ See Mounce, *Revelation*, pp. 101-102.

¹⁶⁸ T.L. Decker, 'Faithfulness to Christ as Covenant Fidelity: The Pastoral Purpose Behind the Old Testament Allusions in the Seven Messages of Revelation 2-3', *AUSS* 55 (2017), p. 168, considers the prophetic messages to the churches of Ephesus and Laodicea to be an inclusio around the entirety of the seven prophetic messages because of their 'shared narrative of creation to new creation'.

¹⁶⁹ See Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 187.

¹⁷⁰ See Collins, *The Apocalypse*, p. 30. See Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 204, who suggests that this identification is a 'deliberate contrast' with the lukewarm Laodiceans who were not faithful to Jesus and whose witness did not exist. Jesus emphasizes himself as the faithful witness to show the apathetic church a model for faithful witness, which is suffering. That Jesus expands the title of faithful witness to include ἀληθινός ('true') suggests that Jesus has a reliable testimony and, conversely, the Laodiceans do not. See also Fanning, *Revelation*, p. 187.

As the hearers move to vv. 15-16, their suspicions would be confirmed. Jesus criticizes the Laodicean's witness, suggesting they are neither cold or hot¹⁷¹ but lukewarm¹⁷² and tells them he will spit them out of his mouth. The hearers learn that the Laodiceans think that they are rich,¹⁷³ but Jesus reveals that they are poor and in a detestable state.¹⁷⁴ It would be impossible to imagine that the hearers would miss the significance of this language as it is the inverse of Smyrna who, though they are poor, Jesus calls them rich (2.9). This contrast with the church of Smyrna would further suggest to the hearers that the Laodiceans' situation is much different than the situation of those churches which have suffered for their witness.

Jesus implores the Laodiceans to buy from him three things: (1) gold refined by fire, (2) white garments,¹⁷⁵ and (3) eye salve.¹⁷⁶ Gold refined by fire would likely strike the hearers. Up to this point, the idea of suffering has been commonly associated with faithful witness. It might not be going too far to suggest that the fire would call to mind fires of suffering which would be instrumental in purifying the church's witness.¹⁷⁷ Would joining Jesus in that suffering be a way to be saved from their lukewarm state? Could this be the way to follow Jesus' example and

¹⁷¹ For ψυχρὸς/ζεστός/χλιαρὸς being a reference to the aqueduct system in Laodicea, see J.A.D. Weima, *The Sermons to the Seven Churches of Revelation: A Commentary and Guide* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2021), p. 236-41; Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches*, pp. 186-91. Contra Koester, *Revelation*, p. 337, who calls such a view 'untenable' because all of the cities had similar aqueducts, wherewith the water was by-and-large good to drink from.

¹⁷² Perhaps the hearers would understand that lukewarm substances adapt to the environment, seeing this as a criticism that their witness has adapted to their own culture or perhaps they would understand that lukewarm substance is undesirable and ineffective like their witness. Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, pp. 188-89.

¹⁷³ The Laodiceans say of themselves Πλούσιός εἰμι καὶ πεπλούτηκα καὶ οὐδὲν χρεῖαν ἔχω ('I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing'). The triple use of the first-person singular – εἰμι, πεπλούτηκα, ἔχω – emphasizes self-interest. Perhaps later on in the narrative the hearers would discover that this sort of testament is indicative of Babylon (Rev. 18.7)! See Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, p. 101.

¹⁷⁴ Irony comes into play as Jesus reveals to the hearers that the situation is the reverse: the church of Laodicea is actually ὁ ταλαίπωρος καὶ ἐλεεινὸς καὶ πτωχὸς καὶ τυφλὸς καὶ γυμνός ('wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked'). The employment of polysyndeton in the quadruple use of the connective conjunction καὶ combined with the -ὸς endings on each of the adjectives gives this list an intense and forceful emphasis. Perhaps the hearers would be startled by how Jesus really saw their situation!

¹⁷⁵ The hearers would likely understand white garments in connection with walking intimately with Jesus (1.14; 3.4) as white has been the color associated with Jesus up to this point.

¹⁷⁶ The hearers would likely connect the eye salve to the blind man in the FG who received his sight (Jn 9.39-41). See Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 194; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 306; Mounce, *Revelation*, p. 111-12. Such a connection would likely cause the hearers to consider the Laodiceans spiritual blindness and need for discernment.

¹⁷⁷ Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 209, suggests that this imagery might bring Ps. 66.10 to mind and/or possibly Zech. 13.9 and Isa. 1.25. Swete *The Apocalypse of St John*, p. 61, recognizes that the purification process which removes the dross potentially has reference to 'the fiery trial which attends the process'. See Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 305.

assume a faithful witness? ¹⁷⁸ Is faithful witness, which has the prospect of suffering, a way to reverse their situation of being spiritually poor in order to be spiritually rich like the church in Smyrna? In light of this, Jesus exhorts the church to repent, urging them that to answer his knock and accept his wish to dine with them. ¹⁷⁹

In v. 21, Jesus offers the one who conquers a promise:

ὁ νικῶν δώσω αὐτῷ καθίσαι μετ' ἐμοῦ ἐν τῷ θρόνῳ μου, ὡς καὶ γὰρ ἐνίκησα καὶ ἐκάθισα μετὰ τοῦ πατρὸς μου ἐν τῷ θρόνῳ αὐτοῦ.

The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.

Upon concluding this last message, the hearers now discover that one of the consistent elements of each letter is a promise for those who νικάω ('conquer'). ¹⁸⁰ The repetitive nature of this promise would be understood as a structural feature which binds these messages together in harmony. ¹⁸¹ It would also recall Jesus' words from the FG which declare that he has νενίκηκα ('conquered') the world (Jn 16.33) and various place in the Johannine epistles which disclose that the people of God νενικήκατε ('have conquered') the evil one through Jesus (1 Jn 2.13, 14; 5.5). Thus, the promises to the conqueror suggest that that the people of God are able to

¹⁷⁸ See Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, pp. 192-93.

¹⁷⁹ Perhaps Jesus' wish to dine with the Laodiceans would remind the hearers of the various places in the FG where Jesus is portrayed dining (Jn 12.2; 13.2, 4; 21.20). Given these instances hold sacramental nuances, the hearers would likely discern Jesus' intent to fellowship with his church. See Koester, *Revelation*, p. 340-41; Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 198. The banqueting language would also likely suggest to the hearers a final eschatological banquet in the Messianic Kingdom (Isa. 25.6; 1En. 62.14; 2 Bar. 29.8) causing them to anticipate this scene later on toward the end of the narrative.

¹⁸⁰ See T. Holtz, 'νικάω', *EDNT*, II, p. 467, which suggests that this term means 'to conquer, gain victory'. Koester, *Revelation*, p. 265, notes that this metaphor could potentially draw from three spheres of meaning: military, athletics, and faithfulness. He posits that 1 Macc. uses this term to portray the Maccabean martyrs who endured torture and were executed for their faithfulness to the Jewish Law (1 Macc. 1.11; 6.10; 9.30; 11.20; 17.15). Koester argues that conquering in Revelation subverts the typical meaning of conquering which entails inflicting pain and overpowering the enemy through weaponry and tactics. Instead, Jesus conquered evil through his death and resurrection. Those who 'conquer' are those who remain faithful to Jesus. 'By remaining faithful to Christ, his followers conquer the world in which hatred and untruth operate ... Revelation transforms the images of conquest and victory, which brought high honor in Greco-Roman culture, into a call for Christians to resist aspects of that culture ... in Christ's eyes the faithful are worthy of the victory wreath.' See also Ladd, *Revelation of John*, pp. 40-41; Patterson, *Revelation*, pp. 89-90.

¹⁸¹ M. den Dulck, 'The Promises to the Conquerors in the Book of Revelation', *Bib* 87 (2004), pp. 516-22, suggests that the promises to the conquerors are based on previous events that have taken place in salvation history. He maintains that they are not given at random. Rather, they follow a 'coherent approach' that follows a 'salvation-historical line' that highlights critical points in the biblical narrative.

overcome in spite of suffering and tribulation.¹⁸² But how? Jesus' use of the aorist ἐνίκησα likely points to the moment in which he conquered (3.21). This moment was during his faithful and true witness (3.14), at his death and resurrection (1.5). Thus the hearers would likely understand conquering to be faithful witness in the face of suffering. The reward of this is sharing Jesus' throne.¹⁸³ While considering the throne, the hearers would likely be reminded of texts from the OT where God reigns from the throne.¹⁸⁴ They are now invited to be part of this eschatological rule.¹⁸⁵ Such a notion could only fill them with awe.

Jesus' seven prophetic messages come to an end with the promise of the throne being offered to the conquerors who maintain their witness in spite of trials.¹⁸⁶ Perhaps the hearers would suspect significance, even strategy, in how these messages conclude.¹⁸⁷ As the hearers move from the prophetic messages into the inaugural vision of heaven, they have become aware that sharing Jesus' throne includes sharing Jesus' sufferings. This will be in view as they encounter this very throne in just a few verses ahead (4.2).¹⁸⁸

¹⁸² Slater, *Revelation as Civil Disobedience*, p. 68, notes, 'John has transformed *nikao* and its cognates from a political, athletic, or legal victory to victory through suffering'.

¹⁸³ Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 79, suggests sharing the throne with Christ can come no other way, as Christ, in whose throne they share, conquered through suffering. See also Wall, *Revelation*, p. 87.

¹⁸⁴ See Ps. 47.8; Isa. 6.1.

¹⁸⁵ See Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 214-15.

¹⁸⁶ See Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, pp. 84-86, who suggests that if the hearers are observing the plot of each letter, they might perceive that the shape of the plot in each letter is U-shaped, which is like that of a comedy. N. Frye, *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (Boston, MA: Mariner Books, 2002), pp. 169-71, suggests that the entire Bible is shaped with a U-shaped plot and is a 'divine comedy'. In this story, a man 'loses the tree and water of life at the beginning of Genesis and gets them back at the end of Revelation'. Frye suggests that the meta narrative is composed of smaller U-shaped plots. Pertaining to the messages of the seven churches, Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, pp. 84-87, suggests that the top of the U is Jesus' 'I know' (οἶδα) wherein Jesus acknowledges the various churches' good works. However, the U-shaped plot turns downward when Jesus rebukes the churches for what he has against them. The U-shaped plot reverses and begins to go back up upon Jesus' call for repentance. The plot finally reaches a stable level upon Jesus' promise to those who conquer.

¹⁸⁷ The hearers will soon learn that the θρόνος ('throne') will play a foremost part of the narrative going forward. D. Sanger notices that θρόνος appears around 60 times in the NT, yet three-fourths of those appearances are in Revelation. See D. Sanger, 'θρόνος', *EDNT*, II, p. 156. That θρόνος is a major theme in the narrative of Revelation is undeniable.

¹⁸⁸ In light of how the seven prophetic messages end with the promise made to the Laodiceans in v. 21, Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, p. 6, says, 'this last promise seems to be placed last, not because of a special appropriateness to the church at Laodicea, but rather because it anticipates chapter 5. Christ's own "conquest" and his consequent enthronement with his Father in heaven is what John sees announced and celebrated in chapter 5.' At any rate, Bauckham sees this as a transition to the inaugural vision of heaven in 4.1-5.14.

Implications of Revelation 1

The opening chapter of Revelation presents information necessary for the hearers to understand the remainder of the narrative. There are ten implications concerning suffering and theodicy that will be important in the narrative ahead:

First, grace and peace are offered to the hearers before any explicit reference to suffering in the narrative. Both grace and peace come from the fullness of seven Spirits suggesting that the Spirit will play a key role in offering grace and peace in tribulation as the narrative unfolds (1.3).

Second, suffering enters the narrative for the first time when Jesus' witness is associated with his death (1.5). His death is associated with his resurrection, as he is called 'the firstborn of the dead', and his death and resurrection become associated with his rule over the kings of the earth. The doxology reveals that Jesus loves us, has loosed us from our sin by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom of priests unto God. This reveals an association between Jesus' love, his suffering death, redemption from sin, and the people of God's service to him in his Kingdom (vv. 5-6).

Third, those who pierced Jesus end up mourning for two possible reasons: (1) they mourn for themselves owing to the judgment Jesus brings upon those who have opposed him or (2) they mourn for Jesus who suffered in his death (v. 7).

Fourth, God is the ruler over life and death and all that is in between. This is discerned in the statement that is he the Alpha and the Omega (1.8).

Fifth, there is an association between tribulation, the kingdom, and patient endurance. This association suggests that tribulation and patient endurance are part of sharing in the kingdom and these experiences draw one into close fellowship with Jesus (v. 9).

Sixth, John is on the island of Patmos because of his faithful witness (v. 9) which implies some form of tribulation and suffering.

Seventh, the Holy Spirit will play a central role through the narrative in administering grace and peace. The first 'in the Spirit marker' in v. 10, heard in association with the seven Spirits before the throne (v. 4), alludes to the central role that the Holy Spirit will play as the Apocalypse unfolds.

Eighth, Jesus is the divine judge. This is discerned in the inaugural vision with the description of the sword coming out of his mouth (v. 16).

Ninth, Jesus has the ability to make alive the dead. This idea emerges when Jesus places his right hand on John who has fallen before him as dead and tells him that he is the living one who died but is alive forevermore (vv. 17-18).

Tenth, Jesus' presence among the seven churches suggests that he has sovereign control over everything taking place within them (v. 20).

Implications of Revelation 2-3

As the hearers come to the end of the prophetic messages in chapters two and three, they would now notice each messages contain the same formula¹⁸⁹ at or near the end:¹⁹⁰

ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις.

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.¹⁹¹

There are four implications that the hearers would likely 'hear' the Spirit¹⁹² saying in Revelation 2-3 in regard to suffering and theodicy:

First, Jesus is looking for a church that is willing to suffer with him.¹⁹³ There are a number of overtures in the narrative that suggest this: (1) the churches that Jesus commends most profoundly are those suffering explicitly for him, Smyrna and Philadelphia; (2) the only individual within the entire community that is singled out amongst them and named in a positive way, Antipas, is an individual who has suffered unto death; and (3) the church whose witness suffers due to their apathy and penchant for avoiding suffering, Laodicea, receives a strong and severe warning. These overtures would be enough to suggest to the hearers that suffering with Jesus out of faithfulness to him draws the people of God into an intimate fellowship together with him.

¹⁸⁹ A-M. Enroth, 'The Hearing Formula in the Book of Revelation', *NTS* 36.4 (1990), pp. 598-608, notes that the 'Hearing formula' is treated esoterically by the scholars she has surveyed. She discourages this interpretation and posits that it is not a signal for 'deeper intention'. Rather, it is 'an encouragement and a call to those who have remained faithful and stood firm in the community in spite of problems ... caused by persecutions.'

¹⁹⁰ Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment*, pp. 210-11, notes that the exhortation to hear the Spirit is communal but requires individual responsibility. It suggests the need for continuous discernment and obedience for the one who hears the Spirit, hears Jesus, and hears the words of God.

¹⁹¹ See 2.7; 2.11; 2.17; 2.29; 3.6; 3.13; 3.22. This pneumatic activity is part and parcel with the constitution of the entire book, as is also observed in the ἐν πνεύματι divisions of the text (1.10; 4.2; 17.3; 21.10).

¹⁹² The Spirit is referred to in the singular in this formula in Revelation 2-3. This is a change from how the Spirit is presented as the seven Spirits in 1.4. See M. Wilson, *The Victor Sayings in the Book of Revelation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2007), p. 72.

¹⁹³ Summarizing these prophetic messages through the lens of a Pentecostal, Newton, *A Pentecostal Commentary on Revelation*, p. 117, says, 'It is not so much someone who is doctrinally correct or successful (not that these are important, but one who is faithful persevering, willing to suffer, uncompromising with the world, and passionately devoted to Christ'.

Second, suffering comes with faithful witness. Faithful witness appears as a theme a number of times throughout these messages (2.10, 13, 19; 3.14). In each of these instances, the possibility of suffering for faithful witness is present. Even the church of Laodicea, though there seems to be no suffering taking place, faces the prospect of becoming like the suffering saints in Smyrna if they repent and become faithful in their witness. Thus, the hearers learn that suffering comes with faithful witness, as suffering is an unavoidable component of witness.

Third, maintaining witness in spite of suffering is conquering. The call to conqueror appears in each message toward the end. This is not without significance and the hearers would perhaps consider this to be by design. This narrative feature would likely suggest to them that conquering comes after faithful witness, faithful witness often being done in the face of suffering. Thus, conquering is subsequent to have suffering *with* Jesus as witnesses *of* Jesus.

Fourth, conquerors will be rewarded by Jesus in the eschaton. Within each letter, Jesus makes it clear to the hearers that conquerors will receive an eschatological reward. Such bold promises would assure the hearers that their suffering is noticed by God, and it matters. Perhaps these promises would also cause the hearers to designate God as the just judge over suffering, something that they would anticipate seeing throughout the remainder of the narrative as it unfolds.

Given what the hearers would hear in Jesus' messages to the churches, it is not going too far to suggest that they would *not* hear a rational explanation to explain the problem of suffering and evil. The commendations, warnings, and promises place emphasis on following Jesus' witness. While faithful witness serves as the immediate cause of their suffering, continued faithful witness through patient endurance (2.2, 19; 3.10) and hope in Jesus' own faithfulness to keep his promises serve as the only response to suffering.

4.6 ἐν πνεύματι – In Heaven (4.1 – 16.21)

The closing of the message to the Laodicean church (3.22) marks the conclusion of Jesus' prophetic messages to the seven churches and brings the first major section of Revelation (1.9-3.22) to an end. In 4.1, the second section begins, indicated by the next appearance of the structural marker, ἐν πνεύματι (4.2). This is the largest section of the Apocalypse and includes the inaugural visions of heaven (4.1-5.14), the opening of the seven seals (6.1-8.5), the seven trumpet judgments (8.2-11.9), the struggle of God's people as seen from a cosmic perspective

(12.1-15.4), and the seven bowl plague judgments (15.1-16.21). Upon discovering that the next scene *is* the throne room, the hearers would not fail to notice the apparent compatibility of the two sections.¹⁹⁴ Moreover, as an interpretive clue, 3.21 would cause the hearers to anticipate this next scene to elaborate upon the throne. Such ‘duodirectionality’ would cause the hearers to keep in mind what they have heard in the first section as they move into this next scene (and section), suspecting it is crucial to understanding the narrative.

Revelation 4-5¹⁹⁵

Entering this next scene and section, the hearers are met with the marker *Μετὰ ταῦτα εἶδον* (‘After this I saw’)¹⁹⁶ which signals a transition and would provoke their expectations for what is next. The first image relevant to suffering and theodicy in chapter four is a *θύρα* (‘door’)¹⁹⁷ to heaven.¹⁹⁸ This imagery would create a sense of hopefulness in the hearers as it would appear to be an invitation to another world,¹⁹⁹ namely heaven. A voice which sounds like a trumpet²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁴ Perhaps the hearers would not see these two sections as mutually exclusive owing to the mention of the throne in 3.21, which would appear strategical, serving as a ‘springboard’ into chapters four and five. Ranko Stefanovic refers to what he calls, a ‘springboard passage’. A springboard passage is a text that concludes what precedes it while at the same time introducing what comes after it. Thus, he says that 3.21 provides an ‘interpretive outline’ for what takes place in chapters four-seven. See R. Stefanovic, ‘Finding Meaning in the Literary Patterns of Revelation’, *JATS* 13.1 (2002), pp. 27-28. J. Paulien refers to these ‘springboard passages’ as ‘duodirectionality’. Noticing these are crucial. He posits, ‘To notice this is to find the author’s own explanation of what follows hidden in what precedes it. But to ignore it is to miss the author’s own commentary or interpretation of what follows.’ See J. Paulien, *The Deep Things of God* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2004), p. 159. Gullusz concurs with Paulien, stating that 3.21 is an interpretive clue for the visions in 4-5. See L. Gullusz, *The Throne Motif in the Book of Revelation* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury, 2014), p. 99. See also Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 218, who suggests that chapter five is commentary on 3.21. Paulien, *The Deep Things of God*, pp. 160-61, suggests that 3.21 commentates upon chapters four, five, and seven. His thought is that 3.21 contains two parts: (1) the overcoming believer and (2) the overcoming Christ. Both experience trial and overcome and receive the throne. This is commentated in chapters four, five, and seven. In chapter four, the throne is introduced. In chapter five, Jesus joins his Father on the throne. In chapter seven, the conquerors join Jesus on the throne.

¹⁹⁵ Revelation 4-5 is widely regarded as *the* central chapter of the Apocalypse. Gorman, *Reading Revelation Responsibly*, p. 102, notes that they ‘belong inseparably together’. See also Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 93, who has suggested that the two chapters must be taken together to notice the interpretative clue they provide. See also, Archer, *I Was in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day*, p. 174, who offers an array of scholars who share the same viewpoint.

¹⁹⁶ This marker will become a regular transitional marker as the narrative moves forward (7.1, 9; 15.5; 18.1; 19.1)

¹⁹⁷ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 202, gives four possible things the door might remind the hearers of: (1) the open door in Philadelphia in 3.8; (2) the fact that Jesus holds the key of David; (3) an open door for not only John but the entire Johannine community; and (4) the door Jesus knocks on in his message to the Laodiceans in 3.20.

¹⁹⁸ Doors are not unfamiliar in apocalyptic, representing entrance into the heavenlies, heavenly perspective, and even paradise and delight (1 En. 14.10-11; 15.14; 104.2; T. Levi 5.1).

¹⁹⁹ Reddish, *The Revelation*, p. 89, discusses whether or not the Apocalypse can be classified as a *bona fide* ‘otherworldly journey’ like the Apocalypse of Abraham, 2 Enoch, 3 Baruch, the Apocalypse of Paul or, even, Dante’s *Inferno*. Reddish is slow to classify the Apocalypse into this category as it is distinguished from these *bona fide* examples because the journey motif does not carry all the way through the narrative.

²⁰⁰ The voice of a trumpet would likely remind the hearers of the inaugural vision (1.10).

confirms this invitation saying, ‘Ἀνάβα ὧδε, καὶ δείξω σοὶ ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι μετὰ ταῦτα’ (‘Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this’). This would stir the hearers hope for two reasons: First, it would cause them to think of OT figures who were given visions of heaven in their own trials.²⁰¹ Second, it offers them the opportunity to discern their situation from a heavenly perspective.²⁰² In. v. 2, the hearers encounter the throne which is the second image relevant to suffering and theodicy in this chapter:

καὶ ἰδοὺ θρόνος ἔκειτο ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ, καὶ ἐπὶ τὸν θρόνον καθήμενος.

and behold, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne.

The hearers are not only drawn to the throne but also to the one who sits on the throne. This is understood by (1) the use of the interjection ἰδοὺ (‘behold’),²⁰³ which draws their attention toward what is being said, and (2) a slight shift in focal point that redirects the hearers attention from the throne to the one who sits on the throne.²⁰⁴ By the end of v. 2, the hearers have heard the term θρόνος (‘throne’) six out of the 47 times they will learn it appears in the narrative, causing them to suspect that the throne will be a dominant symbol in the narrative. As such, they would discern that God’s sovereignty and justice will be one of the central themes moving forward.²⁰⁵ Furthermore, it would not be lost on the hearers where God is in relation to his throne: seated.²⁰⁶ This seated imagery would confirm the ultimate sovereignty of God even in the midst of suffering and trials.

Following the image of the throne, the hearers would observe the third image relevant to suffering and theodicy and that is the twenty-four thrones around God’s throne and the elders seated on those thrones (v. 4). The hearers would notice that the twenty-four elders wear both white garments and gold crowns, recalling the rewards Jesus promises to the conquerors in the seven churches (2.10; 3.4-5, 11, 18, 21). This imagery would become even more striking in

²⁰¹ See 2 Kgs 6.15-17.

²⁰² Koester, *Revelation*, pp. 359-60, notes that the repetition of ἐν πνεύματι in 4.2 confirms a switch to a heavenly setting.

²⁰³ The hearers would be familiar with this interjection by this point. It might not be going too far to say that it would cause them to immediately render their focus upon what was to be said (1.7, 18; 2.10, 22; 3.8, 9, 20).

²⁰⁴ John tends to redirect his focal points in order to point out important details to the hearers. See Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, p. 107, who suggests John does this in various places such as in 19.11.

²⁰⁵ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Vision of a Just World*, p. 120, acknowledges the central symbol of the throne and the central theme of God’s justice as it relates to empire. ‘Revelation’s central theological query is: To whom does the earth belong? Who is ruler of the world? The book’s central theological symbol is therefore the *throne*.’

²⁰⁶ This instance is the first of 13 times in the narrative that the hearers will observe God sitting upon his throne. See Rev. 4.3, 9, 10; 5.1, 7, 13; 6.16; 7:10, 15; 19.4; 20.11; 21.5. Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, p. 31, refers to God sitting on the throne as one of the four main designations used to describe him in the narrative.

considering the number twenty-four, which the hearers would likely understand to represent the sum total of the people of God.²⁰⁷ Thus, it is likely that the image of the 24 elders would convey the reign of those whom Jesus has called to conquer through their faithful witness.²⁰⁸

In v. 5, a fourth relevant image to suffering and theodicy emerges. The hearers discover that there are *ἑπτὰ λαμπάδες πυρὸς ... ἃ εἰσιν τὰ ἑπτὰ πνεύματα τοῦ θεοῦ* ('seven torches of fire, which are the seven Spirits of God') before the throne. The hearers would recall a number of possible things: (1) the seven Spirits in the prologue (1.4), (2) the inaugural vision and the fiery eyes of Jesus which would indicate to the hearers that the seven Spirits have a unique relationship to Jesus (1.14),²⁰⁹ (3) the seven lampstands which would indicate the seven torches of fire have a unique relationship to the seven churches (1.12),²¹⁰ and (4) the empowerment of the Spirit²¹¹ associated with Zechariah's vision of the seven burning lamps (Zech. 4.6).²¹² Owing to these things, the hearers would likely suspect that the Spirit and his empowering activity is part of God's reign. The proximity of the seven torches of fire to the throne of God would confirm this. The Johannine community already understands the Spirit to be active among them

²⁰⁷ The number 12 is often associated with the people of God in Scripture. Gorman, *Reading Revelation Responsibly*, p. 107, points out that this number is likely taken from the 12 tribes of Israel and the 12 apostles. Hence, the number twenty-four forms the people of God on earth. See also M.E. Boring, *Revelation* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1989), p. 106.

²⁰⁸ Boring, *Revelation*, p. 106, refers to the twenty-four elders as a heavenly 'counterpart' to God's people on earth who are called to faithful witness unto death. Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 208, considers the white garments and crowns as attestations of their conquering as faithful witnesses, like Jesus.

²⁰⁹ Wilson believes that the similar fire language used to describe Jesus' eyes and the seven Spirits before the throne indicates a distinct relationship between the two. See Wilson, *The Victor Sayings in the Book of Revelation*, p. 73.

²¹⁰ Waddell, *The Spirit of the Book of Revelation*, p. 177, makes this connection and proposes that lampstands are omitted from the throne because that imagery has already been employed. He concludes, 'the seven flames which burn before the throne also inhabit the church(es), lighting the lampstands'.

²¹¹ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 209, argues that the reappearance of the seven Spirits, which comes after the various references to the singular form of referencing the Spirit in chapters two and three, suggests that the seven Spirits of God and the Holy Spirit are one and the same.

²¹² Newton, *A Pentecostal Commentary on Revelation*, p. 124, points out that 4.5 would recall the Spirit empowerment associated with Zech. 4.6 because the community in Revelation was under threat like the Jewish people during the time of Zerubbabel. Under threat, the Spirit empowered Zerubbabel to build the Temple and under threat the Spirit empowers the community in Revelation. Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, p. 163, understands the idea of the seven Spirits, echoing Zech. 4.1-14, to be key to understanding John's idea of the Spirit's activity in the world. 'If we wonder why he should have attached such importance to this obscure vision of Zechariah, the answer no doubt lies in the word of the Lord which he would have understood as the central message of the vision: "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts"'. Wall, *Revelation*, p. 93, suggests that a 'pentecostal' understanding of fire as metaphor for the empowerment of the Spirit is helpful to explain the importance John attaches to his blazing lamp imagery.

(Jn 14.16-17, 26-27) though now they would understand that his activity in the earth is part-and-parcel with God's heavenly rule.²¹³

As the narrative continues, the hearers encounter living creatures singing²¹⁴ while the twenty-four elders fall down before the Lord and cast their crowns before the throne (v. 10). The elders' worship is the fifth image relevant to suffering and theodicy in chapter four. Perhaps the hearers would find it interesting that the elders have fallen before God because this was John's response when seeing the resurrected Jesus (1.17). The hearers would likely form a connection between the twenty-four elders and John, perhaps discerning the twenty-four elders to be those who have shared in tribulation, and in the kingdom, and in patient endurance, thus making them faithful witnesses.²¹⁵ If so, the hearers would understand that the crowns are a reward for faithful witness in the face of suffering (2.10),²¹⁶ meaning their conquering has not come through their own strength or empowerment. It has been made possible by the one on the throne,²¹⁷ even his Spirit. In casting their crowns, they praise God as creator (v. 11). The Johannine community would be quite familiar with the idea of God as creator (Jn 1.3) though they would likely wonder how the twenty-four elders acknowledging God as creator would fit into this vision. What does the presence and active agency of the creator in the world look like?²¹⁸ As the hearers contemplate this, the narrative transitions into chapter five.²¹⁹

²¹³ Wall, *Revelation*, p. 93, notes, 'the pentecostal use of "fire" as metaphor for the empowerment of the Spirit may help explain John's image of "blazing lamps" ... as an element of God's reign ... The rule of God is not removed from the experience of God's people on earth; God is always for Christ's disciples and with them in transforming power.'

²¹⁴ Resseguie, *The Revelation of St John*, p. 112, refers to these living creatures as 'hybrids' that comprise traits of both the world above and below. 'Their hybrid nature is emblematic of the world in perfect harmony with its creator – in other words, the world as it was intended to be.' The song they sing is broken up into three stanzas: (1) holy, holy, holy, (2) Lord, God, Almighty, and (3) was, is, is to come. The divisions of three would further reinforce the divinity of the one on the throne as three is the number associated with the Godhead. See E.W. Bullinger, *Number in Scripture* (Redding, CA: Pleasant Places Press, 1894), p. 108.

²¹⁵ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 216.

²¹⁶ G.M. Stevenson, 'Conceptual Background to the Golden Crown Imagery in the Apocalypse of John (4:1, 10; 14:14)', *JBL* 114.2 (1995), pp. 257-72, argues that the crown imagery in Revelation is 'narrowly identified' when it is interpreted to mean *only* victory or royalty. He maintains that the interpretation of crown imagery needs to be expanded to include 'divine glory and honor' which, he believes, are the predominant ideas behind it.

²¹⁷ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 216.

²¹⁸ Resseguie, *The Revelation of St John*, p. 114, thinks that the mention of worship forms a link with the second half of chapter five as chapter five answers how the creator of the world redeems the world – through the suffering of the Lamb. This notion seems to also be supported by O'Brien. He notes that Revelation 4 reveals God as Creator which ties into Revelation 5 where the mystery of redemption is revealed. See K.J. O'Brien, 'Revelation 5.1-14', *Int* 53.2 (1999), p. 177.

²¹⁹ L.T. Stuckenbruck, 'Revelation 4–5: Divided Worship or One Vision?', *SCJ* 14.2 (2011), pp. 235-48, argues that Revelation 4 portrays what Revelation is all about: 'the continuous, authentic worship that is to be manifest in

The transition into 5.1 is noted by *Καὶ εἶδον* ('And I saw').²²⁰ The first thing the hearers encounter is a scroll, with writing on the inside and outside, in the right hand of the one on the throne. It is sealed with seven seals. The suspense builds as John weeps loudly.²²¹ No one is worthy to open the scroll or look into it (v. 4). The interjection *ἰδοὺ* ('behold') draws the hearers' attention to the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the Root of David, who *ἐνίκησεν* ('has conquered'). Perhaps the hearers would take note of the aorist tense which indicates that this conquering has already been achieved. The result of this conquering is that *ἀνοίξει*²²² τὸ βιβλίον καὶ τὰς ἑπτὰ σφραγίδας αὐτοῦ ('he can open the scroll and its seven seals'). More than likely the conquering language would remind the hearers of a few things: (1) Jesus' prophetic messages to each of the seven churches where the conqueror is promised a reward; (2) Jesus' description of himself, as a conqueror, in his message to Laodicea; and (3) Jesus' identity in the FG as the one who has conquered the world (Jn 16.33).²²³ The description of the conqueror who is able to open the scroll takes on Messianic overtures as the description portrays the Messiah's mighty victory through two remarkable titles from the OT: *ὁ λέων ὁ ἐκ τῆς φυλῆς Ἰούδα* ('Lion of the Tribe of

the whole of Christian life together'. Thus, the worship in chapter four excludes those who have compromised with the Nicolaitans or the woman called Jezebel.

²²⁰ This phrase is used 32 times in the Apocalypse. Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, pp. 126-27, suggests it serves three purposes: (1) to introduce a new vision, (2) to lead into a scene within a continuing vision, and (3) to draw attention to an important action. Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 247, notes that it occurs four separate times in chapter five and divides chapter five up into four separate sections (5.1, 2-5, 6-10, 11-14). Fanning, *Revelation*, p. 211, comments on the structure of Revelation 5, affirming these four divisions and stating that they mark four additional phases of John's vision that began in chapter four. The first division (5.1) is to connect the divisions that follow to what is central in chapter four, that is, the one on the throne. Wall, *Revelation*, p. 98, notes that chapter five is where the main body of the Apocalypse begins. In his outline, he says that this main body deals with 'the History of God's Salvation: An Exhortation to Christian Faithfulness' which extends until 22.6a. See Wall's outline in Wall, *Revelation*, p. 41.

²²¹ John's weeping would be familiar to the Johannine community as weeping occurs frequently in the FG (Jn 11.31, 33; 20.11, 13, 15). Fanning, *Revelation*, pp. 215-16, refers to this weeping as 'overwhelming grief' based on what he decides is the inceptive use of the imperfect verb *ἐκλαιον*. Of the inceptive imperfect, Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, p. 544, says it is 'used to stress the beginning of an action, with the implication that it continued for some time'. This, coupled with the adjective *πολύ* ('much'), makes for intense despair and even hopelessness.

²²² The infinitive *ἀνοίξει* is used, stressing result. See Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, p. 592, which says the infinitive of result 'indicates the outcome produced by the controlling verb'.

²²³ See Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 223.

Judah') and ἡ ῥίζα Δαυίδ ('Root of David').²²⁴ The hearers would understand that the victory of God is proclaimed in these titles.²²⁵

While the hearers are pondering these things, the third Καὶ εἶδον appears in v. 6 and transitions this vision into its third section. Between the throne and the elders and four living creatures, the hearers notice a Lamb ἐστῆκός ('standing') as though ἐσφαγμένον ('it had been slaughtered').²²⁶ In v. 5, John has *heard* an announcement about a Lion. Yet, in v. 6 John *sees* a Lamb.²²⁷ This might seem incongruent to the hearers at first. Yet, the hearers would likely come to perceive this as dialectic imagery owing to the nature of the visions. In this case, it would not be a contradiction but rather a clarification. The Lion *is* the Lamb.²²⁸ The Lion in v. 5 would be interpreted in association with the Lamb in v. 6.²²⁹ The psychedelic Lion/Lamb becomes the principal image of suffering and theodicy in chapter five.

The hearers would find the nature of the Lamb's death quite peculiar: a σφάζω ('slaughter'). This slaughter would remind them of several things: (1) the suffering of the Passover lamb which redeemed Israel from slavery to the Egyptians and death (Exod. 12), (2) Isaiah's Suffering Servant prophecy where the Messiah is led like a lamb to the slaughter (Isa. 53.7),²³⁰ and (3)

²²⁴ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 133, notes that the Lion of Judah and the Root of David are stock ideas within Jewish messianism. Fanning, *Revelation*, p. 217, suggests that the combination of these two phrases showcase 'a mighty victory'. The Lion of the Tribe of Judah recalls the dominancy of Judah's lineage and the kingship which comes from it that was fulfilled in David and ultimately Jesus (Gen. 49.9-10). The Root of David recalls Isaiah's prophecy that a future ruler will come from the line of Jesse and lead God's people into a world without sorrow (Isa. 11.2-10). Here, John changes it from Jesse's line to David's line. This would likely be to address the Christian community who spoke of Jesus in connection with David's throne more often. See Koester, *Revelation*, p. 376.

²²⁵ Longman, *Revelation*, p. 88, comments on the use of these two OT stock ideas, saying 'Here the triumph of God in Christ is already proclaimed, even before we see many of the other dramatic events found in Revelation'.

²²⁶ Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 132, notes the use of both perfect participles ἐστῆκός and ἐσφαγμένον. The perfect suggests an event has taken place in which the effects are still ongoing.

²²⁷ Here the Lamb becomes a dominant figure in the apocalypse, the first mention of 28 in connection with Jesus.

²²⁸ Michaels, *Revelation*, p. 95, notes that the designations interpret one another and clarify each other. Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 224, maintains this and adds that it is better not to see the Lamb as a replacement of the Lion. He calls the imagery 'psychedelic' which allows for the possibility of the Lion to be the Lamb at the same time. Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, pp. 98-99, also makes this determination saying, 'perhaps we should not try to discriminate too much between the various possibilities in an apocalypse which works by evoking associations rather than offering one-to-one correspondences'. Contra Caird, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 25.

²²⁹ J.A. Jackson and A.H. Redmond, "'And They Sang a New Song": Reading John's Revelation from the Position of the Lamb', *Contagion* 12-13 (2006), p. 101, point out that lions were a common stock image in apocalyptic writing. They depicted a fierce God. Yet, John decides to capture the Lion's fierceness and power through the image of the Lamb that will remain slaughtered forever.

²³⁰ The root word σφάζω ('slain') is used in Isa. 53.7 in the LXX where it portrays the Suffering Servant as a lamb that is led to the σφαγήν ('slaughter').

Jesus the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, as portrayed in the FG (Jn 1.29). At this point, the hearers would determine that the Lamb is Jesus who suffered in his sacrificial death, causing the hearers to recall John's description of Jesus in the prologue (Rev. 1.5).²³¹

The Lamb who has been slaughtered is 'standing'.²³² The Lamb standing would likely shock the hearers. Such puzzling imagery might cause the hearers to recall the FG wherein the Lamb of God, after dying for the sins of the world, is described 'standing' after his resurrection three times (Jn 20.14, 19, 26)²³³ – the first of these instances occurring outside of his own tomb.²³⁴ The recollection of the resurrected Jesus standing near his tomb from the FG would add to what Jesus has already said about his own suffering and resurrection up to this point (1.18; 2.8).²³⁵ Hence, the Lion/Lamb dialectic would continue to shape the hearers' imagination concerning conquest: the triumph and rule of the Lion has been accomplished by the suffering witness of the Lamb who overcame in his death and rose to life.²³⁶ Perhaps this understanding would bring greater clarity to Jesus' example mentioned in the prologue wherein he suffers death yet overcomes suffering to reign as the most exalted king upon the earth (1.5). As such, the hearers would understand their own suffering witness, even to the point of death, is meaningful because they will conquer with Jesus through it.

The hearers learn additional details about the Lamb. First, the Lamb has seven horns.²³⁷ These horns would likely remind of various Psalms which mention an exalted horn (Pss. 89.17,

²³¹ Hanson, *The Wrath of the Lamb*, p. 169, suggests that the judgments that follow this scene in chapter six are 'judgments of the Cross'. They are brought about because the Lamb continues to be slain through his faithful followers who are persecuted.

²³² Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgment*, p. 120-25, offers a section wherein she compares the apocalypticism of Paul and John. She suggests that Paul has a cosmological theology wherein he stresses the historical Jesus' death on the cross. John portrays Jesus as having Lordship because of his violent death. Both Paul and John recognize the role of Jesus' violent death in becoming the Lord of the world.

²³³ In each case, a form of the root ἵστημι is used.

²³⁴ Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, p. 352, sees the detail of the Lamb standing as a significant detail which might make reference to Jesus' resurrection, alluding to how the Lamb has conquered in v. 5.

²³⁵ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 225.

²³⁶ R. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), p. 174 says, 'the one who is the true King of kings and Lord of lords rules by virtue of his submission to death'. Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, p. 74 notes, 'By juxtaposing the two contrasting images, John has forged a new symbol of conquest by sacrificial death'. See also Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p.227; Gorman, *Reading Revelation Responsibly*, pp. 108-10; Newton, *A Pentecostal Commentary on Revelation*, p. 133; Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment*, p. 239; Resseguie, *The Revelation of St. John*, p. 118-19.

²³⁷ A horned lamb is a figure which is familiar to apocalyptic literature (1 En. 90.9), as is a lamb which overcomes (T. Jos. 19.8-9).

24; 92.10; 112:9), indicating complete power and honor.²³⁸ Next, the hearers learn the Lamb has seven eyes. These seven eyes are identified as the seven Spirits of God. This would remind of 4.5 where the seven Spirits were identified as seven torches of fire. These seven Spirits are sent out into all the earth. The hearers would recall the FG and connect the sending of the seven Spirits into all the earth to the Paraclete who is active in the world (Jn 14.26; 15.26; 16.7; 18.8-11). These associations would further convey the empowering activity of the Spirit, which plays a part of God's reign.²³⁹ Because the empowering activity of the Spirit is mentioned in close proximity to the conquest of the Lamb, the hearers would begin to understand that the Spirit's empowerment is what enables the people of God to maintain their witness, endure suffering, and conquer.²⁴⁰

In v. 7, the Lamb takes the scroll from out of the right hand of the one on the throne.²⁴¹ The right hand would remind of 5.1, indicating a transfer of authority to the Lamb. The hearers would understand such transfer of authority in connection with the Lamb's faithful witness through his sacrificial suffering and death. As soon as the Lamb takes the scroll, the Lamb becomes the object of worship as the four living creatures and twenty-four elders fall before him (v. 8). Each are holding a harp and a golden bowl, and the golden bowls are full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints (v. 8). Here, the term ἅγιος ('saint') is used for first time in the narrative. It is also the first time in the narrative where the prayers of the saints are mentioned in connection with incense.²⁴² Perhaps the hearers would understand the prayers' association with incense to echo Ps. 141.2. In this Psalm of lament the psalter prays for deliverance and vindication.²⁴³ As such, the imagery evokes a strong sense of emotion which would cause the hearers to anticipate

²³⁸ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 226, notes that the Lamb is the first of various horned animals to appear in the Apocalypse (Rev. 12.3; 13.1; 17.3). Perhaps the hearers would later understand that the power of the horned animals they encounter are imitations of the power the Lamb.

²³⁹ Newton, *A Pentecostal Commentary on Revelation*, p. 134, connects the Lamb's seven eyes to Zech. 4.10 where the seven eyes of the Lord range through the earth. He notes that this statement is in connection with 'anointed servants' thus suggesting that the hearers might form a picture of the Spirit on the Lord's mission, like what is depicted in Acts 1.8. Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 257, makes a similar connection.

²⁴⁰ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 227, suggests that the Spirit enables the people of God to endure suffering, and this might be the case for Jesus (1.5), Antipas (2.13), and the two witnesses (11.3-13).

²⁴¹ See M. Kiddle, *The Revelation of St. John* (MNTC; New York, NY: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1940), p. 102, who notes the Lamb taking the scroll out of the right hand of the one on the throne is a 'symbol of the death of Christ in its results'. He posits that John is expressing the will of God and the will of Jesus.

²⁴² The hearers will soon see the prayers of the saints and incense mentioned again in 8.4.

²⁴³ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 357, makes a similar connection suggesting that these prayers are not just praises but requests for God to 'defend the honor of his reputations for justice by judging the persecutors of his people'.

themes of lament, deliverance, and vindication ahead.²⁴⁴ It would also suggest that the prayers of the saints are pleasing to God, and not a nuisance.²⁴⁵ Having fallen down, the elders and living creatures sing a new song:²⁴⁶

Ἄξιός²⁴⁷ εἶ λαβεῖν τὸ βιβλίον
καὶ ἀνοῖξαι τὰς σφραγίδας αὐτοῦ,
ὅτι ἐσφάγης καὶ ἠγόρασας τῷ θεῷ ἐν τῷ αἵματί σου
ἐκ πάσης φυλῆς καὶ γλώσσης καὶ λαοῦ καὶ ἔθνους
καὶ ἐποίησας αὐτοὺς τῷ θεῷ ἡμῶν βασιλείαν καὶ ἱερεῖς,
καὶ βασιλεύσουσιν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς.

Worthy are you to take the scroll
and to open its seals,
for you were slaughtered, and by your blood you ransomed people for God
from every tribe and language and people and nation,
and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God,
and they shall reign on the earth.

Careful hearers would recognize that the conjunction ὅτι suggests the Lamb's worthiness is the result of three achievements which are all described by aorist indicative verbs: ἐσφάγης ('you were slain'), ἠγόρασας ('you ransomed'), and ἐποίησας ('you made').²⁴⁸ This recognition would lead the hearers to at least three conclusions: First, the Lamb is worthy because he was slaughtered. The mention of ἐσφάγης²⁴⁹ would not only call to mind v. 6, but once again recall the Exodus Passover lamb as well as imagery from Isaiah's Suffering Servant. Second, the Lamb is worthy because his blood has ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and

²⁴⁴ Rev. 6.9-11; 8.4-5.

²⁴⁵ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 230. The prayers of the saints used in association with incense and the recollection of Ps. 141.2 would likely prepare the hearers for what they will soon encounter in the prayers of the souls under the altar in the next chapter (6.9-11).

²⁴⁶ A new song anticipates the coming of a new creation and new life. See Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 136; Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 259. It may also suggest victory after God has defeated his enemies. See Longman, *Revelation*, p. 93.

²⁴⁷ The term Ἄξιός ('worthy') would recall the worthiness of God in 4.11, showing further that the visions of both chapters four and five are intertwined. The term would also confirm that God and the Lamb have an intimate relationship with one another as this term has now been applied to each of them.

²⁴⁸ Fanning, *Revelation*, p. 223.

²⁴⁹ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 231, suggests that ἐσφάγης stands alone as its own stanza. As a stanza which stands alone, ἐσφάγης would point to the 'crucial significance' of the Lamb's sacrifice and death.

nation. Here is the first appearance of αἷματί ('blood') since 1.5, with a particular emphasis on τῷ αἷματί σου ('your blood') (i.e. the Lamb's blood) which further emphasizes the Lamb's sacrificial death. His death has achieved a universal victory in ransoming people from every tribe and language and nation, indicating that the effect of his suffering witness has no limits. This ransom would be understood as a priceless purchase owing to the nature of the ransom combined with the use of the word ἀγοράζω, which carries a commercial meaning in the FG (Jn 4.8; 6.5; 13.29).²⁵⁰ That Jesus' blood is able to acquire such a treasured purchase communicates the immense worth of his suffering death. Third, the effects of the Lamb's ransom result in a kingdom of priests to God who shall reign upon the earth. This declaration would not be unfamiliar to the hearers as they would recall 1.5-6, where Jesus' blood sacrifice is associated with making a kingdom of priests unto God. Not only does this declaration further associate Jesus' blood with reigning and conquering but perhaps it would fill in Jesus' message to the church in Thyatira, wherein he promises the conqueror rulership over the nations (2.26, 27).

In v. 11, the fourth appearance of καὶ εἶδον appears, transitioning the vision into its fourth section. Here John describes the voice of 'myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands' of angels who are joined with the living creatures, singing with one voice:

Ἄξιόν ἐστιν τὸ ἀρνίον τὸ ἐσφαγμένον λαβεῖν
τὴν δύναμιν καὶ πλοῦτον καὶ σοφίαν καὶ ἰσχὺν
καὶ τιμὴν καὶ δόξαν καὶ εὐλογίαν.

Worthy is the Lamb who was slain,
to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might
and honor and glory and blessing!

Once again, Ἄξιος ('worthy') is used to describe the Lamb in connection with his slaughter.²⁵¹ This is followed by a sevenfold²⁵² list of privileges due to him. The second attribute, πλοῦτον ('wealth'), would be of particular interest to the hearers as it would recall the church in Smyrna –

²⁵⁰ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 231.

²⁵¹ L.A. Powery, 'Painful Praise: Exploring the Public Proclamation of the Hymns of Revelation', *Theology Today* 70.1 (2013), p. 72, notes 'For John, worthiness stems from experiencing pain. The Lamb, a crucified Christ, is one of the wounded and thus worthy of praise.' Powery goes on to suggest that 'pain is the "matrix" of praise'. Through Christ's pain, humans are delivered from their own.

²⁵² The sevenfold list is fitting considering it has been used in the narrative already to denote divinity and completeness.

who had suffering and poverty but was πλούσιος ('rich') (2.9) – and the church in Laodicea – who claimed to be πλούσιος ('rich') but was poor (2.17).²⁵³ The slain Lamb's sacrifice being mentioned in connection with wealth would explain the subversive nature of wealth that has been portrayed in the aforementioned two churches. This would enable the hearers to discern true wealth from false wealth, prompting them to understand it from a heavenly perspective.²⁵⁴

Suddenly the hearers encounter every creature in heaven and earth and under the earth and in the sea saying:

Τῷ καθημένῳ ἐπὶ τῷ θρόνῳ καὶ τῷ ἀρνίῳ
ἡ εὐλογία καὶ ἡ τιμὴ καὶ ἡ δόξα καὶ τὸ κράτος
εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων.

To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb
be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!

Here the Lamb joins²⁵⁵ the one who sits on the throne and worship is made unto him by all creation (5.13).²⁵⁶ Such praise attests to the supreme power of the Lamb to whom creation ascribes κράτος ('might'), recalling John's description of Jesus in the prologue (1.6) where he is described in relation to God having τὸ κράτος εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας [τῶν αἰώνων] ('dominion forever and ever'). Moreover, this praise would remind of God's description in 4.8 as παντοκράτωρ ('Almighty'). The fact that every aspect of creation worships God suggests praise in the absolute sense.²⁵⁷ What has the one on the throne done in creation to receive this praise from creation? The hearers may have this question fresh in their minds as the narrative continues.

²⁵³ See Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 234.

²⁵⁴ This perspective will be useful as the narrative moves forward and wealth continues to be introduced. See 6.15; 13.16; 18.3, 15, 17, 19. Resseguie, *The Revelation of St John*, p. 122, connects wealth to Jesus' self-sacrifice saying, 'Christ's wealth is gained through self-sacrifice, not self-aggrandizement.' He contrasts Jesus' self-sacrifice with the wealth of the exploitative Babylon, as Babylon's exploitation will appear later in the narrative.

²⁵⁵ Though the Lamb joins the one who sits on the throne, he does not he replace him. They are united together. Contra Wall, *Revelation*, p. 105, maintains that God, not the Lamb, sits on the throne. Be that as it may, he still posits that the Lamb is worshiped along with God.

²⁵⁶ R. Bauckham, 'Creation's Praise of God in the Book of Revelation', *BibThBul* 38.2 (2008), pp. 62-63, notes that the vision chapters (Revelation 4-5) serve an eschatological aspect that portray the renewing of creation in the kingdom of God. Bauckham notes that Revelation portrays a distinct aspect of the renewing of creation that the Psalms do not. This aspect is that God's coming kingdom not only liberates people from evil but liberates the earth from those who destroy it.

²⁵⁷ Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 140; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 366. Reddish, *Revelation*, pp. 118-19, suggests that this absolute praise is offered to God by creation because creation anticipates that the one on the throne shall make right everything in creation.

Implications of Revelation 4-5

There are seven implications regarding suffering and theodicy that emerge from Revelation 4-5:

First, trials and suffering are to be viewed from a heavenly perspective. The door encountered in the beginning of the visions, a common apocalyptic symbol for an invitation to another world, emphasizes to the hearers that they are to see their situation from above. This gives them divine insight into how they view the situation of the seven churches, particularly those suffering.

Second, God's justice and sovereignty is a vital theme. By 4.2, the hearers have heard the term *θρόνος* ('throne') six times. God is seated on the throne (4.2) and remains the center of the activity that takes place in the throne room visions. The multiple uses of *θρόνος* ('throne') and its spatial significance at the center of the visions indicates that God's justice and sovereignty will play a central role as the narrative unfolds and that it is essential to the circumstances of the seven churches.

Third, the people of God will reign with God. This is indicated by the twenty-four elders, who wear white garments and gold crowns (4.4). Such garb is associated with the conquerors in the seven churches. The number of the elders, twenty-four, is associated with the sum total of the people of God. This number in convergence with the apparel the elders wear conveys that, from a heavenly perspective, the people of God reign with God.

Fourth, the triumph and rule of the Lamb is accomplished through suffering. The suffering/standing description of the Lamb, coupled with the Lion/Lamb paradox, conveys the idea of conquering through suffering (5.5-6). Thus, the suffering of the faithful in the seven churches is not pointless because they overcome in their suffering.

Fifth, the Spirit is present and active among the community and is part of God's reign and justice. The mention of *ἑπτὰ λαμπάδες πυρὸς ... ἃ εἰσιν τὰ ἑπτὰ πνεύματα τοῦ θεοῦ* ('seven torches of fire, which are the seven Spirits of God') and the Spirit's proximity to the throne associates the Spirit with the reign of God (4.5). The mention of the Spirit as the eyes of the Lamb (5.6) conveys that the Spirit is sent into the world to empower the people of God amidst their trials and while suffering for the testimony of Jesus.

Sixth, the Lamb is worthy because he was slaughtered (5.9). His blood has ransomed the people of God from every tribe and language and nation. That Jesus' blood is able to make such

a valuable purchase indicates the priceless value of his blood and the immense effect of his suffering witness which is without limits.

Seventh, all creation offers God and the Lamb absolute praise (5.12-13). The redemptive work of God and the Lamb is so sufficient that the totality of creation renders its full-fledged exultation to the one on the throne.

Revelation 6.1-8.5²⁵⁸

The first thing the hearers encounter in 6.1 is the Lamb opening one of the seven seals on the scroll. The Lamb's appearance at the beginning of the opening of the seals suggests his supervision and sovereignty over the events about to take place.²⁵⁹ The contents of the first four seals, when opened, emerge as the first images relevant to suffering and theodicy in chapter six. When the first seal is opened, one of the four living creatures summons a horse and its rider with the command "Ἐρχου ('Come!').²⁶⁰ The first horse to appear is white whose rider bears a bow, wears a crown, and comes out conquering and to conquer (v. 2).²⁶¹ The Lamb opens the second

²⁵⁸ After the throne room visions, the narrative transitions to the opening of the seven seals (6.1-8.5) which includes the first extended interlude in the Apocalypse (7.1-17) found between the opening of the sixth and seventh seal. The opening of the seven seals is divided into a four plus three pattern – the first four seals pertaining to events that take place on the earth and the last three seals pertaining to events that take place in the heavens.

²⁵⁹ Tonstad, *Saving God's Reputation*, p. 142, notes that 'if the theodicy in the book of Revelation is thought of in strict dictionary terms as "vindication of God's justice in tolerating the existence of evil", God has, in the figure of the Slaughtered Lamb, prevailed'. Tonstad says this in light of how the cosmic beings have observed the cosmic conflict from its beginning. They are persuaded, even as the Lamb opens the seals, of the character of the one who sits on the throne.

²⁶⁰ As the hearers will soon learn, this command will be used three more times by one of the living creatures to summon other horses and riders (vv. 3, 5, 7). The repeated use of "Ἐρχου when the Lamb opens each seal, the involvement of the four living creatures, and the consistent use of the horse and rider convey that the first four seals are intimately connected with one another.

²⁶¹ The hearers are familiar with the color white, as it has strong associations with Jesus and his followers (1.13; 2.17; 3.4, 5, 18; 4.4). Crowns also have strong association with Jesus and his followers (2.10; 3.11; 4.4; 4.19), conveying the concept of conquering (2.7, 11, 17, 26; 3.5, 12, 21; 5.5). For a thorough examination of the interpretive possibilities for the identity of the white horse rider, including their pros and cons, see I. Boxall, "Who Rides the White Horse?" Truth and Deception in the Book of Revelation', *Scripture Bulletin* 41.2 (2011), pp. 76-88. Boxall refers to rivaling interpretations. The first interpretation is the interpretation that offsets the first rider as unique from the other three. The second interpretation is one that urges the reader to examine each 'in turn'. The third is the interpretation that allows the riders to 'ride out together as harbingers of doom'. Boxall concludes by considering the literary strategy of the book and posits that the reader is to *first* consider that the rider is a Christ-like figure then rethink this as the other horsemen appear and the rest of the narrative unfolds. 'It is in Revelation's interest to portray the Christlike figure as convincingly as possible in Rev. 6, so that the apocalyptic unveiling will be all the more shocking even to the committed Christian reader.' Contra Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, pp. 240-41, who makes a convincing argument that the hearers would interpret the rider of the white horse to be Jesus. See also J.S. Considine, 'The Rider on the White Horse: Apocalypse 6:1-8', *CBQ* 6.4 (1944), pp. 406-22, who maintains that the rider on the white horse is Christ or 'the continuous effect of Christ'. Considine attempts to answer why, if it is Christ, he would be riding into a series of plagues. He suggests that Christ, as the grace of the gospel, is riding with the plagues. Moreover, he suggests that war, famine, and death are known apocalyptic images. Without Christ, they would just be signs of the end. By placing Christ in them as the white horse rider, John portrays that these are

seal revealing the second horse which is red (v. 4). Its rider is permitted to take peace from the earth, which results in people slaying one another, and the rider is given a great sword (v. 4). This is the first mention of the color *πυρρός* ('red') in the Apocalypse.²⁶² This color would be associated with war and bloodshed, owing to the slaughtering that takes place when the rider is given the sword and is permitted to take peace from the earth.²⁶³ The hearers would not find it insignificant that the word *σφάξουσιν* ('should slaughter') is used to describe bloodshed when peace is taken from the earth. Having been used exclusively for Jesus up to this point, the hearers would very likely make a connection between the slaughtered one who opens the seals and the ones who are slaughtered when the seals are opened. Perhaps the hearers would discern an irony here: those responsible for the slaughter of Jesus are themselves, slaughtered.²⁶⁴ The Lamb opens the third seal with the appearance of a black horse whose rider has a pair of scales in his hand (v. 5). A voice in the midst of the living creatures states the inflated price of wheat and barley and that this overpriced food is to be rationed out. The voice also gives a command not to harm the oil and wine (v. 6). As darkness²⁶⁵ is often depicted in Johannine literature as having ominous qualities, the hearers would very likely understand the black color of the horse as something negative, even threatening (1 Jn 1.5-6; 2.8-9, 11). The pair of scales in the hands of the rider, along with the rationing of food, would remind the hearers of instances in the OT where such images were characteristics of famine (Lev. 16.26; 2 Kgs 7.1; Ezek. 4.10, 16). The exorbitant prices would indicate that the famine associated with the coming of the black horse and its rider

'Christian signs of the End'. For further reading, see Koester, *Revelation*, p. 394, for more on the three ways that the white horse and rider is interpreted by various commentators: (1) Christ (Rev. 19.6-11), (2) an evil figure, and (3) human conquest. Newton, *A Pentecostal Commentary on Revelation*, pp. 143-44, considers four possibilities for the identity of the white horse and rider: (1) the conquest of the world by the Roman Empire, (2) the Parthians, (3) the spread of a mystery religion, (4) the conquest of Christ. Wall, *Revelation*, p. 109, avoids offering any exhaustive explanation of the identity of the rider, though he does prefer a theological reading over a historical, saying 'Our commentary of this passage will assume, then, that, in keeping with the overarching intentions of his entire composition, John is making a theological point rather than a historical prediction'.

²⁶² The hearers will learn that the red will come to have ominous associations as the narrative unfolds (12.4). The color *κόκκινος* ('scarlet'), which is similar to red, will be the color of the seven-headed, ten-horned beast as well as one of the colors worn by the woman who sits on this beast (Rev. 17.3-4).

²⁶³ The divine passive, *ἐδόθη* ('was permitted' or 'was given') is employed twice in v. 4, which suggests that God is permitting this action.

²⁶⁴ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 243, asks, 'Have the slaughterers now become the slaughtered?'

²⁶⁵ Here I am presuming the color *μέλας* ('black') is associated with *σκοτός* ('darkness'). Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 152, asserts this.

is severe.²⁶⁶ Finally, the Lamb opens the fourth seal revealing a pale horse (v. 8). Its rider's name is 'Death', and 'Hades' follows him. They are given authority over a fourth of the earth – to kill with sword, famine, pestilence, and wild beasts. In this instance, the color of the horse – *χλωρός* ('pale green' or 'greyish green') – might be understood by the hearers to be the color of a corpse.²⁶⁷ The rider is unique in that it is the only one with a name – *θάνατος* ('Death') – and it is the only one with a companion who has a name, *ἄδης* ('Hades'). The names of the riders would not be unfamiliar to the hearers' minds as this pair of names, Death and Hades, has already been heard when Jesus announced he has the keys of Death and Hades (1.18).²⁶⁸ Perhaps the appearance of their names here would indicate to the hearers that, despite the effects of Death and Hades, Jesus remains in control. This would be somewhat of a relief to the hearers as the suffering which this fourth horse rider and companion inflict is devastating, affecting a quarter of the earth.²⁶⁹

With the opening of the first four seals, suffering 'gallops' across the imagination of the hearers' minds as devastation is inflicted on the world.²⁷⁰ Yet, the narrative has given the hearers reason to remain confident in God's supervision over these events because the Lamb has opened the seals.

In 6.9, the fifth seal is opened.²⁷¹ The hearers encounter the souls under the altar which have been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne,²⁷² the second image that is relevant to suffering and theodicy in chapter six. Perhaps the first thing the hearers would notice

²⁶⁶ Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 153. Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, pp. 244-45, suggests what is meant by the command to not harm the oil and the wine is that famine is limited and not severe enough to affect the olive trees or the vineyards.

²⁶⁷ Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 155.

²⁶⁸ This is the second of four times wherein the pairing 'Death and Hades' is used in the Apocalypse (1.18; 6.8; 20.13, 14).

²⁶⁹ These four plagues seem to be a 'culmination' of the first four seals. See Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 247.

²⁷⁰ In light of the four horses and riders, Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, pp. 145-46, says the hearers would 'have recoiled in terror as war, bloodshed, famine, and death galloped furiously across the stage of their imagination'. Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 156, says, 'the judgments of God brought about by the four woes of the apocalyptic horsemen symbolize and effect the suffering of the whole world, which is already in progress and will continue to the end. See also Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 238.

²⁷¹ Perhaps one of the syntactical features of this chapter, which suggests the fifth seal is unique from the first four, is the modifying adjective *τὴν πέμπτην* ('fifth') is placed in front of its noun, *σφραγίδα* ('seal'). This is strange in comparison to the other six seals, wherein the modifying noun is placed after its noun (6.2, 3, 5, 7, 12; 8.1). See Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, pp. 247-48.

²⁷² Pattemore, *The People of God in the Apocalypse*, pp. 73-74, suggests that the context wherein the fifth seal has been opened has been established by 6.1-8. John has established 'a cognitive environment' wherein the audience understands themselves to be part of suffering humanity, which is the result of God's action, and that they will experience a 'unique dimension' of that suffering as those who are persecuted.

is that there is no horse here – a departure from expectations based on the opening of the first four seals. Instead, the hearers encounter an altar which would remind them of the altar of sacrifice in the OT where blood sacrifices were made.²⁷³ No sooner than the bloody imagery fills their imaginations do they learn that the sacrifices are not animals, rather τὰς ψυχὰς (‘souls’)! This shocking revelation would convey a sacrificial nuance, reminding of places in the FG and 1 John where ψυχὴ is understood in connection with intentional sacrifice (10.11, 15, 17; 13.37, 38; 15.13; 1 Jn 3.16). The hearers also learn that the souls are ὑποκάτω (‘under’) the altar. This would confirm that the souls are sacrifices, as the blood of OT sacrificial victims was poured under, or at the base of, the altar (Lev. 4.7).²⁷⁴ Yet, the bloody sacrificial victims, in occupying a position under the throne, find themselves in a proximity that is close to the throne. The hearers would understand this proximity to mean the sacrificed souls, through suffering, are: (1) close to God,²⁷⁵ (2) under the care of God,²⁷⁶ and (3) in close enough proximity to God to ensure that their cries are heard by God.²⁷⁷

At this point, the hearers encounter a familiar word, ἐσφαγμένων (‘who had been slain’), now used in connection with the souls under the altar. Up to this point, σφάζω (‘slaughter’, ‘slay’) has been used in close association with the Lamb (5.6, 9, 12). Encountering it in connection with the souls under the altar might initially come as a shock as the hearers now learn that the souls have suffered the same as the Lamb. This common suffering between the souls and Jesus would likely imply that the souls have an intimate relationship with Jesus. This is confirmed by the double use of the preposition διὰ (v. 9),²⁷⁸ which indicates that their witness²⁷⁹ of Jesus is what has caused them to suffer and die as he did. Thus, the hearers learn that the souls under the altar have suffered διὰ τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν μαρτυρίαν ἣν εἶχον (‘for the Word of God and for the

²⁷³ Exodus 20.24; Lev. 1.5; 4.7, 18; 8.15. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 146, deems it ‘unnecessary; to speculate about whether or not the altar in 6.9 is the altar of burnt offering or the altar of incense (Exod. 30.1; Lk. 1.11). He sees the slaughter of the saints suggesting the former and the prayers of the saints suggesting the latter and therefore recognizes the possibility that they both ‘blend together as one’.

²⁷⁴ Koester, *Revelation*, p. 398.

²⁷⁵ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 248.

²⁷⁶ Koester, *Revelation*, p. 399.

²⁷⁷ Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 113.

²⁷⁸ Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, p. clxxvii-clxxviii, notes that the preposition διὰ used with the accusative in Revelation is a marker of cause with a focus on ‘instrumentality’.

²⁷⁹ Blount is careful to make a distinction between their witnessing and their death, noting that it is their *witnessing* that is ‘the provocative activity’ that John has been commending in the narrative. It is the *witnessing* that leads to God’s vengeance and justice. See B.K. Blount, ‘Reading Revelation Today: Witness as Active Resistance’, *Int* 54.4 (2000), pp. 398-412.

witness they had borne’). This reason for their suffering would likely bring three things to mind: (1) John’s description of himself on Patmos (1.2, 9), (2) John’s description of Jesus’ death (1.5), and (3) Antipas from the church in Pergamum who was killed as Jesus’ faithful witness. This group of witnesses now extends to include the souls under the altar who, like Jesus and Antipas, have willingly suffered for the message of God and have laid their own lives down as sacrifices.

The faithful witnesses who have been slaughtered cry out to God in a φωνῆ μεγάλῃ (‘loud voice’). If the hearers perceive that that the souls are crying for justice,²⁸⁰ they would hear judicial nuance in the usage of κράζειν (‘cry out’).²⁸¹ This would also be understood by the fact that the souls refer to God as ὁ δεσπότης ὁ ἅγιος καὶ ἀληθινός (‘Sovereign Lord, holy and true’), language which would remind of Jesus’ self-identification in his message to the church in Philadelphia (3.7). The reemergence of these titles would underscore the idea of God’s faithfulness. They portray his ability to be counted on, in this case, for justice. By this point, the hearers are familiar with hearing loud voices, this being the fourth time in the Apocalypse something is said with such resounding timbre.²⁸² Yet, this is the first time that *people* use such a tone, as it has only been used by divinity and angelic beings prior to this (1.10; 5.2; 5.12).²⁸³ Most important to the hearers would be *what* the souls cry in a loud voice: “Ἐως πότε, ὁ δεσπότης ὁ ἅγιος καὶ ἀληθινός, οὐ κρίνεις καὶ ἐκδικεῖς τὸ αἷμα ἡμῶν ἐκ τῶν κατοικούντων ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς; (‘O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those

²⁸⁰ Charles, *The Revelation of St. John*, p. 175, finds this cry differing from gospel teaching in Lk. 18.7 where Jesus states ‘will not God give justice to the elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them?’ in the parable of the unjust judge. He notes that in 6.9-11, the departed souls are praying whereas in the parable of the unjust judge, Jesus is referring to the living. Kiddle also sees a difference in the soul’s cry for vengeance and the ‘lofty spirit of forbearance which distinguished the Christian church in its earliest days’. See Kiddle, *The Revelation of St. John*, p. 119. Contra Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John*, p. 526, who believes it is a cry of ‘suffering justice’, not ‘thirst for revenge’ (though he does admit it is different than from Stephen’s prayer in Acts 7.60). Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p.115, takes issue with ‘liberal Westerners’ who are unwilling to accept the cry for vengeance in this call, suggesting that it is a matter of perspective from where one stands. ‘From the perspective of the vulnerable, oppressed or persecuted, this is a heartfelt protest against the world’s injustice, the voice of the voiceless struggling to be heard above of the noise of the powerful.’ See also Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World*, p. 64, who posits the same sentiment.

²⁸¹ D.R. Seal, ‘Emotions, Empathy, and Engagement with God in Revelation 6:9-11’, *ExpT* 129.3 (2017), pp. 112-20, uses Rev. 6.9-11 to explore prayer as a divine experience. In doing so, he identifies several emotions that the souls under the altar convey in their prayer: lament, reverence, hope, and confidence. These emotions portray the souls’ longing for ‘eschatological consummation’. Seal advocates that similar pleas with similar emotions should be employed by those who see suffering in the world today.

²⁸² The FG uses φωνῆ μεγάλῃ in only one place and that is where Jesus calls for Lazarus to come out of the grave (11.43).

²⁸³ The hearers will come to learn that this tone is only used by divinity and angelic beings after this point, the only exception being the great multitude in 7.2. See 7.10; 8.3; 10.3; 11.12, 15; 12.10; 14.2, 7, 9, 15, 18; 16.1, 17; 23.

who dwell on the earth?’).²⁸⁴ The term ἕως πότε (‘How long’)²⁸⁵ is often used in the LXX in contexts of suffering²⁸⁶ where people cry out to God. As a result, God ultimately punishes the oppressor and vindicates his people.²⁸⁷ The provocative nature²⁸⁸ of this phrase would not be lost on the hearers, accentuating the desire the souls under the altar have for divine justice and vindication.²⁸⁹ This is expressed in the verbs κρίνεις (‘judge’) and ἐκδικεῖν (‘avenge’), as they appear in the narrative for the first time.²⁹⁰ The introduction of these terms, at the same time, sets up the hearers to anticipate how the just God will vindicate his faithful witnesses throughout the remainder of the narrative. Concerning the question itself, the hearers would understand that the souls are concerned about *when* God will bring this resolve, which they sense is already delayed.²⁹¹ However, the hearers would not consider the urgency in their cry erroneous because the souls appeal to their αἷμα (‘blood’). This is the third appearance of the word αἷμα up to this point (1.5; 5.9). Here, it is associated with the death of the faithful witnesses.²⁹² Though the hearers would not likely hear resentment or antagonism in their urgency,²⁹³ they would interpret this urgency as insistence for the righteous God to act justly in the face of their unjust suffering.

²⁸⁴ Barr, ‘Doing Violence’, pp. 99-102, notes that this question raises a moral issue: If God has the power to end the world’s suffering, why does he not? ‘By what logic can God allow innocent suffering to continue?’ Barr posits that, within the story John is telling, God acts *through* suffering – evil is overcome by ‘suffering love’. Hence, the delay is not due to God’s indifference.

²⁸⁵ Tonstad, *Saving God’s Reputation*, p. 134, notes the theodicy question, so essential to the biblical story, is found in this cry. As such, he does not think this cry should be limited to this specific historical situation as it is a ‘timeless and perplexing realization in the believer’s experience’.

²⁸⁶ Psalms 6.4; 12.2; 73.10; 78.5; 79.5; 88.47; 89.13; 93.3; Dan. 8.13 Θ; 12.6-13 Θ; Zech. 1.12.

²⁸⁷ G.K. Beale and D.A. Carson, *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), p. 1104.

²⁸⁸ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World*, p. 64, notes that those exegetes who label this cry for justice as ‘unchristian’ are those who have not suffered oppression and ‘are not tormented by God’s apparent toleration of injustice’. She posits that one can only truly adjudicate this cry theologically if they have comprehended the anguish the souls are experiencing.

²⁸⁹ Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgment*, pp. 46-49, notes the eschatological expectation that is set with this question. The concern is the timing of God’s judgment upon those dwelling on the earth. When will the Christian community’s suffering terminate and what is the meaning of it? The language going forward after this question points toward God’s judgment in the future. ‘In sum, Rev. does not comfort the community with a reference to God’s plan for history but with the assurance of the immediate coming of its lord to judge the world’.

²⁹⁰ This is the first of sixteen times that κρίνω, or any of its cognates, appear in the Apocalypse and the first of two times that ἐκδικέω is used.

²⁹¹ Fee notes that this question is one which will lead the remainder of the narrative. See G.D. Fee, *Revelation: A New Covenant Commentary* (NCCS; Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011), p. 97.

²⁹² The word αἷμα appears 23 times in the narrative. It will later be used again in association with the death of the saints (16.6; 17.6; 18.24) which will be vindicated by God (19.2). See Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 160.

²⁹³ Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 161.

The use of the first-person plural pronoun ἡμῶν ('our') in the construction τὸ αἷμα ἡμῶν ('our blood')²⁹⁴ would convey how personal this cry is for the souls under the altar.

Contained within the cry is the souls' desire for God to act against τῶν κατοικούντων ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ('those who dwell on the earth'). This description, 'those who dwell on the earth', would remind the hearers of the message to the Philadelphian church wherein an hour of trial is said to be coming to try this same class of individuals (3.10). The reappearance of this description would likely cause the hearers to now discern two classes of people: (1) the people of God whom God upholds and (2) those who dwell on the earth who are God's enemies because they oppress his people – those whom the souls hope God will take vengeance upon.²⁹⁵

The faithful witnesses' cry is met with divine response, indicated by the use of two divine passives in v. 11, ἐδόθη ('were given') and ἐρρέθη ('were told'): καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτοῖς ἐκάστῳ στολὴ λευκὴ καὶ ἐρρέθη αὐτοῖς ἵνα ἀναπαύσονται ἔτι χρόνον μικρόν ('Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little while longer'). This response is two-fold. First, God gives the souls a white robe. White has already been closely associated with Jesus (1.13-14) and white garments have been associated with those who conquer in Sardis (3.4-5) and Laodicea (3.18), as well as the twenty-four elders seated around the throne (4.4). The hearers would understand this response to be an acknowledgement that the souls have overcome with Jesus. Moreover, this gesture would be understood as provisional²⁹⁶ in nature, hinting that the answer to their prayer for vengeance and justice will come later in the narrative.²⁹⁷ The second part of God's two-fold response is the command to ἀναπαύσονται ('rest' or 'wait')²⁹⁸ ἔτι χρόνον μικρόν ('a little longer'). Time language (χρόνον) appears here in connection with the witnesses' suffering. This time language is given a limitation: μικρόν ('little' or 'little while'), indicating a definite end to the

²⁹⁴ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 251, notes that the use of τὸ αἷμα ἡμῶν does two things: (1) reveals that the slaughtering of the souls is as real as the slaughtering of the Lamb and (2) underscores the identification between the Slaughtered Lamb and his followers. This further solidifies that the death of the faithful witnesses is patterned after the death of the Lamb.

²⁹⁵ Heil, 'The Fifth Seal', p. 242, maintains that the souls' prayer 'sets the agenda for the remainder of the book', anticipating the judgment and vindication the souls are seeking in their prayer.

²⁹⁶ Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 164.

²⁹⁷ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World*, p. 64, understands the white robes to mean participation at the marriage feast of the Lamb (19.8), something the hearers would likely connect the white robes with once they learn about the marriage supper of the Lamb near the end of the narrative.

²⁹⁸ The word ἀναπαύσονται can be translated either 'rest' or 'wait', conveying the idea of waiting while at rest. See Pattemore, *The People of God in the Apocalypse*, pp. 88-89. Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 289, calls it a 'double meaning'. Contra Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 253, who is not convinced that the remainder of the verse supports the idea of resting.

injustice experienced by the souls under the altar,²⁹⁹ though the command for the souls to wait/rest a little while longer signals that the souls have no control over when this will be.

As the hearers encounter the latter half of v. 11, it might come as a shock as they soon discover that the injustice the souls have experienced in their suffering and death will come to an end only after more injustice, suffering, and death is experienced:

ἕως πληρωθῶσιν καὶ οἱ σύνδουλοι αὐτῶν καὶ οἱ ἀδελφοὶ αὐτῶν οἱ μέλλοντες ἀποκτενεσθαι ὡς καὶ αὐτοί

until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been

The temporal conjunction, ἕως ('until'), indicates the prospect of more suffering. This conjunction also introduces the clause that specifies who will experience the injustice, suffering, and death that is to come: their σύνδουλοι ('fellow servants') and ἀδελφοὶ ('brothers'), terms that are already familiar to the hearers. The root of the first term, δοῦλος, has appeared a number of times to describe both John (1.1) and the faithful in Thyatira (2.20). The second term, ἀδελφοί, has been used to describe John with respect to his relationship with the hearers and the tribulation they have experienced (1.9). The nuances behind these terms would not be lost on the hearers as they would understand them to mean faithful witness and conquering in spite of tribulation. Thus, the hearers would put those who would come to be killed into company with John, the souls under the altar, and the others in the churches who have suffered because of their faithfulness. These nuanced terms present a sobering situation to the hearers: perhaps *they* are those for whom the souls under the altar are waiting? Such would be a reasonable conclusion given the careful and consistent vocabulary that appears to describe these sufferers.

The hearers next learn that the number of these fellow servants and brothers must be (πληρωθῶσιν) 'complete'.³⁰⁰ This statement would further verify two things: (1) more suffering, injustice, and death lies ahead but, (2) injustice, suffering, and death have a limit and a definite

²⁹⁹ Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 116, suggests the command to wait a little while longer signals the end of suffering. While this may be the case in a broader sense, here in 6.10 it seems to suggest that a final termination of suffering is only the case for those souls under the altar, as this divine command is only a response to *their* inquiry.

³⁰⁰ Stevenson, *A Slaughtered Lamb*, p. 148, considers how God does not simply do away with suffering because of faithful witness. He posits that it is because 'the suffering of the saints serves a larger purpose within God's design'. That said, Stevenson makes specific note that he is referring to suffering for faithful witness and not the 'suffering of a devastating illness or tragic accident'.

end.³⁰¹ Though this message would serve as minimal relief, the hearers would still be contemplating the likelihood of being ἀποκτένεσθαι ('killed') like the souls under the altar.³⁰²

While the hearers continue to wonder about their own potential suffering and the timing of God's justice and vindication, the Lamb opens the sixth seal and their attention is shaken by earthly and cosmic upheaval: there is a great earthquake, the sun turns black like sackcloth, the full moon becomes like blood, the stars fall to the earth, the sky vanishes, and every island and mountain is removed (vv. 12-14). These cosmic events make up the third image that is relevant for suffering and theodicy in chapter six, as such imagery would cause the hearers to recall places in the OT wherein these images are used to denote the day of the Lord³⁰³ (Isa. 13.9-13; 24.1-6, 17-23; 32.6-8; Hos. 10.8; Joel 2.10, 30-31; 3.15-16; Hab.3.6-11).³⁰⁴ Such cosmic events, plus the opening of the seal by the Lamb, bring the hearers a much needed reminder that God is present and at work in the chaos. In v. 15, careful hearers would discover that seven classes of people are affected by the events of the chaotic scene: (1) οἱ βασιλεῖς τῆς γῆς ('the kings of the earth'), (2) οἱ μεγιστᾶνες ('the great ones'), (3) οἱ χιλιάρχοι ('the generals'), (4) οἱ πλούσιοι ('the rich'), (5) οἱ ἰσχυροί ('the powerful'), and (6-7) πᾶς δοῦλος καὶ ἐλεύθερος ('every slave and freeman').³⁰⁵ Because seven has occurred as the number of totality in the narrative, perhaps its usage here would suggest that the chaos described at this point affects *all* of humankind. This is confirmed by the range the chaos affects, spanning from the highest class ('the kings of the earth') to the lowest class ('slaves').³⁰⁶ That all classes are included as recipients of the wrath of the Lamb would cause the hearers to understand that those listed have been previously referred to as 'those who dwell on the earth' – the enemies of God (v. 10). The acute action that both God

³⁰¹ Koester, *Revelation*, p. 403.

³⁰² See Heil, 'The Fifth Seal', pp. 221-22.

³⁰³ Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 117, refers to these as 'stock elements' from the OT that signal the day of the Lord. See also Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 396.

³⁰⁴ See also Isa. 34.4 LXX. For similar passages in apocalyptic literature, see 4 Ezra 5.4-8; 7.39-40; T. Mos. 10.3-6.

³⁰⁵ See Koester, *Revelation*, pp. 402-403, for comment on these classes.

³⁰⁶ Moreover, that the chaos affects all of humankind is also established in the last designation ('every slave and freeman'). According to Gaius, 'Et quem summa divisio de iure personarum haec est, quod omnes homines aut liberi sunt aut servi' ('The first divisions of men by the law of person is into freemen and slaves'). See Gaius, *Elements of Roman Law* (trans. Edward Poste; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1875), p. 45. The hearers will soon find out that these same classes of people, more or less, will be mentioned later in the narrative as allies with the beast (13.15-16; 19.8-9).

and the Lamb take against them would make the hearers suspect that the sixth seal is the beginning of God's answer to the cry for justice made by the souls under the altar.³⁰⁷

As the description of the sixth seal draws to a close, the hearers would likely find the phrase τῆς ὀργῆς τοῦ ἀρνίου ('the wrath of the Lamb') to be peculiar (v. 16).³⁰⁸ The slain Lamb (5.6) is now the judge of all the earth.³⁰⁹ The recipients of his wrath ask an ironic question: τίς δύναται σταθῆναι ('who can stand')? The hearers would likely be reminded of the last time a mention of standing appeared in the narrative, where the slain Lamb is 'standing' triumphantly (5.6). This question would also cause the hearers to be reminded of language from the OT, where this same question is used in connection with the coming of the Lord (Mal. 3.2; Joel 2.11; Nah. 2.6). Thus, this question serves as a point of convergence which suggests that the enemies of God cannot stand amidst the wrath of the Lamb. The Lamb who was slain stands as conqueror and judge. His enemies will not be triumphant. They will be defeated at his coming.

While still pondering the question 'who can stand?', the hearers come to the first major interlude of the Apocalypse (7.1-17). Here, the pace of the narrative changes. Chapter six has been an intense chapter with the swift and speedy opening of the six seals, one after the other. Just when the hearers would expect the seventh seal to follow suit, there is a delay followed by an angel descending with the seal of the living God. He calls with a loud voice to four angels and tells them not to harm the elements until the servants of God have been sealed on their foreheads (vv. 2-3). The seals on the foreheads of God's servants make up the first image in chapter seven relevant to suffering and theodicy. Such an image would not be lost on the hearers as they ponder the question 'who can stand?' Being sealed for protection is not an uncommon concept in the OT. Cain is sealed by God with protection in Gen. 4.15. Similar to this is the Passover event in Exodus where the blood of the Passover lamb marks the people of God and protects them from the angel of death (Exodus 12).³¹⁰ In Ezek. 9.4-6, God commands the faithful to be marked for

³⁰⁷ The upheaval and suffering the earth dwellers experience is so intense that they hide in caves and call for the rocks to fall on them to hide them from the face of the one on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb (v. 16). The hearers would likely be reminded of Isa. 2.10, 19, where the enemies of God hide themselves in caves and among the rocks of the mountains at the coming of the Lord.

³⁰⁸ This is the first of five times that ὀργή ('wrath') is used in the Apocalypse (6.17; 11.18; 16.19; 19.15), as the hearers will soon learn.

³⁰⁹ The reference to the throne and the one on the throne, in connection with the Lamb, would likely suggest righteous judgment from the throne (v. 16).

³¹⁰ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 409; Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 183; Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 261, note the connection between Exodus 12, Ezek. 9.4-6 and Rev. 7.4. Beale suggests that these references are all interrelated. Thus, Exodus 12 informs Ezek. 9.4-6 and both inform Rev. 7.4.

the sake of divine protection from wrath that will come via the hands of the Babylonians. The hearers would likely draw these connections, understanding the people of God are promised divine protection³¹¹ and exemption from judgment. Such connections to God's people in the OT would begin to shed light on the answer to the question 'who can stand?'³¹²

Next, the hearers learn that John *hears* the number of those sealed: 144,000 from every tribe of the sons of Israel (vv. 4-8). Yet, the hearers discover that John *sees*³¹³ a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, tribe, peoples, and languages standing before the throne and before the Lamb (v. 9). The 144,000/great multitude becomes the second image relevant to suffering and theodicy in chapter seven. The multitude is clothed in white robes and palm branches are in their hands and they are crying 'salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!' (vv. 9-10). The great multitude is in close proximity to the throne and to the Lamb. They are also *ἑστῶτες* 'standing'. The idea of standing has held important significance up to this point. It has been associated with intimacy with Jesus (3.20); the conquering over suffering and death, accomplished by the slain Lamb who, himself, has become the judge of the world (5.6); and the wrath of God upon his enemies as the judge of the earth (6.17). It is likely the hearers would be reminded of these instances while considering the multitude before the throne. The presence of the multitude standing before the throne is the answer to the question 'who can stand?' (6.17): this multitude, who stands before the Lamb, has conquered with the Lamb. This is indicated by a two-fold description. First, the multitude is clothed in white robes. White robes or clothing has been used in a number of places in association with Jesus and with conquering (1.13-14; 3.4-5, 18; 4.4). Yet, the latest place it has been used is in association with the souls under the altar (6.11). The hearers would likely draw a connection to the souls, this connection being confirmed by the fact that the ones in white are *κράζουσιν* ('crying out') in a *φωνῇ μεγάλῃ* ('loud voice'). This intentional language delivers a striking picture to the hearers: the souls under the altar now seem to celebrate the victory

³¹¹ In light of the sealing in Rev. 7.3, Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 182, notes, 'those who belong to the true Church of God (cf. 2.13) have the assurance of divine protection ... and this enables them to respond with faithfulness at all times to the suffering which they are called upon to endure'.

³¹² Newton, *A Pentecostal Commentary on Revelation*, p. 159.

³¹³ As in 5.5-6, what is heard is different than what is seen.

achieved by the Lamb,³¹⁴ a victory of which they are a part because of their faithful witness.³¹⁵ Second, the multitude is holding *φοίνικες* ('palm branches'). The hearers might well recall the instance in the FG where Jesus triumphantly enters Jerusalem while the crowds praise him with palm branches (Jn 12.13),³¹⁶ adding to this scene of conquest.

The angels, along with the elders and four living creatures, stand around the throne and then fall on their faces and worship God (vv. 11-12). One of the elders inquires of John about the identity of those wearing the white robe and where they have come from. The elder who interprets³¹⁷ says that they are the ones coming out³¹⁸ of *τῆς θλίψεως τῆς μεγάλης* ('the great tribulation').³¹⁹ The image of the great tribulation is the third image in chapter seven relevant to suffering and theodicy. The idea of tribulation, even 'great tribulation', is not unfamiliar to the hearers. This concept is known from the FG (Jn 16.21, 23) and by now it has been associated with John's tribulation (1.9), the church in Smyrna's tribulation (2.9-10), as well as the tribulation experienced by those who refuse to repent of their adultery with Jezebel in Thyatira (3.22). It would also likely remind the hearers of the tribulation mentioned in Dan. 12.1-2.³²⁰

³¹⁴ Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 192, notes, 'the worshiping and joyful multitude in Rev. 7.9 and beyond, consists of those who are purified by the blood of the Lamb ... and can therefore be victorious over suffering and evil. This is the character of the Church triumphant ... clutching their branches of palm ... celebrants of the victory of the kingdom of God itself.'

³¹⁵ Osborne, *Revelation*, pp. 319-20, notes a strong and obvious connection between the multitude and the souls under the altar in 6.9-11, both with their clothing and in their crying out.

³¹⁶ John 12.13 is the only other time in the NT where the word *φοίνιξ*, or any of its derivatives, appears.

³¹⁷ See Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment*, pp. 250-51, who notes the limits of John's discernment and posits that it is possible that the elder knows the identity of the ones clothed in white (the 144,000 who have been sealed) through the help of the seven Spirits.

³¹⁸ Stevenson, *A Slaughtered Lamb*, p. 153, notes that 'coming out' of the tribulation indicates that the deliverance of the faithful was not a deliverance *from* suffering but a deliverance *through* suffering.

³¹⁹ See Koester, *Revelation*, pp. 421-22, for various ways that commentators have understood the great tribulation including: (1) future tribulation, (2) afflictions throughout time, and (3) final affliction occurring presently. Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, p. 141, translates the 'great tribulation' like Smalley ('the great ordeal') and concurs with Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 196, who says it is 'a present reality' and does not only occur, exclusively, at the end of time. This time of great tribulation includes persecution, famine, imprisonment, and death as the result of faithful witness to Jesus. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 434, suggests the same. He sees the tribulation as already having been going on at the time of the writing of the Apocalypse and notes that such tribulation occurs because of 'faithful witness to Jesus'. He also is careful to note that unbelievers are, in fact, punished during this time, connecting this period to the punishment of those who commit fornication with Jezebel in the church in Thyatira (2.22). Wall, *Revelation*, p. 120, thinks that the use of the definite article in *τῆς θλίψεως τῆς μεγάλης* denotes a time in particular, though this time is one in salvation history and not necessarily human history. By this notion, he refers to the history of the church. Hence, it is not all the suffering everyone in the world experiences, rather, suffering unique to God working out salvation amongst his church.

³²⁰ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, pp. 434-35, mentions that the author of 1 Macc. 9.27 would have understood the 'great tribulation' to have already begun by the second century BCE. He also points out that Midr. Ps. 119.31 applies Daniel 12 to Israel's trouble over time. He notes that Rev. 3.10 alludes to Dan. 12.1, 10 and includes the time

Such associations would reveal that those wearing white have been through a time of severe testing and great suffering and now they are ‘coming out’ of it. The present participle, οἱ ἐρχόμενοι (‘the ones coming’), signals that those wearing white are passing through this time of suffering and the preposition ἐκ (‘out of’) indicates that they do, in fact, make it out.³²¹ Moreover the hearers learn that during this time of tribulation the multitude has washed their robes and made them white with the blood of the Lamb (v. 14).³²² Two third person aorist active verbs – ἔπλυναν (‘they have washed’) and ἐλεύκαναν (‘they have made’) – are used to depict this activity. The use of these suggests that the multitude has not been passive³²³ during their time of suffering but has played an intentional role with deliberate activity. Once again, the white robes remind of alignment with Jesus, conquering, and the souls under the altar (1.13-14; 3.4-5, 18; 4.4; 6.11). Only now, the hearers would understand that those who wear white have deliberately made them white by washing them in the blood of the Lamb. The blood of the Lamb has already been understood to refer to Jesus’ suffering and death. Though Jesus’ blood is what explicitly makes them white, their faithfulness and loyalty to Jesus serves as the active agency which allows for this to occur.³²⁴

In vv. 15-17, the interlude concludes with a hymn³²⁵ comprised of various scenes which, together, make up the fourth image relevant to suffering and theodicy in chapter seven. The hymn begins by portraying those in white robes around the throne of God. Once again, the faithful are portrayed in close proximity to God, underscoring their fellowship with Jesus which has come from being united with him in faithful witness through suffering. The hearers would notice that the present tense used in the interlude has now switched to the future tense. Perhaps they would understand this switch to mean the hymn reveals provisions that are eschatological in nature. The first of these eschatological provisions is protection provided by the one who sits on

before Jesus’ ministry and Parousia. In light of these points, he concludes that the tribulation spoken of here has begun, continues in the present, and will have a final conclusion wherein it is intensified.

³²¹ Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, p. 139.

³²² The act of washing garments, particularly in blood, was an act of consecration and, here, would refer to the cleansing of sin (Exod. 19.10, 14; Ps. 51.7; Isa. 1.18; 1 Jn 1. 7; Rev. 1.5; 5.9). See Fanning, *Revelation*, p. 217.

³²³ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 273.

³²⁴ Reddish, *Revelation*, p. 151, notes that being washed in the blood means participating in the life and death of Jesus. Sharing in Jesus’ sacrifice is for one to ‘align themselves unreservedly with him’. He goes on to note that, though the blood is what whitens, faithfulness to Jesus is required. Hence, the active agency by the crowd. The active washing of the robes refers to making Jesus’ faithfulness their faithfulness. See also Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, p. 139-40; Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 273.

³²⁵ Wall, *Revelation*, pp. 120-21, notes the theodicean nature of this doxology.

the throne; he will σκηνώσει ('shelter')³²⁶ the faithful with his presence. This language would remind of the Festival of Booths, a celebration of God's provision and protection in the wilderness.³²⁷ Because God shelters or 'tabernacles' over the faithful, the faithful experience four more eschatological provisions: (1) they hunger no more, (2) they thirst no more, (3) the sun does not strike them, and (4) scorching heat does not strike them (v. 16). In keeping with the idea of God's provision and protection that Israel found in the wilderness, this language would likely bring to mind the exiles as they returned from Babylon in Isa. 49.10.³²⁸ Perhaps the mention of hungering no more would evoke language from the FG where Jesus promises his faithful followers that they will hunger no more (Jn 6.35). The idea of thirsting no more would likely remind of places in the OT where God meets the needs of his people by leading them to water and giving them drink (Ps. 7.17; 23.2; 36.8-9). Moreover, the language used to express protection from the sun and the scorching heat would remind of God's promise to be a shade of refuge to the faithful (Ps. 121.5-6). At this point, the hearers observe something ironic: the Lamb who has conquered and become the judge of the earth is now the shepherd who tends to the faithful who have suffered through the great tribulation (v. 17).³²⁹ The shepherd metaphor would not be lost on the hearers as they would be familiar this metaphor from both the OT (Psalm 23; Isa. 40.11; Ezek. 34.23) and the FG (John 10; 21.15-17). The shepherd leads them to ζωῆς πηγῶν ὑδάτων ('life's water springs').³³⁰ Here the word ζωῆς ('life') is found in the emphatic position, accentuating the idea of life.³³¹

³²⁶ J.-A. Bühner, 'σκηνώω', *EDNT*, III, pp. 252-53, notes that σκηνώω refers to dwelling in a tent. Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, has translated it to 'tabernacle over'.

³²⁷ J.A. Draper 'The Heavenly Feast of Tabernacles: Revelation 7.1-17', *JSNT* 19 (1983), pp. 133-47. Draper reads Revelation 7 in light of the eschatological hope he finds in Zechariah 14. He concludes that it is possible that some early Christians may have kept the Feast of Tabernacles, thus giving it 'eschatological significance' in Rev. 7. Contra Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, pp. 440-41, who argues that the primary OT background for this text depends on Ezek. 37.26-28, though he does suggest that Rev. 7.9-17 might suggest a contemporary Jewish interpretation of Zechariah 14.

³²⁸ Oswalt sees Isa. 49.10 as a combination of Psalm 23 and the Exodus account. See J.N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40-66* (NICOT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), p. 299.

³²⁹ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 166, calls the judge becoming the shepherd an 'intriguing exchange of roles'. Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 276, notes that, here, the diverse roles of the Lamb come together. Koester, *Revelation*, p. 423, points out that shepherding can mean to rule with a rod of iron (2.27) or, as in here, lead to water.

³³⁰ Swete, *The Apocalypse of Saint John*, p. 103, offers this translation and notes that ζωῆς is in the emphatic position, giving prominence to life.

³³¹ See Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 201. The hearers will later discover that these springs of life's water will become a river of life's water flowing through the heavenly city and from the throne of God and the Lamb (Rev. 22.1).

As the interlude and hymn come to a close, the hearers discover one last scene in the hymn that is used for the first time in the narrative: ἐξαλείψει ὁ θεὸς πᾶν δάκρυον ἐκ τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν αὐτῶν ('God will wipe away every tear from their eyes').³³² The hearers would be reminded of Isa. 25.8, wherein God wipes away tears from all faces and death is swallowed up forever.³³³ Such a powerful and unmistakable detail would set up their anticipation for what may come later in the narrative, likely causing them to expect some kind of eternal safety and provision for those who have maintained their faithful witness to Jesus through times of great suffering. Furthermore, the hearers would suppose that no matter what comes next in the narrative, the Lamb will somehow bring justice to those who cry before the throne.

At this point, the hearers enter chapter eight and encounter an angel with a censer (8.3-5). It is standing at the altar and offers the prayers of *all* the saints with incense before the throne. This imagery would cause the hearers to recall the last time the altar was mentioned (6.9), drawing a connection between these saints' prayers and the cry of the souls under the altar.³³⁴ The prayers rise before God and an angel hurls fire from the altar³³⁵ upon the earth (v. 5). This descriptive imagery would evoke theophanic language from the OT that depicts the coming of the Lord (v.

³³² The hearers will learn that this image reappears in Rev. 21.4 in connection with an explicit statement that death, sorrow, and suffering will pass away. Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 201.

³³³ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 277, thinks this image would likely cause the hearers to recall Jesus' weeping (Jn 11.35), evoking the account of Lazarus wherein Jesus demonstrated his power over death.

³³⁴ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 281, notes if the prayers in 8.3-5 are understood in association with the cry in 6.9-11, the hearers would expect the saints' prayers to lead to a divine response. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 455, draws a clear connection between 6.9-11 and 8.3-5, suggesting that both altars are the same, as noted by the repetitious use of θυσιαστήριον ('altar') and the mentions of incense being added to the saints' prayers (cf. 5.8). Beale goes so far to say that the connection validates the idea that the martyrs under the altar are not a 'narrow reference to a group of literal martyrs but a figurative representation of *all* saints who suffer to whatever degree'. Needless to say, Beale understands 8.3-5 to refer to the suffering that believers experience because of faithful witness. Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 215, concurs. R. Stefanovic, 'The Angel at the Altar (Revelation 8:3-5): A Case Study on Intercalations in Revelation', *Seminary Studies* 44 (2006), pp. 79-94, argues that 8.3-5 is a link that concludes the seven seals and introduces the seven judgments. 'As such, the passage defines the theological meaning and nature of the trumpet plagues in light of the petition of the slain saints for justice in the scene of the fifth seal (6.9-11).' Stefanovic goes on to say that the parallels between 8.3-5 and 6.9-11, as well as how 8.3-5 functions to introduce the seven trumpet judgments, suggest that the main theme of the Apocalypse is 'the situation of faithful Christians in the hostile world'. He notes, 'The purpose of the passage ... was, on one hand, to provide the faithful, suffering under the oppression of Rome, as well as the Christians throughout the centuries, with an assurance that their suffering is not the last word and that heaven is not indifferent to what they pass through'. He concludes by maintaining that the idea of the passage is to inspire patient endurance in all the 'suffering faithful'.

³³⁵ Likely a reference to Ezek. 10.2-17. J. Roloff, *The Revelation of John: A Continental Commentary* (trans. J.E. Alsup; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), p. 108, thinks that the throwing down of fire to the earth is symbolic of 'the outbreak of divine wrath'.

5; cf. Exod. 19.6; 20.18; 2. Sam. 22.14; Ps. 18.12).³³⁶ The hearers would likely discern that the saints' prayers have brought forth the judgment of God and his coming.³³⁷

Implications of Revelation 6.1-8.5

There are seven implications that emerge regarding suffering and theodicy in Rev. 6.1-8.5:

First, the Lamb has supervision and sovereignty over the events which are about to take place – events which will entail suffering. Though suffering is released with the opening of the first four seals, the Lamb has opened them. This suggests nothing happens apart from Jesus' control, including the suffering experienced by the people of God such as those in the seven churches, even Antipas.

Second, those who suffer for their faithful witness are under the care of God and have an intimate relationship with Jesus. The souls are 'slaughtered' just as the Lamb had been slaughtered (6.9). Sharing the death of Jesus creates a close bond with him. The souls under the altar share this bond as does Antipas, those who have suffered with Jesus in the seven churches, and those who will suffer for Jesus as the narrative unfolds.

Third, more injustice occurs before justice. The faithful must wait for more injustice to occur before they receive the justice they plea for as they learn the number of those who suffer must be 'complete' (6.11). Thus, in spite of all the suffering that has already been experienced by the faithful people of God in the seven churches and by the souls under the altar, more suffering is yet to come.

Fourth, the suffering of the faithful will have a definite end. The notion of the faithful's suffering being 'complete' suggests that, at some point, there will be a definite end to their suffering.

Fifth, the enemies of God are affected when God answers the cries of the souls under the altar. This notion is revealed in 6.15, where cosmic events in the sixth seal denote the day of the Lord and God's vengeance on behalf of his suffering people.

Sixth, those who are protected from judgment during the day of the Lord are those who have endured the suffering of the great tribulation. The multitudes who have white robes and cry out are associated with (1) those who have overcome trials in the seven churches and (2) the souls

³³⁶ See Longman, *Revelation*, p. 132.

³³⁷ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 175, sees this possibility and goes as far to say that the plea of the martyrs in 6.10 is answered here in part.

under the altar who cry out for justice. Jesus' blood has caused them to overcome, and their loyalty to Jesus is the active agency on their part that has enabled this to occur (7.3-14).

Seventh, God tabernacles over his people (7.15). The Lamb who conquered is the shepherd of those who have been faithful unto death. Though justice does not come immediately, the just God is at work to answer his people's prayer for justice. This answer occurs at the Lamb's coming (7.14-8.5), when suffering and injustice are finally put to an end.

Revelation 8.6-11.19

As this next section begins, the hearers encounter the blowing of the trumpet judgments. As the first four trumpets sound, little escapes the judgment of God including the elements and the luminaries (8.6-12). The hearers would not fail to notice that a *third* of the earth is affected by the trumpets, whereas only a *fourth* of the earth was affected by the seals. It is likely this would suggest that the judgments are growing in intensity and could continue to grow stronger as the narrative moves forward.

While these judgments explicitly affect the earth, implicitly they affect humanity. Within these first four trumpet judgments, there are at least three images wherein the hearers would discern human suffering.³³⁸ The first is in the initial trumpet where hail and fire, mixed with blood, is thrown upon the earth. The mixture of hail, fire, and blood are not altogether unusual in OT, Apocryphal, and pseudepigraphic literature (Ezek. 38.2; Joel 2.30; Wis. 16.15; 1 En. 14.9-10). Yet, the blood included in this scene of judgment would likely remind the hearers of the instances where they've already encountered blood up to this point: the Lamb's blood (1.5; 5.9) and the blood of the faithful witnesses (6.10; 7.14). Perhaps the hearers would find this appearance of blood ironic: those who have shed the blood of the Lamb and the blood of the Lamb's faithful witnesses now reap blood in return.³³⁹ The second image where the hearers would discern suffering is in the blowing of the third trumpet wherein a star named 'Wormwood' falls on a third of the rivers and the springs of water. The waters are made bitter, and many people die as a result (v. 11). This image would likely be heard as a transposal of Exod. 12.25,

³³⁸ While the hearers would likely associate each of these trumpets with some form of suffering, these three images are the most explicit places wherein the hearers would discern human suffering. For sake of space, I have omitted the potential suffering the blowing of the second trumpet would cause when the sea becomes blood and a third of the earth's ships are destroyed. The hearers would likely understand this to equate into great economic loss which would lead to human suffering to a significant extent.

³³⁹ Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 137, makes this connection: 'An empire founded on bloodshed, whether that of Christ ... his followers ... or other unnamed victims ... can only reap blood in return'. See also Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, pp. 286-87, who sees this possibility in the text.

wherein God made the bitter waters sweet for Israel so they could quench their thirst.³⁴⁰ Perhaps the hearers would also hear various OT echoes such as Lam. 3.19; Jer. 9.15; 23.15 where wormwood is used as a symbol for suffering and bitter sorrow which comes as judgment on the rebellious. Whatever this image would mean for the hearers, they would understand the severity of the trumpet judgments by this point. The third image where the hearers would discern human suffering is in the blowing of the fourth trumpet where there are three woes announced upon τοὺς κατοικοῦντας ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ('those who dwell on the earth') (v. 13). The repetition of the phrase τοὺς κατοικοῦντας ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ('those who dwell on the earth') would cause the hearers to recall the last place in the narrative this occurred – where the souls cry for God to judge and avenge their blood on those 'who dwell on the earth' (6.10). The hearers would suspect that these three woes of judgment³⁴¹ are directed against those who have caused the suffering of God's faithful witnesses.³⁴² Perhaps those who have caused sorrow will experience sorrow in return.

In chapter nine, the hearers soon find that they would be correct in suspecting sorrow for those who have caused sorrow. Up unto this point the trumpet judgments have explicitly affected the earth and have implicitly affected humanity. Yet, when the fifth trumpet blasts (9.1-11),³⁴³ locusts come upon the earth from the bottomless pit and explicitly harm people. This dreadful image is the first of several images in chapter nine relevant for suffering and theodicy. The locusts are given power like scorpions and are forbidden to harm the elements but are permitted to harm those that do not have the seal of God on their foreheads for five months. Their sting is so intense humanity seeks death, but death flees (vv. 1-6)! Careful hearers would not overlook the word ἀδικήσουσιν ('harm') in v. 4. Up to this point, a form of this word has appeared several times in the narrative (2.11; 6.6), and, most recently, in the interlude where the 144,000 of God are sealed and protected from harm (7.2-3). The reemerging of ἀδικέω would likely add to the meaning of it in 7.2-3, suggesting that the sealing of the 144,000 is a means of protection from

³⁴⁰ Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 139.

³⁴¹ Woes are used in the OT for warning of judgment (Hos.7.13; Isa. 10.5; Jer. 23.1). Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, pp. 140-41, connects the three woes to the three trumpets yet to blow and the disasters they cause. The warning could even suggest that these next three trumpets will be worse than the previous four.

³⁴² Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 292, sees this interpretive possibility.

³⁴³ If the hearers have not yet learned that the fifth trumpet is to be more intense than the first four, perhaps they would gather this not only from the content of its description but also in observing that the description of the first four trumpets is about equal in length to the description of the fifth trumpet, alone.

God's wrath against humankind under these woes.³⁴⁴ This protection would perhaps remind of God's protection of the Israelites in Exodus as well as the instance in Ezek. 9.3-6 where God uses a mark to protect those grieved over the sins of Judah. Yet, the harm done to those not sealed is enough to βασανισθήσονται ('torment') them. Such torment describes intense physical distress.³⁴⁵ The hearers would perhaps observe a poetic³⁴⁶ couplet in v. 6 which portrays the intensity of the suffering those who are not sealed experience:

καὶ ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις ἐκείναις ζητήσουσιν οἱ ἄνθρωποι τὸν θάνατον καὶ οὐ μὴ εὕρῃσουσιν αὐτόν,
καὶ ἐπιθυμήσουσιν ἀποθανεῖν καὶ φεύγει ὁ θάνατος ἀπ' αὐτῶν.

And in those days people will seek death and will not find it. They will long to die, but death will flee from them.

In the first part of the couplet, the tormented ζητήσουσιν ('seek') death. In the second part of the couplet they ἐπιθυμήσουσιν ('long') to die. The hearers would find it ironic that those who have caused the martyrs great suffering, suffer themselves and cannot attempt to escape. Having slaughtered the faithful, they are now tortured by the cosmic forces that provoked them to slaughter the faithful.³⁴⁷ The intensity of this suffering would likely remind the hearers of the level of anguish Job describes in his own suffering (Job 3.21).

Perhaps the most terrifying thing about these locusts is that their king is the angel from the bottomless pit, Abaddon (in Hebrew) or Apollyon (in Greek) (v. 11). There are two interpretive possibilities for the identity of this king angel: (1) the hearers might identify this angel as Satan himself,³⁴⁸ which would remind of Exod. 12.23 wherein the death angel is referred to as 'the destroyer',³⁴⁹ or (2) the hearers might consider this an angel that governs over the underworld.³⁵⁰

³⁴⁴ Koester, *Revelation*, p. 458, notes that the seal does not protect the 144,000 from all forms of suffering as the faithful will later suffer at the hands of evil (Rev. 13.7; 17.6).

³⁴⁵ See W. Stenger, 'βασανίζω', *ENDT*, I, pp. 200-201, who suggests the verb βασανίζω means to 'torture'. Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 229, seems to think the use of βασανίζω in v. 6 should include psychological torture of some kind as those tortured are driven to seek death.

³⁴⁶ See Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, pp. 229-30; Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 368.

³⁴⁷ Osborne, *Revelation*, pp. 368-69, makes this observation.

³⁴⁸ D.E. Aune, *Revelation 6-16* (WBC 52b: Dallas, TX: Word, 1998), p. 534, suggests that the angel is Satan owing to the fact that ἄγγελος is articular. Contra Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 373, who thinks suggesting that the angel is Satan based on the articular ἄγγελος is reading too much into the article.

³⁴⁹ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, pp. 502-503, makes this case by pointing out how destruction is often equated with Sheol (Job 26.6; 28.22; Ps. 88.11; Prov. 15.11; 27.20). Beale concludes that the king angel's identity is either the Devil or an evil representative of the Devil.

³⁵⁰ See Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, p. 65, who posits that this angel governs the underworld based on account of 2 Bar. 21.23 and Job 28.22.

However the hearers would interpret this, they would discern that the torment of the locusts is cosmic and dreadful and a judgment from God upon those who have caused the suffering of God's people.

At this point, the sixth trumpet sounds and it produces the second image relevant to suffering and theodicy in chapter nine. This image includes four angels who appear and morph into a cavalry of 200,000,000 horsemen that have been prepared to kill a third of humankind (vv. 13-16). The imagery of the sixth trumpet also includes the altar (v. 13), causing the hearers to recall the plea of those who had been slaughtered for their faithful witness (6.9; 8.3). Thus, it is quite likely that the hearers would understand the sixth trumpet as a response to the pleas of the souls under the altar who have been slaughtered. Moreover, in the sixth trumpet, the hearers learn that suffering has increased since the opening of the fourth seal (6.7-8), from a fourth of the earth to a third of the earth (v. 18). Perhaps the significant increase in deaths would remind the hearers of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19.24, 28) as well as other places in the OT where severe judgment is mentioned (Isa. 34.9-10; Ezek. 38.22). At the very least, it would communicate the growing intensification of suffering within the judgments upon those who have slaughtered the martyrs.³⁵¹ In spite of this increased suffering, the hearers would think of two things: (1) God's protection of the faithful and (2) God's faithfulness in answering the plea of the martyrs in this judgment, creating in them a growing anticipation of the justice of God.³⁵²

The hearers now come to chapter ten which is the beginning of the second interlude in the narrative.³⁵³ The first image of this chapter that relates to suffering and theodicy is the angel who makes the oath and proclaims that there will be no more delay (v. 6). It is likely that this image would remind the hearers of the question the souls under the altar pose in 6.9-11,³⁵⁴ as this statement suggests that the martyrs would not have to wait much longer until the just God

³⁵¹ Stevenson, *A Slaughtered Lamb*, p.172, suggests that, along with judgment, the first six trumpets would reveal God's mercy. While God's judgment expresses his wrath, it can be a 'catalyst' for repentance. 'What the trumpets demonstrate is that suffering as an outgrowth of divine wrath and suffering as an outgrowth of divine mercy both fall under the sovereignty of God and function to accomplish his plan for creation.'

³⁵² See Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 308.

³⁵³ This is a two-part interlude. The first part consists of John's prophetic commission and the second part consists of the church's prophetic witness. See Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 150. For interpretive options concerning how this interlude plays a part in the arrangement and structure of Revelation, see M. Seaborn Hall, 'The Hook Interlocking Structure of Revelation: The Most Important Verses in the Book and How They May Unify Its Structure', *NovT* 44.3 (2002), pp. 278-96, who goes as far as to say that this interlude is the 'interlocking center' and the 'key to the outline of the book'.

³⁵⁴ Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 155; Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 206; Reddish, *Revelation*, pp. 196-97.

avenges their blood.³⁵⁵ The second image of this chapter that relates to suffering and theodicy is the sweet yet bitter taste of the scroll which John is told to consume.³⁵⁶ The taste of the scroll would remind the hearers of two things: (1) the instance in Ps. 119.103 where the word of the Lord is described as sweet and (2) the instance in Ezek. 3.1-14 where the prophet eats a sweet scroll but has a bitter reaction toward the prospect of warning rebellious Israel with the message of the Lord.³⁵⁷ The hearers would also likely take notice of the word *πικραίνω* ('to make bitter') which has been used once in the narrative up to this point, at the third trumpet, where a third of the waters become bitter due to it being polluted by wormwood, resulting in the deaths of many (8.11). The word *πικραίνω* now converges here with Ezekiel's experience suggesting that the bitter stomach would be an adverse result of eating the scroll. That John's commission to prophesy immediately follows his experience of consuming the scroll (v. 11) would cause the hearers to anticipate that there is suffering³⁵⁸ ahead in connection with the message³⁵⁹ of this prophetic commissioning.³⁶⁰

³⁵⁵ Fanning, *Revelation*, p. 315, seems to think that the angel's proclamation that there will be no more delay 'speaks also to the nearness of the full salvation of God's people; they do not have long to wait when this point is reached'. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 539, notes that this verse suggests a time when God has decided to complete his purposes. Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 316, considers the notion that this proclamation is a response to the plea from the souls under the altar. Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 265, however, does see this possibility but does not limit the proclamation to only martyrdom.

³⁵⁶ Waddell, *The Spirit of the Book of Revelation*, p. 170, notes, 'The protection of the Lord is encouraging but the thought of persecution can leave one sick'.

³⁵⁷ See Wall, *Revelation*, p. 140. See also Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, p. 156, who proposes three possible reasons for the sweet/bitter effect of the scroll: (1) it is God's word and the plan of salvation for the world but at the same time a message of judgment, (2) there is no more delay in the fulfilment of God's plan but at the same time the church undergoes persecution, and (3) the message is God's plan for the world but persecution is inevitable as a result of proclaiming it. What Resseguie correctly identifies in these interpretive options is that the inevitability of persecution goes hand-in-hand with faithful witness, as has already been demonstrated in the narrative up to this point.

³⁵⁸ See D.E. Holwerda, 'The Church and the Little Scroll (Revelation 10, 11)', *CTJ* 34 (1999), pp. 148-61, who says, 'the church is called to believe that suffering witness is God's method of surprising the world and taking over its kingdoms'. He notes that the eating of the scroll is what produces disciples who are willing to suffer. 'Until Jesus comes, the church cannot escape its bittersweet calling.'

³⁵⁹ There are a number of ideas about what the content of the scroll is. Boring, *Revelation*, p. 142, suggests it is God's plan for his creation which includes the message of judgment and salvation; Longman, *Revelation*, p. 154, sees it as containing judgments; Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 265, refers to the contents of the scroll as containing God's purposes; Reddish, *Revelation*, p. 198, suggests that the scroll contains God's plans for the world. See also Caird, *Revelation*, p. 126, who understands the big scroll in 5.1 to be different from the small scroll here in chapter ten. He notes that the scroll in 5.1 contains God's purposes accomplished by the Lamb and the little scroll contains a 'new version' of these purposes, only accomplished by the church.

³⁶⁰ Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things*, p. 104, notes that what looms ahead in the narrative is the suffering that God's faithful witnesses experience as they bear witness to the truth.

As the hearers come to chapter 11, they are introduced to the second part of the interlude which began in 10.1. The hearers observe John being told to measure the temple and the altar and the worshippers³⁶¹ but not the outside court as it will be given over to the nations to trample for forty-two months (vv. 1-2).³⁶² Two witnesses are introduced who are given authority to prophesy for 1,260 days. They can pour fire from their mouths and have power to shut the sky and command plagues (vv. 4-6). To the hearers' horror, a beast comes from the bottomless pit and conquers and kills the two witnesses. Adding to this horror, their bodies lay in the street of the great city for three and a half days and they are not allowed to be buried (vv. 7-9). The earth dwellers rejoice that these prophets are dead because these two prophets have tormented those who dwell on the earth (v. 10). Yet, after three and a half days life from God enters them and they come back to life and ascend to heaven. At the same time a great earthquake causes the death of seven thousand people, which is a tenth of the city. Those who are not killed are terrified and give glory to God (vv. 10-13). This interlude ends and the third woe begins (v. 14). The seventh angel trumpets. An angel announces that the kingdoms of the world have become the kingdoms of Christ. The twenty-four elders worship God and God's temple opens with a display of lightning, thunder, earthquake, and heavy hail (vv. 15-19).

There are four images present in chapter 11 that are relevant to suffering and theodicy which the hearers would notice. The first image is the reappearance of the altar (v. 1). This reappearance would cause the hearers to recall the souls under the altar (6.9-11), holding the image of the souls under the altar as a lens to read the remainder of this section.³⁶³ The hearers would likely find irony in that God has commanded the temple, altar, and worshippers³⁶⁴ to be measured but has excluded the outer court. On the one hand the hearers would find comfort in

³⁶¹ Waddell, *The Spirit of the Book of Revelation*, p. 164, suggests that 11.1-13 is a narrative prophecy which is divided into two sections: (1) the measuring of the temple (11.1-2) and (2) the story of the two witnesses.

³⁶² F. Tavo, 'The Outer Court and Holy City in Rev 11:1-2: Arguing for a Positive Appraisal', *ABR* 54 (2006), pp. 56-72, suggests that whatever the hearers would encounter in 11.1-2, it cannot be isolated from passages wherein the church is portrayed as physically vulnerable, such as Revelation 2 and 3. Tavo maintains that the seven churches would want to know why they are vulnerable. Revelation 11.1-2 would be a two-fold response concerning the churches' vulnerability, suggesting that: (1) the church is 'physically vulnerable temporarily (v. 2c) but is eternally safe spiritually (v. 1b)' and (2) the vulnerable church on earth is united with the 'saintly community' in heaven.

³⁶³ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 563, sees this element of the story as quite important in the lead up to what follows. He translates τὸ θυσιαστήριον as 'the place of sacrifice' and notes that it refers back to 6.9-10. The idea here is to portray the 'sacrificial calling' of the faithful which is their faithful witness. They have 'brought themselves to be sacrificed on the altar of the gospel, to which they have been called to testify'.

³⁶⁴ That there is a link between the temple, worshippers, altar, outer court, and holy city is enough to suggest that they all represent the people of God. See Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, pp. 272-73; Waddell, *The Spirit of the Book of Revelation*, pp. 168-70; Thomas and Macchia, *Revelation*, pp. 200-201.

the measuring as it echoes Zech. 2.1-5, alluding to divine protection for the people of God.³⁶⁵ On the other hand, the hearers would begin to anticipate distress and suffering ahead. Their anticipation would come from learning that the court outside of the temple has not been measured³⁶⁶ but has been given over to the nations. Moreover, the holy city³⁶⁷ is to be trampled for forty-two months.³⁶⁸ The trampling of the city would remind of Zech. 12.3 (LXX) and Dan. 8.11-14.³⁶⁹ Perhaps the forty-two months would be taken as an echo of Dan. 7.25; 12.7. The unmeasured court and the trampling of the city converging with the image of the souls under the altar would likely cause the hearers to be aware of suffering just as the two witnesses are introduced.

The second image relevant to suffering and theodicy in chapter 11 is the two witnesses. They are introduced as the two olive trees and lampstands³⁷⁰ that stand before the Lord (vv. 3-4).³⁷¹

³⁶⁵ Though the passage itself does not explicitly mention protection in the measuring, it is immediately followed by assurance of God's protection (vv. 8-9). See Reddish, *Revelation*, p. 207. Contra J.P.T. de Aquino, 'A Proposed Reading of Revelation 11.1-13', *Fides Reformata* 23.1 (2018), pp. 35-51, who argues that the measuring suggests God's testing of his people, not 'preservation'. However, his close reading does suggest that those who pass God's test of fidelity will be preserved.

³⁶⁶ Koester, *Revelation*, pp. 485-86, gives three interpretive options for the outer court in v. 2. (1) The outer court is the vulnerable aspect of the church. While God preserves the church (noted in the measuring of the temple), it also remains vulnerable (noted in the unmeasured portion). (2) The outer court is the unbelieving world. (3) The outer court is the part of the church that accommodates false worship. Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 326, emphasizes that this verse suggests abandonment and vulnerability for God's people: 'the graphic language encountered describing that John is to leave out and not measure the outer court would not be lost on the hearers for the phrase ἐκβαλε ἔξωθεν ("cast outside") underscores the idea of vulnerability if not outright abandonment!'

³⁶⁷ Koester, *Revelation*, p. 486, gives two interpretive options for the 'holy city' in v. 2: (1) the Christian community and (2) the unbelieving world.

³⁶⁸ Newton, *A Pentecostal Commentary on Revelation*, p. 204, points out that many of the ways commentators read the trampling of the outer court are negative. He seeks to expand the reader's understanding of the trampling of the outer court into a 'positive direction'. 'The implication here, and by some other authors, is on the "poor suffering church" ... while there is definitely struggle and persecution here, Christ is building his church, and the conquerors are not looking for comfort, but power to be witnesses.'

³⁶⁹ Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, pp. 271-72, notes that Rev. 11.1-2 comes from a 'precise' interpretation of Dan. 8.11-14 in connection with Zech. 12.3.

³⁷⁰ Waddell, *The Spirit of the Book of Revelation*, p. 173, points out that the lampstands are defined by Christ as the seven churches. Since John has used the lampstands to symbolize the church, and there is no effort by him here to redefine them otherwise, 'the burden of proof will continue to lie with those who wish to identify two lampstands as anything other than the church'.

³⁷¹ R.P. Menzies, *The End of History: Pentecostals and a Fresh Approach to the Apocalypse* (Springfield, MO: ACPT Press, 2022), p. 126, suggests that John is using Zech. 4.1-14, which is Zechariah's vision of a golden lampstand and two olive trees, to portray that the two lampstands (two witnesses) represent the entire church just as the single lampstand in Zechariah's prophecy represented the entire temple. As the church, the two witnesses must rely on the Holy Spirit amidst persecution and opposition. Hence, Menzies's reading of this text shows the importance of Spirit empowerment for overcoming trials and maintaining faithfulness amidst suffering. Conquering cannot occur by might or by power but only by the Spirit (Zech. 4.6). See also Waddell, *The Spirit of the Book of Revelation*, p. 174, who suggests that the witnesses are 'synecdoche' for the 'entire' church as the lampstand was a synecdoche for the 'whole' temple. 'The church is to engage in prophecy as it bears the word of God and the

The two witnesses would remind the hearers of those who have functioned as a *μάρτυς* up to this point: John (1.2), Jesus (1.5; 3.14), and Antipas (2.13). The hearers would also recall the souls under the altar who were slain for the witness they had borne (6.9). If suffering for witness has not yet been perceived as an explicit theme up to this point, it would be impossible to ignore when the completion of the two witnesses' powerful and unrivaled testimony is met with death (v. 7). The hearers would perceive this death as horrific owing to four facets: (1) the witnesses' death at the hands of the beast is described in a triplet: *ποιήσῃ μετ' αὐτῶν πόλεμον καὶ νικήσῃ αὐτούς καὶ ἀποκτενεῖ αὐτούς* ('will make war on them and conquer them and kill them'). The use of polysyndeton is not unfamiliar to the hearers. Up to this point, it has been a literary device to display emphasis.³⁷² Because of this emphasis, it may not be going too far to suggest that its employment here emphasizes the brutal nature of their death.³⁷³ (2) The language used here would be reminiscent of the horrific scene in Daniel 7 wherein the four beasts from the sea make war with the saints and overcome them (Dan. 7.3, 21). The beast's warlike description would indicate to the hearers that the beast is violent, even heinous, as they will soon come to find in even further detail (13.17; 16.14; 17.13-14; 19.19; 20.10). (3) It is said that the beast *νικήσῃ* ('conquers') the witnesses. This word has been exclusively used in the narrative to describe the saints who overcome. Now, the beast overcomes. Perhaps the hearers would feel threatened or intimidated by this notion, adding to the threat of the beast's cruelty.³⁷⁴ (4) It is said that the beast will *ἀποκτενεῖ* ('kill') the witnesses. This explicit language has already been used twice in connection with the idea of witnesses, both in connection with Antipas (2.13) and in connection with the souls under the altar (6.11). This intentional language unites the fate of the two witnesses with these earlier identities. The combination of these four elements in v. 7 portray a horrific fate for the two witnesses accompanied by suffering. Yet, it grows worse.

testimony of Jesus before the world just as John has borne the word of God and the testimony of Jesus before the churches.'

³⁷² Throughout the narrative, polysyndeton is used to provide emphasis at pivotal points (1.11; 17.4; 21).

³⁷³ It is peculiar that more commentators do not seem to address the polysyndeton here in v. 7. It seems that the general focus in v. 7 is on the first appearance of the beast or the connection with the bottomless pit or the completion of the witnesses' testimony. It could be that John uses polysyndeton so frequently it is taken for granted here. At any rate, the brutality of the witnesses' death, which the hearers would discern via this familiar literary device, should not be overlooked. (cf. Koester, *Revelation*, pp. 499-500; Fanning, *Revelation*, pp. 333-35; Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, pp. 165-66; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, pp. 587-90.)

³⁷⁴ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 348, points out how the word *νικήσῃ* is used in association with the beast's conquest of the two witnesses and adds, 'Thus, to learn that the beast overcomes these two witnesses threatens to subvert the hearers' understanding of what it means to overcome'.

The third image relevant to suffering and theodicy in chapter 11 is the bodies of the two witnesses which lie in the street. The earth dwellers celebrate their death and refuse to put them in a tomb (vv. 8-10)!³⁷⁵ Such imagery reveals a malevolent attempt to shame the two witnesses after their death, adding to the witnesses' suffering. This would likely remind of Deut. 21.22-23 wherein the Mosaic Law commands that even criminals are to be buried shortly after their deaths.³⁷⁶ The two witnesses' suffering and death is now treated lower, and with more disrespect, than that of a criminal's! Perhaps the hearers would think that this sort of shame and suffering in death would unite the witnesses to their Lord, whose suffering, shame, and death were similar.³⁷⁷ Yet, the hearers learn that not only is the witnesses' shame and suffering similar to Jesus', but so also is their vindication when they are resurrected after three-and-one-half days (v. 11).³⁷⁸

Here the fourth image relevant to suffering and theodicy in chapter 11 emerges: the resurrection of the witnesses (vv. 11-12). The familiar language that appears as they ascend to heaven, *Ἀνάβατε ὧδε* ('Come up here'), would remind of the last place in the narrative that it appears – where John heard the same command from heaven and was taken before the throne of God (4.1). The witnesses' association with the throne of God after their deaths would give the hearers good reason to associate the two witnesses – as well as their suffering and death – to the suffering and death of the souls under the altar. Hence, the motif of the two witnesses serves as a point of convergence where these two witnesses, the souls under the altar, and Jesus converge around the themes of witness, suffering, death, and vindication.

³⁷⁵ The earth dwellers celebrate the death of the two witnesses because the two witnesses' prophetic activity has been a *ἔβασάνισαν* ('torment') to them. The reemergence of the word *βασανίζω* would remind the hearers of the use of this word in 9.5 where those who dwell upon the earth are tormented by the locusts under the fifth trumpet. Such an association between 9.5 and 11.10 would likely suggest that the Spirit inspired prophetic witness of the two witnesses, like the fifth trumpet, involves inflicting suffering upon those who dwell upon the earth. See Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 338.

³⁷⁶ See Longman, *Revelation*, p. 171. Longman also points to Jer. 16.6 where God's people are warned that, in his judgment, their dead would not be buried or mourned. Longman notes that this passage is not suggesting judgment on the witnesses. Rather, it would just confirm the earth dwellers' intent to shame the witnesses.

³⁷⁷ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 592, points out that *ἔπου* only introduces symbolic geography (2.13; 12.6, 14; 14.4; 20.10). This being the case, the 'great city' that kills the witnesses is 'spiritual' Sodom and Egypt and is akin to Jerusalem where their Lord was crucified. Hence, the city that kills the witnesses is like the city which killed Jesus. If Beale is correct, then it might not be going too far to suggest that this similarity between the witnesses and Jesus would cause the hearers to conclude that their experiences are similar, uniting them in such.

³⁷⁸ Three-and-one-half days would no doubt recall the amount of days Jesus remained dead before his resurrection. Koester, *Revelation*, p. 502, sees this time as a link between the story of the two witnesses and Jesus. See also Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 424. Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, pp. 341-42, notes, 'the parallel between Jesus' own experience of death, resurrection, and ascension and that of these two prophets ... Just as he will be vindicated, so also those faithful prophetic witnesses will be as well'.

Following the vindication of the two witnesses, the suffering shifts away from the witnesses and falls upon the wicked (v. 13).³⁷⁹ The fifth image relevant to suffering and theodicy is the earthquake wherein a tenth of the people are killed. This earthquake would likely recall Isa. 6.13 and Amos 5.3 where a tenth is the number of those who *survive* God's judgment. The reversing of these numbers suggests that the mercifulness of God is at play, lessening the suffering due to the wicked because they have accepted the witnesses' testimony. If this is the case, the hearers may begin to discern that suffering witness is not useless but can effectively work toward the conversion of the nations.³⁸⁰

Chapter 11 closes with the blowing of the seventh trumpet, which seems to be the third woe, wherein hearers would encounter a hymn that praises God for rewarding his servants and for *διαφθεῖραι τοὺς διαφθείροντας τὴν γῆν* ('destroying the destroyers of the earth') (v. 18). The conclusion of these trumpet judgments ends with the proclamation of a final judgment that has both a positive side and a negative side.³⁸¹ The positive side includes *τοῖς προφήταις καὶ τοῖς ἁγίοις* ('the prophets and the saints') who receive a reward due to them.³⁸² On the negative side of the judgment are the 'destroyers of the earth'.³⁸³ This language would cause the hearers to recall 9.1-11 wherein the king of the Abyss was called 'Destroyer'.³⁸⁴ Hearers might understand the appearance of this description, and the play on words, to be doing two things: (1) portraying the seriousness of God's judgment against those who are aligned with the demonic forces that

³⁷⁹ Waddell, *The Spirit of the Book of Revelation*, p. 190, argues that the prophecy of Revelation, *in nuce*, is encapsulated in 11.1-13. He points out that the 'essential elements' of the Apocalypse are contained in these verses (forty-two months, 1260 days, sundry places, the attack of the beast, and the church's resurrection) and the remainder of the visions 'unpacks' them.

³⁸⁰ Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, pp. 286-87, believes that suffering witness is the 'centre' of the message of Revelation. He states, 'when the church is faithful, even to suffering and death, in its task of proclaiming the truth of God's thunder and love, as these have been disclosed in Jesus the Christ, the sovereign rule of God can be brought inclusively to the nations as salvation, rather than judgment'. Contra Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, pp. 603-608, who considers the possibility that this passage details the nations exercising 'genuine covenant faith' but concludes that conversion here must be 'ruled out'. Koester, *Revelation*, p. 505, differs from the way Beale and commentators like him treat this passage, pointing out that 'fear' *can* mean conversion. The benefit of understanding it this way 'conveys the hope that the nations will worship and glorify God'.

³⁸¹ Fanning, *Revelation*, pp. 341-42.

³⁸² The hearers will soon learn that these two groups are persecuted and suffer together. See 16.6 and 18.24 where these two groups are mentioned suffering at the hands of evil, together (cf. 13.7, 10; 17.6; 18.20).

³⁸³ R. Waddell, 'The Apocalypse of John according to Craig R. Koester: A Critical Appreciation of *Revelation* (The Anchor Yale Bible) with Special Attention to Rev. 7.1 – 15.4', *JPT* 24 (2015), p. 22, suggests that there are two theological themes in Revelation that he wishes Pentecostals would grasp. The first is found here in 11.18: 'God is none other than the creator of all things old and new ... furthermore, God will protect creation in a penultimate action of judgment, destroying the destroyers of creation (11.18)'.

³⁸⁴ Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 171.

bring destruction upon the earth and (2) emphasizing the earnestness of God's justice which, here, vindicates those who have suffered at the hands of their persecutors.

As this chapter draws to a close, careful hearers might notice that an *inclusio* occurs. In 11.1-2, the chapter begins with the picture of God's people, as a worshipping community, protected from its enemies which is indicated by the measuring of the temple. The chapter ends with the vindication and celebration of the people of God (vv. 17-18), worshipping before the throne and the mention of God's temple once more. Yet, in between this worship and elation, there is suffering, death, and the prospect of being shamed for faithful witness (vv. 4-10). The careful hearers would likely understand that the worshipping community can expect suffering to accompany its witness until the coming of the Lord, when their suffering will be vindicated.³⁸⁵

Implications of Revelation 8.6-11.19

There are four implications regarding suffering and theodicy that emerge from Revelation 8.6-11.19:

First, those who shed the blood of the Lamb and the blood of his followers reap blood in return. This is heard in three places: (1) the first trumpet judgment wherein blood is one of the elements comprising the judgment (8.7), (2) the announcement of the three woes which affect 'those who dwell on the earth' (8.13), and (3) in the fifth trumpet judgment wherein those who have caused the martyrs great suffering are tormented by the cosmic forces that provoked them to slaughter the faithful to begin with (9.5-6). Thus, divine retribution seems to appear in this section – suffering is returned upon those who caused the suffering of those in the seven churches, Antipas, and the souls under the altar.

Second, suffering increases upon God's enemies. The suffering of those who dwell upon the earth increases under the trumpet judgments. Under these judgments a third of the earth (9.18) is affected, a much larger number than the fourth of the earth under the seal judgments (6.7-8). The intensification of judgment indicates: (1) the God of justice is answering the plea of the martyrs and (2) even more judgment and suffering will be encountered as the narrative unfolds.

Third, though faithful witness entails suffering and death, it is met with God's vindication. The story of the two witnesses portrays the witnesses' suffering, shame, and death to be similar to Jesus' own experience. But, like their Lord, they are resurrected and vindicated. These

³⁸⁵ See Wall, *Revelation*, p.141. Cf. Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 364; Archer, '*I Was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day*', p. 217, who both acknowledge that 11.1 and 11.19 form an *inclusio* around the idea of the temple of God.

similarities unite the witnesses with Jesus both in suffering and vindication. Thus, the story of the two witnesses is connected to the souls under the altar and those in the seven churches who have suffered for their faithfulness to Jesus.

Fourth, God's justice has varying outcomes. For those who have suffered for their faithful witness, the outcome is vindication. For those who have caused destruction and the suffering of God's faithful, the outcome is their own suffering under God's wrath (11.18). This acute judgment underscores the seriousness of God's justice toward those who have suffered unjustly and those who have been the cause of unjust suffering.

Revelation 12-14³⁸⁶

As the hearers come to chapter 12, they enter a new section which would likely be a surprise.³⁸⁷ The seven seal judgments and the seven trumpet judgments have come to an end by 11.19, both of which have concluded in theophanic language that would likely cause the hearers to recall chapter four and the one who sits on the throne. The use of such theophanic language in association with the seal judgments and trumpet judgments would likely signal that the coming of the Lord is in response to the cry of the martyrs.³⁸⁸ But this new section signals that there is more!³⁸⁹ As the narrative unfolds, the hearers are met with what seems like a dream of imagery: a woman clothed with the sun who gives birth to a child, a dragon with seven heads and ten horns who targets the woman and her child, a war between angels and the dragon, and a personified earth who comes to the rescue of the woman and protects her from the dragon (12.1-

³⁸⁶ Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, p. 285, sees chapters 12-14 as a 'much fuller exposition' of 11.7, that is, the cosmic conflict that occurs between evil and the people of God. Faithful witness is given a context within this conflict and shows how martyrdom appears as though it is victory for the beast, though it is truly victory for the martyrs themselves.

³⁸⁷ Stevenson, *A Slaughtered Lamb*, pp. 185-87, finds interest in the traditions that he believes John used to compose chapter 12: the Combat Myth, Gigantomachy, Exodus, and Genesis 3. He argues that these traditions portray cosmic opposition. Thus, he concludes, the composition of the story explains why the faithful in the apocalypse suffer – it is cosmic. 'Satan has declared war on those who hold to the testimony of Jesus ... it assures them they do not suffer because of their failings ... but because of their faithfulness.'

³⁸⁸ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 351, points out that the mention of the ark in 11.19 is a sign of God's faithfulness, along with the rainbow around God's throne in 4.3. Thus, he suggests that 4.1-11.19 begins and ends with God's faithfulness. 'At this point the hearers encounter the presence of the God who reigns, rewards, and destroys in his covenant faithfulness.' Thomas also acknowledges that the theophanic elements of the throne room scene in 4.5 reappear in 'intensified form' in 8.5 and then again in 11.19 with even greater intensity. That the theophanic elements are all described in the same order as 4.4 suggests that chapters four and eleven form an inclusio. The progressively increasing intensity of the theophanic elements insinuate that the narrative is moving toward the end. 'The hearers find themselves in the very presence of God as the end of all things has come.'

³⁸⁹ Reddish, *Revelation*, p. 229, notes, 'All that is lacking is the final "Amen!" But John is not ready to let the final curtain fall.'

17).³⁹⁰ As the hearers will soon find out, the fantastic imagery in this chapter deals with theodicean themes such as cosmic conflict, the origins of evil, and God's people in the midst of such.³⁹¹ There are six images that appear in chapter 12 relevant to suffering and theodicy.

The first image is the *σημείον* ('sign')³⁹² which is a sun-clothed woman – the first female character to appear in the narrative since the woman Jesus calls Jezebel in 3.20. This woman³⁹³ has the moon under her feet and wears a crown of 12 stars (v. 1). Yet, the hearers immediately discover she is in *βασανιζομένη* ('agony') and *κράζει* ('crying out') in birth pains. The idea of 'agony' or 'torment' has already been encountered twice in the narrative. The first place is in 9.5 where the locusts from the bottomless pit are allowed to torment those who do not have the seal of God on their forehead. The second place is in 11.10 where the two witnesses are said to have been a 'torment' to the earth dwellers. Hence, the hearers would likely understand this torment to be a combination of some physical and emotional suffering. As a result of this suffering, the woman cries out. This crying out places her among a distinct class of beings who have cried out thus far in the narrative. This includes: (1) the souls under the altar (6.10), (2) the angelic being who ascends from the rising of the sun (7.2), (3) the great multitudes who stand before the throne and the Lamb (7.10), and (4) the mighty angel who stands on the sea and land (10.3). The

³⁹⁰ Modern historical criticism has suggested that John is borrowing ideas from various mythical traditions in order to tell the story of the people of God. See Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation*. Koester, *Revelation*, pp. 527-30, offers a helpful excursus on Revelation 12 and the efforts of historical criticism. He concludes by suggesting that chapter 12 would certainly interest the hearers that were perhaps familiar with such imagery. Yet, John's work is distinct from and not 'constrained' by tales of conflict in ancient cultures. Reddish, *Revelation*, p. 234, thinks that John is making use of mythological language and suggests that 'John is not starting from scratch, but he is "Christianizing" ancient pagan myths in order to tell the story of God's triumph over evil'. Reddish believes that myths are effective devices to talk about the battle between good and evil. As such, he concludes that Chapter 12 is a uniquely Christian account drawn from a mixed bag of combat myths.

³⁹¹ Archer, *I Was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day*, p. 219. It should be noted that these themes are theodicean in that they are ideas which classical theodicies are interested in. However, unlike classical theodicies, Revelation 12 does not offer rational or philosophical explanations that attempt to neatly reconcile these themes.

³⁹² The 'sign' language used in Revelation would be familiar with the Johannine community as signs are used consistently throughout the FG (2.11, 18, 23; 3.2; 4.48, 54; 6.2, 14, 26, 30; 7.31; 9.16; 10.41; 11.47; 12.18, 37; 20.30). Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 313, suggests that signs in Revelation carry the idea of a miracle whether those signs be true or false signs (12.1, 3; 13.3-4; 15.1; 16.14; 19.20). Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 353, notes that 'sign' would recall Rev. 1., signal prophetic language, and would cause the hearers to anticipate language that transcends 'surface' meaning. Archer, *I Was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day*, p. 219, notes that this language would alert the hearers to pay attention to what is about to transpire.

³⁹³ Koester, *Revelation*, pp. 542-43, provides four ways that the woman has been interpreted: (1) the people of God both before and after Jesus' birth, (2) the Christian church, (3) Mary, and (4) the Jewish Community. Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, p. 680, provides six: (1) Mary, (2) the church, (3) the Bride, the Heavenly Jerusalem, (4) the persecuted people, (5) an astrological figure, and (6) Isis, the Queen of Heaven. Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, pp. 360-62, suggests that the woman represents the church. Yet, he posits that the ideas of Eve, Israel, and Mary 'converge' in this one image because Eve, Israel, and the mother of Jesus find their culmination in the church.

woman suffering from labor pains would cause the hearers to recall an instance from the FG where Jesus compares the suffering his disciples experience to a woman in labor (Jn 16.21).³⁹⁴

The second image in Revelation 12 that is of relevance to suffering and theodicy is the great red dragon³⁹⁵ with seven heads and ten horns and ten diadems.³⁹⁶ His tail has great power, enough to sweep down a third of the stars of heaven. The hearers would discern this as a threatening, even ominous sign. The dragon would possibly cause the hearers to recall the various instances in the OT when the enemies of God were referred to as monstrous creatures (Jer. 51.34; Ezek. 29.3; Ps. 74.14; Isa. 27.1). The red nature of the dragon would bring to mind the last, and only other, time the designation *πυρρός* ('red') is used in the narrative – where it describes the second horse who appears at the opening of the second seal (6.4). The reappearance of this color would cause the hearers, once again, to anticipate war and slaughter. Such ominous anticipation would be confirmed by the power of the dragon's tail which is able to sweep a third of the stars of heaven down to the earth (v. 4). The last time the hearers encountered a tail with a power of this sort was in 9.9-10 where they met the locusts whose tails stung like scorpions and had power to hurt people. By now, this great and multiple-headed dragon would be perceived as a daunting figure whose malicious intent is to cause suffering. It would be no surprise to the hearers, then, when they learn the dragon stands before the woman to devour her child.³⁹⁷ Though the child is caught up to heaven, the woman flees into the wilderness where she is nourished for 1,260 days (v. 6).

³⁹⁴ See D.A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (PNTC; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), p. 544.

³⁹⁵ Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, p. 683, notes that the idea of a dragon may recall a couple of things: (1) Satan, as 'dragon' is one of his designations in early Judaism or (2) an astronomical reference, as Draco was the name of a recognized Hellenistic constellation. Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 179, notes the effect that a dragon would likely have on the hearers. Such creatures were widely held as nightmarish figures, 'universal phenomenon', which threatened the social order. Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 317, appeals to the collective unconscious of individuals at that time, suggesting that *μέγας* ('great') would not only refer to its physical size but its evil nature.

³⁹⁶ The seven heads would no doubt remind of Dan. 7.2-8 wherein the four beasts in the vision have a total of seven heads. Seven has already been understood as a number of completion in the narrative (1.4). Hence, seven could indicate a universal rule. The beast's ten horns would recall the powerful fourth beast of Dan. 7.7, at minimum, indicating to the hearers the dragon's power. But what of the diadems? This is the first time the hearers encounter such a term in the Apocalypse. The hearers will come to see that Jesus is crowned with many diadems in 19.1. Hence, they would likely understand that, here, the diadems represent a false claim to authority, even divinity. On the diadems, see Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 635.

³⁹⁷ Patterson, *Revelation*, p. 260, refers to the identity of the child as 'easily identified' and Koester, *Revelation*, p. 546, suggests that any other reading of this beside the birth of Jesus is 'not compelling'. Both Patterson and Koester make up a widespread consensus that the child is none other than Jesus. Earlier commentators note this, see Swete, *The Apocalypse of St John*, p. 148. Dispensationalist commentators note this as well, see R.L. Thomas, *Revelation 8-22: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 1995), pp. 125-26, who goes as far as being adamant that it is a reference to Christ *alone* (not Christ *and* the church).

The third image of relevance for suffering and theodicy in chapter 12 is the wilderness. At this point, it comes into view for the first time in the Apocalypse. The wilderness would not be unfamiliar to the Johannine community because of its frequency in the FG (1.23; 3.14; 6.31, 49; 11.54) where it functions positively as a prophetic place, as well as a place of provision and protection.³⁹⁸ Despite the daunting presence of the dragon, the use of the perfect participle,³⁹⁹ ἡτοιμασμένον (‘prepared’ or ‘having been prepared’), to describe the wilderness would encourage the hearers because it indicates God’s preemptive providence, demonstrating that God’s sovereignty is not threatened by the dragon. In cosmic affliction, God’s sovereign provision is at work.

The fourth image of relevance to suffering and theodicy in chapter 12 is the 1,260 days. This number of days would strike the hearers as significant because it would no doubt remind of the same amount of time in which the two witnesses prophesied in 11.3, perhaps causing the hearers to see a connection between the identity of the two witnesses and the woman. This convergence of ideas would likely cause them to anticipate that the woman’s experience may well be similar to the two witnesses’ experience – one of suffering⁴⁰⁰ witness and God’s providence.⁴⁰¹

The current narrative seems to be interrupted by a second narrative which describes a cosmic war between the dragon and Michael (v. 7).⁴⁰² Interestingly enough, the dragon receives an assortment of names, not the least of which is Διάβολος (‘Devil’) (v. 9). The last use of διάβολος appeared in 2.10 where the church of Smyrna is introduced to their opponent who is going to throw them into prison. The hearers already know that the Devil is behind persecution that causes the faithful to suffer. Therefore, the reemergence of this name in connection with the dragon would dispense any doubt about the identity of the dragon and would indicate that the

³⁹⁸ See Exod. 15.22-17.7; 1 Kgs. 19.1-8; Hos. 2.14-15.

³⁹⁹ Moulton says the perfect tense is the ‘most important, exegetically’ of all the Greek tenses. See J.H. Moulton, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, vol. 1 Prolegomena (New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2006), p. 140. Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, p. 573, indicates that the most basic purpose of the perfect tense is to show that an event which has been completed in the past has results in present time.

⁴⁰⁰ L.A. de Lima, ‘The Power of Literary Art in Revelation 12:1-6’, *Unio cum Christo* 2.2 (2016), pp. 209-23, suggests that 12.1-6 is an image that summarizes the entire OT and NT narratives by depicting the cosmic battle which began in Eden and carries on until the end of time. He notes that, in spite of the conflict, ‘the path to victory is through relying on God’s purposes, as shown by being faithful to his calling even when undergoing suffering’.

⁴⁰¹ See Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 363.

⁴⁰² Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, p. 169, points out the A, B, A chiasm that this chapter follows. A1 (vv. 1-6) describes the conflict between the dragon and the woman and her child. B2 cuts away and describes the cosmic conflict that takes place between this dragon and Michael (vv. 7-12). A3 resumes the conflict between the dragon and the woman (vv. 13-17).

source of the people of God's suffering is cosmic. Certainly, the conflict is spiritual! Yet, the hearers would not lose heart in the sovereignty of God as they would notice that the enemy of God's people is said to be ἐβλήθη ('thrown down') over four times.⁴⁰³ The hearers would not find it insignificant that the Devil is given his names in all their fullness before he is dispensed by an angel. This phenomenon emphasizes⁴⁰⁴ God's ultimate victory over the one who has caused so much suffering.⁴⁰⁵ Such victory⁴⁰⁶ extends to the people of God, as conveyed in v. 11:

καὶ αὐτοὶ ἐνίκησαν αὐτὸν διὰ τὸ αἷμα τοῦ ἀρνίου καὶ διὰ τὸν λόγον τῆς μαρτυρίας αὐτῶν καὶ οὐκ ἠγάπησαν τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτῶν ἄχρι θανάτου.

And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.

A number of ideas with which the hearers are already familiar converge in this verse. The first of these ideas is the word ἐνίκησαν ('conquered'). The hearers initially encountered this word in Jesus' messages to the churches where he instructed each church to conquer. It is hard to imagine the hearers would not have this in mind as they learn that their brothers conquer the dragon. Perhaps they would also think of how Jesus is described in 5.5 – both Lion and Slaughtered Lamb – who conquered though slain. Ironically, the hearers would likely also recall the most recent instance where they encountered the word 'conquer' – in 11.7 where the two witnesses are conquered by the beast that rises from the bottomless pit. If this instance were any reason for the hearers to feel threatened or intimidated by the beast's cruelty, the exclamation that God's people have conquered (v. 11) would reassure them that their prospect of conquering has not been negated.

The second idea that converges with others in this verse is the blood of the Lamb. The hearers first met the idea of blood in the doxology where they learned that it was Jesus' blood that has loosed them from their sins (1.5). As the narrative has developed, the hearers have

⁴⁰³ Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 325, says, 'The repetition underlines the finality of the divine victory over the devil; and the same is true of the virtual replication here'.

⁴⁰⁴ Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 202, notes that Satan's defeat is in mind here. His being thrown down to the earth implies an intensification of his work to control the nations and harm the work of God. Despite this, his being thrown down signals that his plans will ultimately fail.

⁴⁰⁵ Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 325, makes use of the phrase τὴν οἰκουμένην ὅλην ('the whole world') which is identified two other times in the narrative (3.10; 16.14). In each case, it refers to those who endure suffering caused by 'demonic deceit'.

⁴⁰⁶ Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 475, notes that the victory of Satan over believers is temporary (cf. 13.7), while believers' victory over Satan is final.

learned that Jesus' blood is associated with suffering and slaughter through which God's people from every nation are ransomed (5.9). The hearers have also learned that those coming out of the great tribulation washed their robes in the Lamb's blood (7.14). Throughout the narrative, the blood of Jesus, shed in his sufferings, has been the cause of the triumph of the people of God. All these ideas converge here and reveal what has been apparent through the narrative thus far – they (God's people) have conquered him (the cosmic force behind their suffering) through the blood of the Lamb.

Finally, a third idea converges here. In addition to the blood of Jesus, God's people have overcome by the word of their testimony. The hearers would once again recall the faithful witnesses up to this point in the narrative: Jesus, John, Antipas, the souls under the altar, and the two witnesses. Like Jesus, these witnesses have shown faithfulness to the point of death, which is made explicit by the statement, *καὶ οὐκ ἠγάπησαν τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτῶν ἄχρι θανάτου*.⁴⁰⁷ Such a statement would cause the hearers to recall Jesus' words and example in the FG (Jn 10.11-17), perhaps even when he exhorted his disciples that the one who loses his life will find it (Jn 12.25).⁴⁰⁸ The hearers would understand that the faithfulness of the saints' testimony, in their suffering, has contributed to their conquering.⁴⁰⁹ In v. 11, the themes of (1) conquering, (2) the blood of the Lamb, and (3) faithful witness to the point of death have all converged.

At this point, the fifth image relevant to suffering and theodicy in chapter 12 emerges which is the dragon pursuing the woman with great wrath (vv. 13-16).⁴¹⁰ In v. 13, the hearers come back to the main narrative of chapter 12 where the secondary narrative (vv. 7-12) has now become integrated with the main narrative. Here, the word *ἔδίωξεν* ('pursued' or 'persecuted') denotes the idea of harassment.⁴¹¹ Though *ἔδίωξεν* is only used here in the Apocalypse, the hearers might well recall that in the FG it appears three times in connection with Jesus (Jn 5.16;

⁴⁰⁷ Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 204, notes that this statement should not suggest that the saints' martyrdom assisted in the overthrow of Satan. Rather, it suggests that the saints' love for Jesus was greater than their own love for their own lives so much so that the saints continued in faithfulness to him. Thus, the saints' unity to Jesus causes them to share in his conquest.

⁴⁰⁸ See Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, pp. 372-73.

⁴⁰⁹ Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, pp. 92-93, notes that it is through witness to the point of death wherein the people of God 'participate in the power of the victory Christ won by his faithful witness to the point of death'. He also notes that the people of God do not necessarily have to die to participate in the Lamb's victory though they must be willing to maintain their testimony to the point of death.

⁴¹⁰ For how the two narratives converge, see Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 375-76, who offers five narrative clues for thinking such.

⁴¹¹ See O. Knoch, *EDNT*, 'δίωκω', I, p. 338.

15.20 [2x]) – most indicatively wherein Jesus tells his disciples that they will be persecuted because he was persecuted (Jn 15.20). In spite of this persecution, God’s providence is at work to assist the people of God. Such providence is expressed through the use of the divine passive: καὶ ἐδόθησαν τῇ γυναικὶ (‘but the woman was given’). God gives the woman two great eagle’s wings to lead her into the wilderness where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time. The language used to describe this divine protection might remind of the Exodus story where God delivered the Israelites and brought them into the wilderness ‘on eagle’s wings’ (Exod. 19.4). The hearers know well by now that the wilderness is a prophetic place of provision and protection. The time the woman spends here – a time, and times, and half a time⁴¹² – confirms such provision and protection and indicates that such is at work despite the Devil’s harassment. Yet, there is one more act of protection that hearers would not overlook. The serpent (the Devil) pours water out of his mouth to sweep the woman away like a flood, but the earth is seen coming to the woman’s help and opens its mouth and swallows the water (v. 15)! What a scene this would be for the hearers to encounter! They would still have the Exodus motif in view as they imagine the woman reenacting Israel’s escape to the desert and the problem the Red Sea posed to Israel’s freedom.⁴¹³ God protects his people once again by overcoming the floodwaters.⁴¹⁴ If the hearers were experiencing any inkling of intimidation because of the threat the dragon poses toward the people of God, they would be reassured that God’s providence is at work amidst the cosmic suffering and persecution his people experience.

The sixth and final image in chapter 12 that is relevant to suffering and theodicy is the dragon’s anger and war. The narrative continues and the hearers learn that the anger of the dragon has not yet subsided. He goes to ποιῆσαι πόλεμον (‘make war’) with the rest of the

⁴¹² The designation ‘a time, and times, and half a time’ would remind of Dan. 7.25; 12.7. Osborne, *Revelation*, pp. 482-83, explains that this is a way of saying three and a half years. The way he understands it, ‘time’ represents one year, ‘times’ represents two years, and ‘half a time’ represents half a year. Hence, three and a half years. Thus, three and a half years and ‘a time, and times, and half a time’ is the same as 1,260 days or 42 months. Koester, *Revelation*, p. 553, notes that this period of time can signify protection or affliction. The two witnesses prophesied with supernatural protection for this amount of time (11.3). Yet, the holy city was trampled for this amount of time (11.2). In Dan. 7.25, the fourth beast afflicts the saints for this amount of time yet, here in Rev. 12.14 this period of time seems to be an inversion of Dan. 7.25 and shows that a time, and times, and half a time is the amount of time that the saints will be protected from the beast (dragon or Devil). Such an inversion would cue God’s protection on behalf of his people.

⁴¹³ See Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 332.

⁴¹⁴ Here the earth is personified as a female character. Concerning the aide she provides the people of God, Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 185 says, ‘although now the domain in which Satan is active, the earth recognizes her Creator and can cooperate with his salvific purposes, opening her mouth and swallowing up the river’.

woman's offspring (v.17).⁴¹⁵ Because the woman has already been associated with the two witnesses, this phrase would remind of 11.7 where the same phrase is used to describe the beast's war on the two witnesses: ποιήσει ... πόλεμον ('make war'). Such a connection would cause the hearers to anticipate that, as the narrative unfolds, they will continue to observe cosmic aggression toward 'those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus.'⁴¹⁶ Such cosmic aggression will result in even more suffering.⁴¹⁷

As the hearers come to chapter 13,⁴¹⁸ they are met with a familiar construction: Καὶ εἶδον ('and I saw'). This construction marks a transition into a new vision. In this encounter, a beast rises from the sea having seven heads and ten horns and diadems on the horns and blasphemous names on its heads (v. 1). In discerning what the vision means, the mention of a θηρίον ('beast') would likely frighten the hearers. The last time a beast was mentioned it conquered the two witnesses (11.7).⁴¹⁹ Perhaps the hearers would think this beast has the same intention and power to inflict such suffering on the people of God,⁴²⁰ owing to the beast's horrifying description (v. 2).⁴²¹ Upon finding out that the dragon gives this beast its power and throne, the hearers would

⁴¹⁵ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 676, maintains that v. 17 and its relation to the verses before it is one of the most difficult problems in the Apocalypse. Yet, he posits that v. 17 is best understood as a summary of vv. 13-16 which portrays 'the suffering individuals who compose the whole church'. See also Ladd, *Revelation of John*, p. 174, who suggests that v. 17 turns from the ideal church (vv. 13-16) to the actual church on earth. Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John*, p. 619, too, suggests v. 17 turns from the ideal church to actual church. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 677, goes as far to say that the woman is equivalent to the inner court of Rev. 11.1-2 and her seed is equivalent to the outer court of 11.1-2.

⁴¹⁶ That these descriptions are one and the same group is indicated by the article τῶν which governs both.

⁴¹⁷ R.D. Aus, 'The Relevance of Isaiah 66:7 to Revelation 12 and 2 Thessalonians 1', *ZNW* 67.3-4 (1976), pp. 252-68, notes that this vision is received by 'a suffering, persecuted church'. The visions of Revelation 12 offer consolation to 'comfort' and 'undergird' the suffering church until the new heaven and new earth.

⁴¹⁸ S.J. Friesen, 'Myth and Symbolic Resistance in Revelation 13', *JBL* 123.2 (2004), pp. 281-313, suggests that John has drawn from a range of mythic traditions in writing the Apocalypse. Friesen thinks by repurposing these myths in 'disorienting' ways, John would discourage his readers from being part of the 'mainstream' society. He explores Revelation 13 in this examination, suggesting that this chapter is derived from three mythic types: (1) traditions about Leviathan and Behemoth, (2) the book of Daniel, and (3) imperial cult mythology.

⁴¹⁹ Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, p. 58, suggests that the beast is not just historical allegory or a metaphor. John is following the rich heritage of combat myth. Thus, the beast imagery carries with it connotations of 'rebellion, chaos, and sterility', which monsters in combat myth carried as they rebelled against the hero god.

⁴²⁰ Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 335, notes that the beast in 11.7 and 13.1 are different from each other given the anarthrous construction in 11.7 and the articular construction in 13.2. It is likely the mention of a beast would cause the hearers to be frightened at this word and would remind of the fate of the two witnesses in 11.7, wherein the beast inflicts great suffering upon them.

⁴²¹ It is likely that the beast's description would remind of the four beasts of Daniel 7. Yet, this particular beast combines all the characteristics of Daniel's four beasts. That it has the same characteristics of the dragon (12.3) suggests that this new beast is a manifestation of the dragon. See Reddish, *Revelation*, p. 249. Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 383, believes that the 10 diadems of the beast in chapter 13 designate it as more powerful than the dragon of chapter 12, who only appears with seven diadems.

have no more doubt about the beast's intention and power.⁴²² A further connection is made with chapter 11 as the hearers discover that this beast is allowed to exercise his power forty-two months (v. 5). The hearers would likely recall 11.2 wherein the period of forty-two months was first introduced to describe the period that the holy city would be trampled. Such a connection fits alongside of the beast's malevolent intentions and would convey the idea that the beast will inflict persecution and cause the people of God much harm.⁴²³ There are a number of images of relevance to suffering and theodicy in chapter 13, within the description of this beast.

The first image of relevance is the mortal wound on the beast's head in 13.3. Here, the word ἐσφαγμένου ('slain') reappears. This is the word used with reference to the Lamb in 5.6, 9, 12, as well as the souls under the altar in 6.9. Perhaps the use of this word to describe the wound of the beast would reveal the beast's false salvific nature and claims.⁴²⁴ The hearers might discern that the one who truly offers salvation to humankind is the one who was 'slain' as a sacrifice for humankind. This is because he conquered through this sacrifice. Thus, those who are willing to be slain with the Lamb are those who truly conquer, such as the souls under the altar.⁴²⁵

The second image of relevance to suffering and theodicy in chapter 13 is the conquering of the beast who makes war on the saints (v. 7). The hearers would recall 11.7, where the beast from the bottomless pit makes war on the saints owing to similar grammatical constructions:

ποιήσει μετ' αὐτῶν πόλεμον καὶ νικήσει αὐτούς καὶ ἀποκτενεῖ αὐτούς

will make war on them and conquer them and kill them (11.7)

αὐτῷ ποιῆσαι πόλεμον μετὰ τῶν ἁγίων καὶ νικῆσαι αὐτούς

to make war on the saints and to conquer them (13.7)

⁴²² In 13.3, the hearers learn that the head of the beast seemed to have a mortal wound but was healed, causing the whole earth to marvel. While the mortal wound has a range of implications, Thompson, *The Book of Revelation*, pp. 81-86, considers it an example of what he calls 'soft boundaries' seen throughout the Apocalypse. Soft boundaries are marked boundaries, though somewhat blurred. They divide the lines between good and evil, though they are not hard and impenetrable. The mortal wound on the beast is considered an example of a soft boundary because it contrasts with the Lamb on the throne who was slain (5.6). Good and evil is marked off, yet the line is blurred. The hearers must discern.

⁴²³ Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, p. 185, observes that forty-two months is the same period of time as 1,260 days and 'a time and times and half a time'. John uses 1,260 days (11.3; 12.6) and 'a time and times and half a time' (12.14) when referring to the church's persecution and he uses 42 months when referring to evil's 'autarchy'. Resseguie posits that 42 is the number that comes from multiplying six times seven: six represents failure to achieve perfection and seven represents completion. Six times seven is, 'imperfection striving for perfection' and falling short of such.

⁴²⁴ See Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 385.

⁴²⁵ Newton, *A Pentecostal Commentary on Revelation*, p. 245, compares these believers to those believers currently 'suffering' in China, North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and elsewhere.

Perhaps the reappearance of this grammatical construction would strike fear into the hearers. It would likely remind of the suffering and brutal death of the two witnesses' at the hands of the beast who conquered and killed them. These memories would fill their minds. Yet, by this point, they have learned about the vindication of the two witnesses (11.11-12). It might not be going too far to suggest that the hearers would anticipate the intervention of God within the description of this new beast and not be surprised when encountering the divine passives appearing abundantly throughout the narration:

Καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτῷ στόμα

And the beast was given a mouth (v. 5)

καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτῷ ἐξουσία ποιῆσαι

and it was allowed to exercise authority (v. 5b)

καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτῷ ποιῆσαι πόλεμον μετὰ τῶν ἁγίων καὶ νικῆσαι αὐτούς

Also it was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them (v. 7)

καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτῷ ἐξουσία

And authority was given it (v. 7b)

The use of these divine passives indicates that the beast has not usurped God's sovereign control despite its malevolent plans and the harm it inflicts upon the people of God. The hearers would understand that the beast's plans have been limited by God. The destiny and fate of the saints rest ultimately in God's hands and not the hands of this beast.

A call to be slain willingly with the Lamb is the third image of relevance to suffering and theodicy in chapter 13 (vv. 9-10). Perhaps the hearers would notice, at this point, the phrase *Εἴ τις ἔχει οὖς ἀκουσάτω* ('if anyone has an ear, let him hear') reappears at the heart of this vision. The last time this terminology was encountered was in chapters two and three – the prophetic call to the seven churches (vv. 2.7, 11, 17, 29; 3.6, 13, 22). Undoubtedly, the phrase would command the attention of the hearers,⁴²⁶ recalling the unique situation of the seven churches and the command they were given to conquer. By now the hearers know that true conquering is

⁴²⁶ Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 192, acknowledges that the reappearance of the phrase *Εἴ τις ἔχει οὖς ἀκουσάτω* is a literary device and would alert the hearers. Up to this point, it has been a very specific and important statement in the narrative that has set the course for the seven churches. Fanning, *Revelation*, p. 375, connects the reappearance of this phrase to suffering, suggesting that it is a warning that one cannot 'blithely expect to be exempted from suffering'. Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 395, suggests that the reappearance of this phrase would remind of something from chapters two and three in relation to conquering, specifically how to conquer in the face of the universal worship of the beast.

overcoming in the manner of the Lamb, and this involves faithful witness and the prospect of great suffering (5.5; 12.11). But the phrase would also remind of the rewards that Jesus has promised his seven churches, which culminated with sitting on Jesus' throne (3.20-21). While the phrase would cause the hearers to contemplate faithful witness and suffering, they would not envisage this without the anticipation of vindication and reward.

The implicit call to faithful witness and suffering becomes explicit in the next verse which happens to be a proverbial saying that would remind of Jer. 15.2 and 43.11:

εἴ τις εἰς αἰχμαλωσίαν, εἰς αἰχμαλωσίαν ὑπάγει εἴ τις ἐν μαχαίρῃ ἀποκτανθῆναι αὐτὸν ἐν μαχαίρῃ ἀποκτανθῆναι.

If anyone is to be taken captive, to captivity he goes; if anyone is to be slain with the sword, with the sword must he be slain.

Jeremiah 15 and 43 list possible punishments for the sins of the people of God.⁴²⁷ In Rev. 13.10, two items from this list – persecution and sword – are outcomes for refusing to worship the beast,⁴²⁸ reminding the hearers that the people of God suffer like the wicked. It is likely this proverbial statement would be heard as a call to suffer willingly.⁴²⁹ Thus, the hearers anticipate the prospect of being killed and joining the souls under the altar (6.9-11). In spite of the unjust suffering that is to come, the proverbial statement is followed by a call for the endurance and faith of the saints:

ἼΩδέ ἐστὶν ἡ ὑπομονὴ καὶ ἡ πίστις τῶν ἁγίων.

Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints.

The hearers encounter the fourth image of relevance to suffering and theodicy in this call: the notion that, in order to conquer, suffering needs to be met with endurance and faith.⁴³⁰ Both the

⁴²⁷ See J.A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah* (NICOT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980), p. 387, where Thompson posits that Jer. 15.2-3 contains various possibilities for Judah as a result of their rebellion and that Jer. 43.11 repeats portions of Jer. 15.2.

⁴²⁸ See Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 344. Patterson, *Revelation*, p. 279, suggests that this proverbial statement is given to prepare the saints for inevitable persecution and to encourage them to meet such suffering with patient endurance and faithfulness. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, pp. 704-705, suggests that John's use of Jer.15.2 and Jer. 43.11 shows that God's faithful also suffer the same penalty that those suffer who have gone into captivity. He makes a connection with Revelation 2-3, suggesting that this connection would motivate the saints to endure faithfully. See also Koester, *Revelation*, p. 576.

⁴²⁹ Ladd, *Revelation of John*, p. 182. Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John*, p. 638, notes, 'If captivity or martyrdom by the sword awaits the readers, they must be ready to meet these tests of their steadfastness, they must not attempt to resist by force the persecution inflicted by the Beast'.

⁴³⁰ This is the first time this call is used. The hearers will learn that this call will come three more times (13.18; 14.12; 17.9)

ὑπομονή ('endurance') and πίστις τῶν ἁγίων ('faith of the saints') would remind of the language Jesus uses in his messages to the seven churches. The word ὑπομονή is first introduced as a quality exemplified by Jesus in his faithfulness to God (1.9). It is later associated with the churches of Ephesus (2.2-3), Thyatira (2.19), and Philadelphia (3.10). The phrase πίστις τῶν ἁγίων would remind the hearers of a number of things: (1) the saints in Smyrna, whom Jesus called to be faithful unto death (2.10); (2) Antipas, whom Jesus called 'my faithful witness' (2.13); (3) the church at Thyatira whose faith Jesus recognized (2.19); and (4) Jesus, who refers to himself as the faithful witness (3.14). Thus, ὑπομονή and πίστις τῶν ἁγίων would be seen as intrinsically related to one another by this point in the narrative. Their use here, after the proverbial call to suffer willingly, suggests that such willing suffering is part of endurance and faithful witness and is how the people of God conquer.

In. v. 11, Καὶ εἶδον ('And I saw') appears and shifts the narrative. Another beast⁴³¹ rises out of the earth with two horns like a lamb and speaks like a dragon.⁴³² This beast has the ability to do great signs, is able to cause fire to come down from heaven and makes the inhabitants of the earth worship the first beast through deception (vv. 12-14). It also encourages making an image for the beast from the sea, later breathing life into this image so it lives (vv. 14b-15).⁴³³ The beast causes those who do not worship the image to be slain.⁴³⁴ The image of the beast from the earth is the fifth image of relevance for suffering and theodicy in chapter 13. It has relevance for three reasons: (1) The demand to worship the image, and the imminent death for those who do not, would remind of Daniel 3 and the predicament that Daniel's three friends found themselves in

⁴³¹ For ways that commentators interpret this beast, see Koester, *Revelation*, pp. 589-90. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 707, understands it to have a religious role. Since it makes the first beast's claim sound plausible, this false prophet leads people to worship the state. Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, p. 187, thinks that this beast is the evil counterpart to the two witnesses of chapter 11 as the two horns is a mockery of such. Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 345, thinks it is plausible that this beast is an 'ideology' which 'informs any human structure, religious or otherwise ... to regulate itself independently of God.' Boring, *Revelation*, p. 157, adds that 'all propaganda that entices humanity to idolize human empire is an expression of this beastly power that wants to appear Lamb-like'.

⁴³² Hanson, *The Wrath of the Lamb*, pp. 172-73, makes note of the 'Satanic Trinity' that is introduced in chapter 13: the dragon, the first beast, and the second beast. He surmises that this trinity is presented in detail here so that the hearers are able to see a difference between 'the methods' of Satan and God. Satan operates 'by inflicting suffering' and God operates 'by accepting suffering'. Their methods of inflicting suffering versus accepting suffering are revealed in how John presents them in a Beast/Lamb contrast.

⁴³³ Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 348, thinks that the idea of 'breathing life' into the image parodies the life God breathes into the two witnesses in 11.11.

⁴³⁴ See D.R. Johnson, 'The Spirit of Prophecy and the False Prophet: Parody and Theology in the Apocalypse', in R. Waddell and C.E.W. Green (eds.), *The Spirit of Prophecy and Reconciliation: Essays in Honor of Rickie D. Moore* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2023), pp. 135-48.

for refusing idol worship.⁴³⁵ The recollection of this Danielic motif reinforces what the hearers have encountered above, that the people of God are called to demonstrate endurance and faithfulness to Jesus amidst suffering. (2) Those who do not worship the image are said to be ἀποκτανθῶσιν (‘slain’). Just a few verses before this same word is used in connection with the proverbial call to suffer willingly (v. 10), which has already been associated with those in the seven churches who are faithful. Thus, the hearers would assume that those who do not bow to worship the image of the beast are none other than those who conquer – those who stand in solidarity with Jesus, Antipas, and the prophetic witnesses. This would be none other than the souls under the altar (6.9-11) and those who have come out of the great tribulation and have washed robes blood in the blood of the Lamb (7.14).⁴³⁶ (3) Those who protest of the image of the beast and do not receive the mark of the beast⁴³⁷ experience economic suffering (v. 16-17). It would not evade the hearers that a χάραγμα (‘mark’) is introduced here. Perhaps the hearers would recall a ‘σφραγίς’ (‘seal’) which identifies the people of God and grants them God’s protection (7.2-3; 9.4). They would note how it is parodied by this mark which identifies the people of the earth with the beast and shields them from economic and social ostracization.⁴³⁸ Thus, the hearers might suspect that this is yet another demonic parody,⁴³⁹ as they have already

⁴³⁵ See Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, pp. 711-12; Longman, *Revelation*, pp. 206-207.

⁴³⁶ See Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 404.

⁴³⁷ For an explanation of how the hearers may have understood the mark of the best, see Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, pp. 188-92, who assumes the number 666 represents ‘the bestial side of humanity as it strives for deification or seeks to be ultimate’ as the triple sixes represent humanity trying to be divine. Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, pp. 388-452, presents a bit more complicated approach where he suggests John is making use of the Nero legend and is perhaps employing isopsephism and gematria. Contra to Bauckham’s approach is Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 726, who says in his comments on 13.18, ‘John is exhorting saints to spiritual and moral discernment, not intellectual ability to solve a complex math problem’.

⁴³⁸ See Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, p. 188.

⁴³⁹ Revelation 13 is a chapter full of parodies which contrast the beast and his system with the faithful saints who keep the witness of Jesus. In this single chapter there is the imitation of the Lamb (13.2; cf. 5.12), the imitation of the resurrection (13.3; cf. 5.6); the imitation or worship to the Lamb (13.3-4; cf. 5.11 and 13.7; cf. 5.9); the imitation of the two witnesses (13.15; cf. 11.11); and the imitation of the seal of God (13.16; cf. 7.2-3; 9.4). See Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, p. 183. See also D.R. Johnson, ‘The Image of the Beast as a Parody’, *NTS* 68 (2022), pp. 344-50, who uses a literary approach to examine the parodic characterization of the beast in 13.15 who, he suggests, ‘mimics’ the two witnesses of 11.3-12. As evidence for this, Johnson points to the appearance of the words εἰκῶν and πνεῦμα, which he considers textual markers, and the relationships of the beast from the earth and the Spirit. In 13.15, Johnson suggests that the beast from the earth impersonates the Spirit when it gives πνεῦμα to an εἰκῶν and raises it to life. The giving of πνεῦμα to the εἰκῶν contrasts with the πνεῦμα ζωῆς that enters the two witnesses and raises them from the dead (11.11). Furthermore, Johnson suggests that the manipulation of fire by the beast (13.13) imitates the seven torches of fire, the Spirit of God (4.5) and the prophetic, Spirit-empowered speech of the two witnesses (11.5-6).

learned that true protection⁴⁴⁰ which comes from God belongs only to those who bear his seal (14.1; 22.4).⁴⁴¹

As the hearers come to chapter 14, they are met with another *Καὶ εἶδον* ('and I looked'), signaling the beginning of a new vision.⁴⁴² There are six important images the hearers encounter in this chapter relevant for suffering and theodicy. The first image is the Lamb standing on Mount Zion (v. 1). The hearers would not fail to find significance in the fact that he is standing. The standing Lamb would cause them to recall 5.6, as well as the instances in Jesus' post-resurrection ministry where he is standing after his own resurrection (Jn 20.14, 19, 16). This recollection adds to their understanding of the Lamb's triumph. At the same time, this notion of victory would not be dissociated from the Lamb's suffering, which would still be fresh in their minds (13.8). What would also be fresh in their minds is the close relationship that the Lamb's followers, who are written in the book of life, have with the Lamb who suffers (13.8).⁴⁴³ In seeing the Lamb who stands on Mount Zion, the hearers would likely suspect the Lamb's followers share in this triumph, owing to their intimacy with the Lamb. The hearers' suspicions would be confirmed as the next thing that enters the vision are the 144,000 who have God's name written on their foreheads!⁴⁴⁴ Perhaps the hearers would associate the name of God on their foreheads with the promise to the church in Pergamum in 3.12: 'and I will write on him the name of my God'. Such an association would likely suggest to the hearers that God is fulfilling his promise to the conqueror.⁴⁴⁵ What might further confirm that God is keeping his promise to the

⁴⁴⁰ Soon the hearers will discover that those who bear the mark of the beast are not truly protected (14.9-11; 16.2; 19.20; 20.4).

⁴⁴¹ This clever parody would suggest to the hearers that only the saints have *ultimate* protection despite their immediate suffering at the hands of the two beasts. Newton, *A Pentecostal Commentary on Revelation*, pp. 254-55, points out that the main thrust of this chapter is relevant today. Those who hold political and economic power demand loyalty and may persecute those Christians who resist. This happens in many countries and, as he points out, Pentecostal Christians will experience this suffering particularly because they are 'aggressive in their faith'. He posits that God allows this Christian suffering for two reasons: (1) to expose nominal believers and (2) to bring the 'ancient struggle' between God and the Devil into the open.

⁴⁴² Stevenson, *A Slaughtered Lamb*, pp. 194-95, suggests that Revelation 14-20 is a series of judgments that depict God demonstrating his justice by restoring order to creation. He points out that there are two themes dominant in these visions: (1) retributive justice and (2) God's justice in assuring retributive justice.

⁴⁴³ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 417, posits that there are two aspects from the mention of the Lamb in 13.8 that would be carried into 14.1: (1) the close relationship that exists between the Lamb and those written in his book and (2) the nature of the Lamb's death.

⁴⁴⁴ The seal on the foreheads of the 144,000 sets them into contrast with the mark on those who follow the beast. See Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 264.

⁴⁴⁵ That vindication has come, or at least has drawn quite close, might be evidenced by the 'new song' the hearers sing in v. 3. A new song could recall Pss. 33.3; 40.3; 96.1; 98.1; 144.9; 149.1; Isa. 42.10. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 736, notes, 'In the OT, the "new song" was always an expression of praise for God's victory over the

conqueror is the reappearance of *Καὶ εἶδον* in 14.1. In 13.1, *Καὶ εἶδον* introduced the vision of the beast coming out of the sea. In 13.11, *Καὶ εἶδον* introduced the beast coming out of the earth. Now, *Καὶ εἶδον* introduces the Lamb on top of Mount Zion (14.1). The shifts in geographical locations, marked by *Καὶ εἶδον*, might cause the hearers to suspect that the visions are moving in the direction of chaos to God's restored order – from their suffering to triumph.⁴⁴⁶

The second image in chapter 14 that is relevant to suffering and theodicy is the voice from heaven which sings a new song before the throne (vv. 2-4). Those singing are said to be οὗτοι οἱ ἀκολουθοῦντες τῷ ἀρνίῳ ὅπου ἂν ὑπάγῃ ('these who follow the Lamb wherever he goes'). The idea of following the Lamb would be a sobering concept to the Johannine community. 'Following' Jesus is discipleship language in the FG (Jn 1.37-38, 40, 43; 10.4-5, 27; 21.19-22).⁴⁴⁷ As such, the hearers would know well that it is not easy to follow Jesus. In fact, 'following' Jesus in the FG means death for Peter (21.19-22). This nuance would likely be considered by the hearers, especially after the reference to the Lamb's slaughter in 13.8. Hence, following Jesus wherever he goes would be understood as following Jesus unto death,⁴⁴⁸ a reoccurring theme already present in the narrative (12.11).⁴⁴⁹

In 14.6, another *Καὶ εἶδον* appears and introduces the third image relevant to suffering and theodicy in chapter 14, two angelic announcements (14.6). The first angelic announcement is the announcement that the time of God's judgment has come (v. 7) and the second angelic

enemy, which sometimes included thanksgiving for his work of creation'. Beale goes on to note that Jewish writings designate a new song to the coming of the Messiah in the world to come.

⁴⁴⁶ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 418. Chapter 13 is the beginning of a series of *Καὶ εἶδον* appearances that continue through 15.2. Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 8, notes that the reoccurrence of *Καὶ εἶδον* is used to convey movement from the sea, where the dragon stood, to the sea of glass, where those who had been victorious stand over the beast. The *Καὶ εἶδον* movement emerges as follows: John sees (1) a beast coming *out of the sea* (13.1), (2) another beast coming *out of the earth* (13.11), (3) the Lamb standing *upon Mt. Zion* (14.1), (4) another angel flying *in mid-air* (14.6), (5) one like a son of man sitting *upon a cloud* (14.14), (6) another great and marvelous sign *in heaven* (15.1), and (7) *a sea of glass* beside which were standing those who had been victorious over the beast (15.2). In 14.1, the movement to the top of Mt. Zion would prepare the hearers for the triumph they will encounter around the sea of glass when the *Καὶ εἶδον* movement is complete (15.2).

⁴⁴⁷ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 426, calls 'following' language 'discipleship language *par excellence*' and points out that this language forms an inclusio around the entirety of the events in John (1.43-21.19-20, 22).

⁴⁴⁸ Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 358, notes the reoccurring theme of following Jesus is present in the FG. He concludes that 'following' language includes the prospect of martyrdom, saying 'Christians are invited to follow the teaching of their Lord, and summoned to be identified with his cross-bearing, as well as imitating his faithfulness in situations of suffering'.

⁴⁴⁹ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 427, points out that following Jesus unto death is the actual means that Jesus and his followers use to wage war against the dragon and beasts.

announcement is the proclamation of Babylon's fall.⁴⁵⁰ Here, 'Babylon' appears in the narrative for the first time,⁴⁵¹ as these proclamations signal impending judgment for those who have afflicted the suffering people of God.

The fourth image in Revelation 14 that is relevant to suffering and theodicy is the announcement of a third angel⁴⁵² who declares wrath upon those who have the beast's mark on their forehead (14.9-11). He says that these individuals, 'will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the Lamb' (v. 10). What would be of special interest to the hearers is that the angel makes it a special point to say that the *καπνός* ('smoke') of their torment *ἀναβαίνει* ('goes up') forever and ever (v. 11). In 8.3-4, the hearers encountered a form of the word *ἀναβαίνει*, along with the word *καπνός*, as the prayers of the saints went up with the smoke of incense before God, prior to the coming of the Lord (cf. 5.8; 6.9-11). Here in 14.11, the hearers would likely connect the rising smoke of the torment associated with those who follow the beast with the rising smoke of the incense that is mingled with the prayers of the martyrs.⁴⁵³ In this convergence, the hearers would see an answer to the prayers of the martyrs even vindication that meets the pleas of the souls under the altar.

The fifth thing image associated with suffering and theodicy in chapter 14 is yet another call for the *ὑπομονή* ('patient endurance') of the saints (v.12; cf. 13.1) This statement reminds of what is already familiar to the hearers. The word *ὑπομονή* reminds of the various uses of the word as applied to John (1.9), Jesus (1.9; 3.10), and the churches in Ephesus (2.2, 3), Thyatira (2.19), and Philadelphia (3.10). It also reiterates the call for the patient endurance of the saints in 13.10. This call would still be fresh in the hearers' mind, as would the notion of willing suffering (13.10). Moreover, the saints are described in v. 12 as those who keep the commandments of God and

⁴⁵⁰ Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, pp. 57-58, notes that John would not have interest in ancient, historical Babylon. Rather, she posits that Rome is called Babylon owing to the fact that Rome destroyed Jerusalem. She thinks John learned this speech from his fellow Jews and it became traditional to refer to Rome as Babylon.

⁴⁵¹ Babylon is also referred to as 'the great city' (11.8; 16.19; 17.18; 18.10, 16, 18, 19, 21) and appears six times in the narrative (16.19; 17.5; 18.2, 10, 21).

⁴⁵² Cory, "'Just and true are your ways, O king of the nations'" (Rev 15:3): Theodicy in the Book of Revelation', p. 27, calls the vision of these three angels 'overlooked'. She believes that John is answering the theodicean question of 'does God care?' with the vision of these angels, in particular. The first angel proclaims the gospel and calls everyone to worship God, the second angel announces the destruction of Babylon which is responsible for killing the holy ones of God, and the third angel warns that those who follow Babylon will face a similar destruction. By adding the exhortation in v. 12, following the vision of these angels, 'John makes this vision a message of consolation for those who suffer because of their witness to Jesus and the word of God'.

⁴⁵³ P.J. Leithart, *Revelation 12-22*, vol. 2 (ITC; New York, NY: Bloomsbury, 2018), pp. 99-100, notes, 'These smoky prayers are finally answered by smoke, the smoke of Babylon's burning ... Smoke is answered by smoke'.

their πίστιν Ἰησοῦ ('faith in Jesus'). Like ὑπομονή, the phrase πίστιν Ἰησοῦ would remind of the seven churches, most explicitly Pergamum and Thyatira. In Pergamum, Jesus refers to his own faith and also references Antipas whom he describes as his own faithful witness (2.13). In Thyatira, Jesus acknowledges the church's faith as one of their notable works (2.19). The ideas of ὑπομονή and πίστιν Ἰησοῦ converge in 14.12. The hearers would likely understand this convergence to be another appeal for steadfast allegiance to Jesus in the face of persecution – one that goes as far as willingness to die as he died.⁴⁵⁴ Yet the hearers would be encouraged to learn that dying is not the end for those who die in the Lord. Those who die in the Lord are 'blessed' (v. 13)⁴⁵⁵ and will be able to rest from their labor.⁴⁵⁶ Just as Jesus was rewarded for his faithfulness in death, so too will the faithful who identify with the Lord in their death.

The sixth and final image relevant to suffering and theodicy in chapter 14 is a vision of two unique harvests.⁴⁵⁷ In coming to vv. 14-20, the hearers are met with another Καὶ εἶδον preparing them for another transition into another set of visions where they encounter these two harvests. Geographically, the hearers find that Καὶ εἶδον has transitioned the visions from mid-air (14.6) to a cloud which a son of man sits upon (14.14). Thus, the visions since chapter 13 would likely still seem to be progressing towards God's order. Careful hearers would likely notice the prevalent use of the word δρέπανον ('sickle') throughout (14.14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19) the

⁴⁵⁴ See Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 275. Mounce suggests that those who die as Jesus died are blessed in that they have entered 'victoriously' into their rest.

⁴⁵⁵ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 767, notes that merely 'dying' is not the emphasis. The emphasis is the dying ἐν κυρίῳ ('in the Lord'). He refers to the dative as a dative of sphere, meaning that death occurs in the Lord. In other words, those who die, die in their identification with the Lord through their faith.

⁴⁵⁶ C-C. Lee, 'Rest and Victory in Revelation 14.13', *JSNT* 41.3 (2019), pp. 344-62, argues that rest from labor is not *just* relief from enduring hardship and persecution. He suggests rest from labor should extend beyond rest from hardships and persecution, as his examination shows that rest from labor reflects two Jewish traditions: (1) rest from work and (2) rest from enemies in victory. His argument leads him to conclude that John uses 'rest' language to encourage his readers to 'to remain faithful to Christ despite them suffering and facing death for their faith'.

⁴⁵⁷ Some commentators see the two harvests in vv. 14-20 as the same event. See Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 773, and Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 279. They posit that these visions are the same harvest of judgment from different perspectives. Yet, other commentators suggest that these visions present two different harvests of judgment. Swete, *The Apocalypse of St John*, p. 187, believes that John is following the harvests mentioned in Joel 4.13 but 'with a difference' which includes presenting the harvests as two distinct harvests. Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, pp. 94-98, offers three reasons why the two harvests are distinct from each other: (1) each of the harvests are connected to separate corresponding antecedents earlier in the chapter, (2) the grain harvest takes place in only one action (reaping) and the vintage harvest takes place in two actions (gathering the grapes and treading the grapes), and (3) the action of the grain harvest is performed by the Son of Man and the two actions of the vintage harvest are performed respectively by angels. Bauckham presents the grain harvest as an image of salvation and the vintage harvest as an image of judgment. Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 374, concurs 'broadly' with Bauckham but points out that salvation and judgment never stand 'entirely apart' in the Apocalypse.

description of the harvests. Its seven uses in six verses are more than enough to suggest that it is a verbal thread that ties the unique harvests together. In the first harvest, the hearers see an angel come out of the temple and call to one who sits on a cloud, telling him to use his sickle to reap the harvest on the earth, which the angel does. The hearers would notice the use of the words *θερίζω/θερισμός* ('reap'/'harvest') four times in two verses. They would likely perceive this harvest as positive as these words are used positively in Jn 4.35-38.⁴⁵⁸ Perhaps it would suggest to them the gathering of God's elect, namely the 144,000 who just appeared in 14.1, 3. Yet, the Johannine audience would not likely perceive the second harvest this way. Here they observe another angel who comes out of the temple in heaven with a sickle. Yet another angel calls for the angel with the sickle to gather the clusters from the vine of the earth because the grapes are ripe. The angel does so and throws the grapes into God's winepress. When the winepress is trodden, blood flows 1,600 stadia (vv. 17-20). In connection with suffering, the hearers would not fail to notice that the angel that comes forth comes out from the altar (v. 18). The mention of the altar would once again remind of the souls under the altar (6.9-11) and the prayers of the saints that are on the altar (8.3). It would also remind of those who worship God at the altar (11.1). Thus, the angel coming from the altar indicates that the presence of this angel is closely connected to these scenes. It might not be going too far to suggest that the angel plays a role in carrying out God's justice for God's faithful who have suffered unjustly. Yet, how would the hearers understand the grape imagery? Perhaps they would connect it to what they have understood earlier, bringing them back to the wine of Babylon's immorality (14.8) and wine of God's wrath (14.10). Thus the grape imagery would describe God's judgment of vengeance and wrath. The hearers would not overlook the fact that juice does not flow out of the grapes. Rather, blood. Blood has meant divine judgment up to this point (6.12; 8.7, 8; 11.6) but it has also been the consequence of faithful witness and closely related to redemption (1.5; 5.9; 6.9-11; 7.14; 12.11). The two ideas converge here suggesting God's judgment in return for the blood of the faithful witnesses, namely the souls under the altar. In this case, this harvest brings vindication for those who have suffered unjustly.

⁴⁵⁸ See Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, p. 201.

When looking at both harvests together, the hearers would observe a gathering together of the people of God juxtaposed next to a judgment upon those who have been the cause of the suffering of the people of God.

Implications of Revelation 12-14

There are seven implications regarding suffering and theodicy that emerge from Revelation 12-14:

First, the persecution and suffering of the people of God (the faithful in the seven churches, Antipas, the souls under the altar, and the two witnesses) is part of a cosmic conflict. The ‘dragon’ (Satan) stands behind their suffering (12.9). His malicious intents are discerned through imagery in the OT that depicts the enemies of God’s people. Yet, Satan’s efforts in afflicting the people of God are not uncontested as they are met and combatted by heavenly, angelic powers.

Second, it is the blood of the slain Lamb and faithful witnesses unto death that causes the people of God to conquer the cosmic force behind their suffering (12.11).

Third, God’s divine protection and providence work on behalf of his faithful people despite the harassment of their cosmic enemy. The language used to describe the women fleeing into the wilderness (12.6, 13) recalls the Exodus story. It confirms that God’s divine protection and providence are at work in spite of the Devil’s persecution and the suffering he continues to inflict upon the people of God.

Fourth, two key qualities make up the faithful witnesses: (1) the calling to be a faithful witness and (2) the willingness to suffer.

Fifth, those who do not worship the beast face the likely prospect of death. The proverbial statement ‘If anyone is to be taken captive, to captivity he goes; if anyone is to be slain with the sword, with the sword must he be slain’ (13.9-10) shows the potential outcome for those who do not worship the beast: they may die unjustly at the hands of the beast. This has been the case for a number of the saints in the seven churches including Antipas, as well as the souls under the altar and the two witnesses.

Sixth, the prayers of the martyrs, including the people of God in the seven churches and the souls under the altar, will be answered. Such an answer to prayer results in vindication. The terminology used in 14.11-13 is similar to that of 8.3-4: the *καπνός* (‘smoke’) of their torment *ἀναβαίνει* (‘goes up’) forever. The rising smoke of the torment associated with those who follow

the beast is associated with the rising smoke of the incense that is mingled with the prayers of those who have been faithful to Jesus unto death.

Seventh, God's eschatological justice includes a gathering together of the people of God who have suffered. It also includes a judgment upon those who have caused the people of God suffering. Within the vision of the two harvests (14.14-20), there is a gathering of the elect/144,000 in the first harvest. In the second harvest, there is a return for the blood of the faithful witnesses. Thus, the people of God who suffer in the narrative will be vindicated and those who inflict their suffering will be repaid with the suffering they inflict.

Revelation 15-16

In coming into chapter 15, the hearers are met with another *Καὶ εἶδον* that signals a transition from the previous scene.⁴⁵⁹ The hearers observe another *σημεῖον* ('sign') in heaven, *μέγα καὶ θαυμαστόν* ('great and amazing'), and encounter seven angels with seven plagues, which they learn are the last plagues (v. 1). As such, careful hearers would likely notice that 12.1 and 15.1 form an *inclusio* that surrounds the contents of 12-14. Being the case, 15.1 would signal an end to Revelation 12-14 and the beginning of a new section that explains the nature of this next 'great and amazing' sign.⁴⁶⁰ Careful hearers would not miss the fact that this next great *σημεῖον* appears *ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ* ('in heaven'). The movement to heaven would confirm that *Καὶ εἶδον* has been marking the change of locations, making these locations structural elements. By now the hearers would be quite certain that these locations have not been random. They have gradually moved upward: from the sea (13.1) to the earth (13.11) to Mount Zion (14.1) to mid-heaven (14.6) unto a white cloud (14.14) and now to heaven (15.1).⁴⁶¹ It is hard to imagine, at this point, that the hearers would not be fairly certain the visions from 13.1 to 15.1 have been moving in the direction of chaos to God's restored order – from suffering to triumph.

While contemplating the movement of locations, another *Καὶ εἶδον* appears and John sees a sea of glass mingled with fire. Those who conquered the beast are standing on/beside⁴⁶² the sea

⁴⁵⁹ The *Καὶ εἶδον* formula appears a total of three times in this chapter, suggesting that there are three separate literary units. The first is v. 1, which is an introductory prologue to the chapter. The second is vv. 3-4, which are the OT quotes that make up the hymn. The third is vv. 5-8, a section that prepares the hearers for the action to come. See Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 382.

⁴⁶⁰ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 448.

⁴⁶¹ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 448.

⁴⁶² Some commentators understand *ἐπὶ* to mean 'on' the sea (Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 285; Osborne, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 562) and other commentators understand *ἐπὶ* to mean 'beside' the sea. See Reddish,

with harps in their hands, singing the song of Moses and the Lamb (v. 2).⁴⁶³ The first image that the hearers would find relevant to suffering and theodicy in this chapter is the image of the conquerors ἐστῶτας ('standing') in unison with the Lamb through his song which they sing.⁴⁶⁴ Up to this point, standing has been an important posture for the conquerors. It has been associated with the Lamb who stood despite having been slain. Thus, standing has come to portray his conquest through his resurrection though he suffered (5.6). The hearers have learned that the conquerors share this victory of the Lamb, indicated by the 144,000 standing before the throne and the Lamb (7.9). Their standing is a response to the question of 'who can stand' (6.16-17) in spite of the wrath of the Lamb. The hearers would recall these instances in 15.2, learning more about the conqueror's solidarity with the Lamb by observing them singing the song of the Lamb.⁴⁶⁵ This song would recall 5.9-12 where those around the throne worship the Lamb for being slaughtered, for redeeming of the people of God, and for making the people of God kings and priests unto God. With this fresh in their minds, the hearers encounter the song which includes the parallelism, δίκαιαι καὶ ἀληθιναὶ αἱ ὁδοὶ σου, ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν ἐθνῶν ('Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations!'). This exultation sounds similar to what the souls under the altar call God: ὁ δεσπότης ὁ ἅγιος καὶ ἀληθινός ('Sovereign Lord, holy and true'). Such a response would likely indicate that the hearers understand the song of the Lamb in connection with the souls' plea (6.9-11). This association suggests that those who sing the song are satisfied with

Revelation, p. 291, who makes the argument for 'beside' due to the fact that this motif parallels the Exodus account and would thus be in better keeping with the story to place the conquerors 'beside' the sea. See also Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, p. 205, who notes that to translate it 'beside' would mean that the victors are now on the side where God's throne is. Yet, he notes, to translate it 'on' would symbolize that the conquerors stand on the sea, in a victorious posture symbolic of their triumph over the sea of chaos and the beast.

⁴⁶³ See R. Scharneck, 'The Song of Moses Which Is Not (Also) the Song of the Lamb: An Investigation into the Number of Songs at Play in Rev. 15', *JECH* 9.2 (2019), pp. 59-73, examines the arguments put forward that there is either one or three songs at play in Revelation 15. Scharneck notes that most scholars see one song at play and that a few scholars see three songs at play. However, he suggests that there are two, as does Thomas, *Revelation 8-22*, p. 235. Smalley, *The Revelation of John*, p. 386, suggests that the use of καὶ is exegetical and means 'even' or 'which is': the song of Moses which is the song of the Lamb. Archer, *I Was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day*, p. 241, suggests that two songs have merged into one. In following Archer, I refer to this as a single song while recognizing that the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb have converged.

⁴⁶⁴ Pattemore, *The People of God in the Apocalypse*, p. 195, notes that the celebration of victory here is reminiscent of the victory in 12.10 and describes victory through suffering and death, not a victory that comes from escaping such.

⁴⁶⁵ According to Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 386, the genitive τῆν ᾠδὴν τοῦ ἀρνίου ('the song of the Lamb') is to be understood objectively here, meaning a song 'to' the Lamb or a song 'about' the Lamb. Contra Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 793, who thinks the genitive is subjective because he takes the genitive in τῆν ᾠδὴν Μωϋσέως ('song of Moses') subjectively. Hence, 'the song sung by the Lamb'. However, Beale suggests keeping it ambiguous, 'The song of Moses ... the song of the Lamb'.

how God has vindicated their own suffering. Furthermore, the title ‘King of the nations’ would indicate to the hearers that God, through the suffering of Jesus, has made a kingdom, a kingdom composed of those who have conquered through their witness, in spite of suffering.⁴⁶⁶ Such a notion would remind of the various promises Jesus has made to the seven churches. It would also remind of 1.5 where Jesus, the faithful witness, is said to be the firstborn of the dead and the ruler of the kings of the earth – the first indication in the narrative that his suffering witness has led to his triumph. Thus, it would not be going too far to say that this passage ‘is the heart of theodicy in the Apocalypse’⁴⁶⁷ because ‘such testimony would ring in the ears of the hearers as assurance that despite the way in which a given early circumstance may create questions about God’s sovereignty, care, and compassion, the testimony of those from the vantage point of heaven itself assure that the ways of God are indeed righteous and true’.⁴⁶⁸ Perhaps the hearers would understand that this testimony does not offer a rational explanation as to why God has allowed suffering in the world, such as an explanation of the origin and impulse of evil. However, they would likely discover that God is concerned with human suffering and his own interaction with human suffering brings vindication to those who suffer.

Following this, the hearers meet another *Καὶ εἶδον*. In this next scene, which is the second image of relevance to suffering and theodicy in chapter 15, John sees the sanctuary of the tent of witness in heaven open from which seven angels with seven plagues proceed (vv. 5-6). One of the living creatures gives one of the seven angels seven golden bowls full of God’s wrath (v. 7). Then the sanctuary is filled with smoke from God’s glory and power (v. 8). The seven bowls would very likely cause the hearers to recall the golden bowls full of incense which are the prayers of the saints in 5.8. However, the hearers would not fail to notice that, while the bowls are the same, the contents they contain have changed. They have gone from containing the prayers of the saints to containing the wrath of God! This observation would likely cause hearers to make a connection: the prayers of the saints are connected to the vindication that God brings

⁴⁶⁶ M. Pohlmann, ‘The Victory Song of Moses in Christological Perspective within the Apocalypse of John’, *Conspectus* 14 (2012), pp. 133-52, posits that the entire message of the Apocalypse is illustrated in the song of Moses and the Lamb. This message is that ‘we can continue to expect having a suffering, yet victorious church’.

⁴⁶⁷ Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 565. See also Cory, “‘Just and true are your ways, O king of the nations (Rev. 15:3): Theodicy in the Book of Revelation’, pp. 25-29.

⁴⁶⁸ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 456.

through his judgments. The association between the saints' prayers and God's vindication indicates that God is actively at work to bring justice to those who cry out (6.9-11; 8.3-5).⁴⁶⁹

Before the narrative moves forward into chapter 16, careful hearers would likely look back on chapter 15 and consider that they have repeatedly seen *Καὶ εἶδον* throughout this chapter. By now they have come to learn that *Καὶ εἶδον* is a structural marker. But what could it be marking in chapter 15, considering there are no changes of location throughout it? Perhaps careful hearers would think they are marking divisions within this section. This would break the chapter into three separate sections: (1) *Καὶ εἶδον* – the introduction of the plagues of wrath (v. 1), (2) *Καὶ εἶδον* – the conquerors' song (vv. 2-4), and (3) *Καὶ εἶδον* – the preparation of the angels to pour out the plagues of wrath (vv. 5-8).⁴⁷⁰ Granted the hearers understand it this way, they would observe that the first and third sections are concerned with the wrath of God. Thus, the idea of God's wrath forms an *inclusio* around chapter 15.⁴⁷¹ This places the conquerors' song between the pouring out of God's wrath. Careful hearers would likely interpret this to mean that the conquerors' song of triumph is based on the judgments of God which have vindicated their suffering.⁴⁷²

As the hearers come to chapter 16, they encounter a loud voice⁴⁷³ from the temple telling the seven angels to *ὑπάγετε* ('go forth') and *ἐκχέετε* ('pour out') the seven bowls of wrath upon on the earth (16.1). Immediately following this command, the angels pour out their bowls with great swiftness (16.2, 3, 4, 8, 10, 12, 17). The pouring out of the bowls is the dominant image pertaining to suffering and theodicy in chapter 16 wherein other related images emerge. The first bowl causes harmful sores on all those who bore the mark of the beast (v. 2).⁴⁷⁴ The second bowl

⁴⁶⁹ Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, p. 207, notices the connection between the golden bowls of 5.8 and 15.7 and says, 'The verbal thread is significant, for the prayers of the saints are instrumental in setting the world in proper order. God's justice is linked to the prayers of the Christians.'

⁴⁷⁰ Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, pp. 203-204.

⁴⁷¹ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 465.

⁴⁷² Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 559, suggests that the three uses of *Καὶ εἶδον* form an ABA chiasm. This chiasm positions the conquerors' song between two sections about the wrath of God. Osborne notes, 'The joy of the victorious saints is the reason for and the result of the angel's mission of judgment. The bowl judgments will vindicate the saints for all they have suffered.'

⁴⁷³ Koester, *Revelation*, p. 646, suggests that the loud voice from the temple is the voice of God. Reddish, *Revelation*, p. 303, arrives at the same conclusion by connecting the voice from the temple to 15.8. See also Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 465, who connects the mention of God's voice to the context of Isa. 66.6.

⁴⁷⁴ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 814, notes, 'The punishment matches the crime: those who receive an idolatrous mark will be chastised by being given a penal mark'.

causes the sea to become like a corpse – everything⁴⁷⁵ living in it dies. Perhaps the hearers would notice that the second bowl judgment parallels the second trumpet judgment. Yet, in the second trumpet judgment only a third of what is living in the sea dies. In this bowl judgment, *every* living thing in the sea dies. At this point the hearers would likely realize that the bowl judgments are more intense than the seal and trumpet judgments for several reasons: (1) the plagues poured from the bowl judgments affect the entire group for which they are designed - this is much more numerous than the one fourth of those affected in the seal judgments (6.1-8.1) and the one third in the trumpet judgments (8.2-11.19); (2) humans are explicitly affected from the very first bowl judgment;⁴⁷⁶ (3) the voice of God is mentioned in connection with the pouring out of the judgments; (4) the command Ὑπάγετε is used which would have the effect of added divine authority (10.8; 13.10); and (5) the angels are told to ἐκχέετε the bowls of God’s wrath, something that would cause the hearers to recall the OT wherein this term appears in liturgical acts of judgment (Jer. 7.20; Ezek. 9.8; Ps. 78.3-6; Lam. 2.4).⁴⁷⁷ These observations converge with what has taken place in the seal and trumpet judgments. This convergence would confirm to the hearers that God’s judgment has been building up to this point and will end with these bowls. Thus, the hearers would likely anticipate something ominous to come in the remaining bowls, even God’s severest judgment as the end now draws near.⁴⁷⁸

While the hearers contemplate how the judgments have intensified throughout the narrative, they come to the third bowl judgment which causes the rivers and springs to be blood. The hearers would now notice two things. (1) The bowl plagues reflect the plagues which came upon the Egyptians, reminding of the Exodus events.⁴⁷⁹ (2) The pace in which these bowls are poured out is rapid.⁴⁸⁰ It is hard to imagine they would not perceive this rapidity to answer the question

⁴⁷⁵ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 815, does not just understand the consequences of the second bowl to be maritime suffering. More than that, he thinks the consequences of the second bowl include all suffering that would be caused by maritime suffering, that is, human suffering. He makes this case based on the use of ψυχή in v. 3 which primarily refers to humans in Revelation.

⁴⁷⁶ A.J. Beagley, ‘Bowls’, in R.P. Martin and P.H. Davids (eds.), *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & Its Developments* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), p. 132, offers reasons number one and two for why the bowl judgments are more intense than the other judgments.

⁴⁷⁷ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, pp. 465-66, offers reasons 3-5 in an explanation of what makes the pouring out of these bowls so ‘ominous’.

⁴⁷⁸ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, pp. 468-69.

⁴⁷⁹ For a comparison of the Egyptian plagues, the trumpet judgments, and the bowl judgments, see Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 225.

⁴⁸⁰ The hearers will soon discover that there are minimal structural delays to suspend the bowls’ swift emptying. See Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, p. 209, who notes the rapid pace in which the bowls are poured out and suggests that this pacing is because the end is near and ‘the narrative speed quickens to a breathless pace’.

the souls under the altar ask about God’s delay in bringing vindication to their suffering (6.9-11). The souls who have inquired ‘how long’ no longer have to wait. Their vindication is here! God’s justice is recognized by the angel in charge of the waters who, after the third bowl is poured out, says:

καὶ ἤκουσα τοῦ ἀγγέλου τῶν ὑδάτων λέγοντος,

Δίκαιος εἶ, ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν, ὁ ὅσιος,

ὅτι ταῦτα ἔκρινας,

ὅτι αἶμα ἀγίων καὶ προφητῶν ἐξέχεαν

καὶ αἶμα αὐτοῖς [δ]έδωκας πιεῖν,

ἄξιόι εἰσιν.

Just are you, O Holy One, who is and who was,

for you brought these judgments.

For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets,

and you have given them blood to drink.

It is what they deserve! (vv. 5-6)

The hearers would take notice of a few things here in regard to suffering and theodicy. First, the angel refers to God as Δίκαιος (‘righteous’) and ὁ ὅσιος (‘the holy one’). These descriptions frame a two-fold description of God: ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν (‘the one who was and is’).⁴⁸¹ Perhaps they would perceive this as a small inclusio in which case it would suggest that the coming of God, in the pouring out of the bowl judgments, accounts for his justice and his holiness. Second, the ὅτι clause which follows, ὅτι ταῦτα ἔκρινα (‘for you brought these judgments’), modifies that which precedes it and confirms that God is just and holy because he has come with these judgments. Third, another ὅτι clause in v. 6 suggests that what follows it is further reason for the angel’s declaration of God’s holy and just character.⁴⁸² And what follows it is God’s retribution to those who have shed the blood of the saints and prophets: he gives them blood to drink.⁴⁸³ The hearers would not overlook the verb ἐξέχεαν (‘shed’). It has already been used four times in the previous

⁴⁸¹ See also 11.17 for the use of this description. As in 11.17, God is no longer described as ‘the one who is to come’ (1.8; 4.8) because here he has come, as demonstrated by his justice.

⁴⁸² See Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 818.

⁴⁸³ G.K. Beale and D.H. Campbell, *Revelation: A Shorter Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), p. 334, note that drinking blood is not just a reference to death. It includes suffering of all kinds. ‘The precise reason people suffer under the judgment of the third bowl is that they have caused God’s people to suffer.’

five verses (vv. 1, 2, 3, 4) to describe the pouring out of the bowl judgments! The use of ἐξέχεαν now functions as a verbal thread to connect the pouring out of the bowls upon the earth to the shedding of the blood of the saints and prophets.⁴⁸⁴ The mention of the saints' αἷμα ('blood') would indicate the identity of the 'saints and prophets'. The hearers would recall the first place where blood is talked about in the Apocalypse – in 1.5 where suffering, particularly Jesus' suffering, is first introduced. Perhaps the mention of blood would remind them of four things: (1) Antipas' death which was the result of his prophetic and faithful witness, (2) the souls under the altar who cry out for God to avenge their blood (6.10), (3) the two witnesses and their brutal death that occurred at the hands of the beast (11.7-12), and (4) the memory of those who were willfully slain by the beast for their prophetic witness (13.10).⁴⁸⁵ The following line, ἄξιοί εἰσιν ('it is what they deserve'), would be understood by the hearers in one of two ways based upon how they interpret εἰσιν. The first way they could understand ἄξιοί εἰσιν is to understand εἰσιν as referring to those who shed the blood of the prophets. Understood this way, this line would reaffirm that God's retribution is just and that those who shed blood received this judgment because they merited it.⁴⁸⁶ The second way the hearers could understand ἄξιοί εἰσιν is to understand εἰσιν as referring to the saints and the prophets whose blood was shed. If understood this way, then it would be better translated ('they are worthy'). Thus it would mean that God has determined them worthy, like the Lamb (5.8), and they are vindicated through these judgments.⁴⁸⁷

⁴⁸⁴ Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 583 says, 'They "poured out" the blood of God's servants, so God is "pouring judgment out" on them'.

⁴⁸⁵ See Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 472. Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 228, believes that the 'saints and prophets' refer to all of God's people who are called to bear prophetic witness that could end up leading to the shedding of blood. While John seems to have a distinct group in mind, perhaps the hearers would recall a distinct group which extends to the seven churches and to the people of God, universal throughout time. Perhaps it suggests that God will vindicate the cause of all those prophetic witnesses who suffer for faithfulness to him?

⁴⁸⁶ See Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 820, who supports the view that ἄξιοί εἰσιν refers to those who shed the blood of the prophets. He maintains that ἄξιος is being used the same way that it is used in the Book of Wisdom – meaning to deserve punishment. The idea of receiving blood for blood is in keeping with the Exodus background that Beale suggests is discernable in 16.6.

⁴⁸⁷ Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, pp. 227-28, understands ἄξιοί εἰσιν as referring to the saints and the prophets whose blood was shed. He determines ἄξιος is 'utterly positive' in Revelation as it is associated with God (4.11), the Lamb (5.9, 12) and those faithful to the Lamb (3.4). Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 820, considers the positive nature of ἄξιος in the narrative but suggests that in 16.6 those who shed blood are worthy and deserving of their punishment in the same way that God, the Lamb, and those faithful to the Lamb are worthy to receive blessing. Perhaps the best interpretive option for ἄξιοί εἰσιν is to consider one option without disqualifying the other. Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 473, does this by suggesting that ἄξιοί εἰσιν refers to God's retribution on those who shed blood

The hearers come to v. 7 and they encounter a peculiar passage:

καὶ ἤκουσα τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου λέγοντος,

Ναὶ κύριε ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ,

ἀληθινὰ καὶ δίκαιαι αἱ κρίσεις σου.

And I heard the altar saying,

“Yes, Lord God the Almighty,

true and just are your judgments!”

It seems that the altar speaks or, at least, a voice representing those who are close to the altar is speaking.⁴⁸⁸ The hearers would connect what the throne is saying (or what those near the throne are saying) to those who have been associated with the altar from the beginning – the souls under the altar in 6.9-11 (cf. 8.3-5).⁴⁸⁹ The first thing the altar says is Ναὶ (‘Yes’). Such a word, like ‘amen’, would now note the satisfaction of the souls under the altar. This would be heard as a remarkable and crucial point in the narrative. The souls under the altar are affirming their contentment with God’s vindication! Prior to this, they had been told to wait (6.11). There have been few references to their prayers as the narrative has unfolded (8.3-4; 15.3).⁴⁹⁰ At best, these references could have been understood as a limited response. But now, the hearers observe that their waiting is now over and the time for the vindication of their suffering has come! In affirming the justice of God, those under the altar refer to God as ὁ παντοκράτωρ (‘the Almighty’). This designation would recall the various times it has been used by God in referring to himself (1.8), by the four living creatures (4.8), by the twenty-four elders (11.17), and by those who conquered the beast and sang the song of Moses and the Lamb (15.3).⁴⁹¹ Now it is upon the lips of the souls under the altar who were awaiting God’s vindication for their suffering. This is

but leaves room for ἀξιοί εἶσιν to mean the worthiness of those whose blood was shed based on how ἀξιοί εἶσιν is used to describe the faithful in Sardis (3.4).

⁴⁸⁸ Koester, *Revelation*, p. 648, does not think that the actual altar is speaking. He understands this as metonymy and suggests that it is the voice of someone near the throne which is none other than the souls under the altar who cry out against those who have shed their blood (6.9-11; 8.3-5; 9.13; 14.18). Osborne, *Revelation*, pp. 584-85 makes the same case based upon the genitive τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου which suggests ‘one’ from the altar. Contra Mounce, *Revelation*, pp. 295-96, who understands the altar to be personification and not a metonymy.

⁴⁸⁹ H.Y. Son, ‘The Exodus Theme in the Bowl Judgments in Revelation 16: A Case of Patterns in Old Testament Uses in Revelation’, *ACTS* 53 (2022), pp. 9-62, makes this case this, saying, ‘considering the entreaty of the slain saints who were under the *altar* for repaying their *blood* to those who dwell on the earth (Rev 6:10), the altar’s response in 16:7 reaffirms that bowl judgments are God’s response to the saints’ entreaty and divine revenge on their oppressors’.

⁴⁹⁰ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 474.

⁴⁹¹ See Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, pp. 474-75.

significant because the sufferers, themselves, now attest to the justice of God and the contentment they have found in how he has responded to their suffering. The hearers have now heard the souls under the altar, speaking from their own perspective. And they declare with the rest of the those in the narrative that God's judgments are true and just (15.3; 16.7; 19.2). This would likely cause the hearers to anticipate God's own justice and fairness in their own trials, afflictions, and sufferings.

The next texts relevant to suffering and theodicy in chapter 16 pertains to the sixth bowl. When it is poured out, the Euphrates dries up to prepare the way of the kings of the east (v. 12). Three unclean spirits, which look like frogs, appear from the mouth of the beast and false prophet. They perform signs to gather the kings of the world⁴⁹² for battle on the great day of God Almighty (vv. 13-14). The hearers would notice that the kings of the whole world are preparing not just for 'a battle' but, τὸν πόλεμον ('the battle').⁴⁹³ The articular use of πόλεμον likely suggests a specific battle, perhaps recalling the eschatological battle in Ps. 2.1-2; Joel 3.2; Zeph. 3.8; Ezek. 38-39; Zech. 14.⁴⁹⁴ The voice of the Lord, which interrupts the presentation of the kings being gathered to Armageddon (v. 15), would signal to the hearers that the coming of the Lord is connected to this battle. The hearers would likely understand that this battle is the final eschatological battle where God defeats the evil that has been wrought at the hands of the evil triumvirate.⁴⁹⁵ This notion would be extended further as the hearers learn that the place of this battle is 'Armageddon' ('Harmagedon').⁴⁹⁶ Whatever the hearers would make of this location, they would at least understand this word comes from the Hebrew words הַר ('mountain') and מִגְדוֹן ('Megiddo').⁴⁹⁷ Megiddo was a place where Israel fought many battles with its enemies (Judg. 5.19; 2 Kgs 9.27; 2 Kgs 23.29-30; 1 Chron. 7.29; Zech. 12.11). Moreover, eschatological battles are associated with mountains, even the slaughter of the nations (Ezekiel 38-39). Hence,

⁴⁹² Are the kings of the east and the kings of the world the same kings? Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 482, suggests so and proposes that the focus moves from 'a single compass point' to 'the whole world'. See Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 232, for a summary of options on how these two groups of kings can be understood. Boxall appeals to the wider context of the narrative to show that the point of mentioning them here is to point to preparations for the final battle between the forces of evil and the Lamb.

⁴⁹³ Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 410, goes so far as to say that this article means that it is the 'final conflict between evil and good'.

⁴⁹⁴ Reddish, *Revelation*, p. 311, notes that if the battle echoes the eschatological from the OT, John has modified this idea from the OT and has made the kings of the earth the instigator and not God.

⁴⁹⁵ The evil triumvirate is a title that refers to Satan, the beast, and the false prophet.

⁴⁹⁶ For more on Armageddon in connection with the final conflict against good and evil, see Reddish, *Revelation*, pp. 311-14.

⁴⁹⁷ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 485.

the hearers would perceive ‘Armageddon’ to be serving as a disorienting apocalyptic image that reveals a place of battle where God overcomes his enemies. This imagery all the more confirms that this battle is the final conflict between good and evil. God will overcome the evil triumvirate and those aligned with it.

As this chapter comes to a close, the seventh and final bowl is poured out (vv. 17-21), offering the final images in chapter 16 that are relevant to suffering and theodicy.⁴⁹⁸ To the hearers’ amazement, they hear a voice exclaim, Γέγονεν (‘it is done’)!⁴⁹⁹ Such a statement realizes 15.1, wherein the purpose of the seven bowls is stated: ‘for with them the wrath of God is ἐτελέσθη’ (‘finished’).⁵⁰⁰ Here in 15.1, ἐτελέσθη is the same verb that was used by Jesus on the cross to exclaim that his redemptive work had been accomplished: Τετέλεσται (‘it is finished!’) (Jn 19.30). The use of this verb would remind the hearers of Jesus’ exclamation on the cross, thereby drawing a connection between the accomplishment of Jesus’ redemptive work and the accomplishment of these final judgments. Perhaps the hearers would understand this to mean that God’s justice, which has been long awaited by the sufferers who have been patient in spite of the evil caused by the evil triumvirate, has finally been accomplished through the coming of God. After this announcement, the hearers observe more familiar theophanic language (v. 18) which would remind of the theophanic language that occurs around the throne (4.5) and at the conclusion of the seal judgments (8.5) and the trumpet judgments (11.19). Such language would signal to the hearers that the Lord has come. Yet, the language has intensified in 16.18 as it includes an earthquake of unmatched magnitude! Perhaps the hearers would recall that great earthquakes are associated with eschatological expectations in the OT (Isa. 13.13; Hag. 2.6-7; Zech. 14.4-5).⁵⁰¹ This unprecedented earthquake results in the splitting of ‘the great city’, Babylon, into three parts. The hearers encounter one eerie detail that causes them to anticipate

⁴⁹⁸ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World*, p. 93, posits that the bowl judgments are the ‘heavenly response’ to the outcry of the souls under the altar. Her idea of justice delineates judgment/justice from punishment. She does not think the Greek text suggests punishment. ‘Not the desire to inflict punitive torments but the values of equity and vindication motivate and direct God’s wrath and judgment.’

⁴⁹⁹ Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, p. 899, notes the perfect tense and suggests that it contrasts with the previous uses of the aorist tenses, revealing a climactic end to the plagues. Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 235, makes use of the perfect to suggest that it speaks of a past event with implications that carry forward. Thus, he understands Γέγονεν to be declaring what Jesus has accomplished in his death and resurrection as the Lamb (12.10-11).

⁵⁰⁰ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 842.

⁵⁰¹ See Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, pp. 487-88.

what awaits in the next chapter:⁵⁰² ‘and God remembered Babylon the great’ (v. 19). The idea of God remembering his enemies and the evil they commit is common in the OT (Gen. 9.15; Lev. 26.45; Ps. 137.7; Hos. 7.2; 8.13). If the hearers have not been sufficiently assured that God has brought justice for those who suffer at the hands of Babylon, this statement settles it. God has remembered their suffering. He now deals justly with their oppressors. God’s just dealings would cause the hearers to anticipate judgment to come upon Babylon, perhaps even next, as the narrative unfolds.⁵⁰³

Implications of Revelation 15-16

There are seven implications regarding suffering and theodicy that emerge from Revelation 15-16:

First, the conquerors will be satisfied with how God has vindicated their own suffering. Their satisfaction is revealed in the song of the Lamb in 15.3 which includes exultation in the form of a parallelism: *δίκαιαι καὶ ἀληθιναὶ αἱ ὁδοὶ σου, ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν ἐθνῶν* (‘Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations!’). This exultation sounds similar to what the souls under the altar call Jesus: *ὁ δεσπότης ὁ ἅγιος καὶ ἀληθινός* (‘Sovereign Lord, holy and true’). Such a response connects the song of the Lamb with the souls’ plea. Because the souls have come to represent those who have been faithful unto death, the identity of those who sing this song would also be associated with the faithful in the seven churches and the two witnesses.

Second, the prayers of the saints are connected to the vindication God brings through his judgments. God is actively working to bring justice to those who cry out in their suffering. The seven bowls in 15.7 remind of the golden bowls full of incense which are the prayers of the saints in 5.8. While the bowls are the same, the content they contain has changed – the prayers of the saints have now become the wrath of God.

Third, God’s vindication gives his people reason to rejoice. The inclusio in chapter 15 places the conquerors’ song (vv. 2-4) between the introduction of the plagues (v. 1) and the preparation of the plagues to be poured out (vv. 5-8). The song of God’s people in association with God’s vindication on their behalf suggests that vindication from God is enough to cause his people’s lament to become praise.

⁵⁰² Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 419, suggests that the seven bowls and the mention of the fall of Babylon in Revelation 16 anticipate the ‘more detailed’ account of Babylon in Revelation 17-18.

⁵⁰³ Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 237, suggests that Revelation 17-18 are a pause in the narrative to show what transpires when God judges Babylon righteously.

Fourth, God's retribution is just. Those who have shed blood throughout receive God's judgment because they have merited it (16.6).

Fifth, God's justice is affirmed (16.7). In spite of the suffering God's people have endured and the delay they've experienced waiting for God to answer their cry, they are content with God's justice and uphold it.

Sixth, God's justice – which the sufferers in the narrative have been long awaiting – is accomplished in his coming. God's coming takes place in the 16.17-21 at the pouring out of the seventh bowl. The word Γέγονεν ('it is done') is associated with ἐτελέσθη ('finished') (15.1) and Τετέλεσται ('it is finished!') (Jn 19.30), drawing a connection between Jesus' redemptive work and these final judgments.

Seventh, God remembers all those who have suffered by remembering those who have caused their suffering. God remembers those who have caused suffering in 16.19 when he remembers Babylon's injustices, recalling instances from the OT in which God remembers his enemies and the evil they commit.

4.7 ἐν πνεύματι – In the Wilderness (17.1 – 21.8)

After the conclusion of the seven bowl judgments, the hearers come to chapter 17. Here they encounter the third ἐν πνεύματι phrase which brings John into a wilderness (17.3). This phrase signals the closing of the largest section in the Apocalypse (4.1-16.21) and the beginning of the third section which the hearers will come to learn continues until 21.8. In this section, the hearers will discover the judgment and destruction of Babylon (17-18),⁵⁰⁴ the celebration in heaven because of Babylon's judgment and destruction (19.1-10), the appearance of the white horse rider (19.11-16), the millennial reign of Christ and Satan's defeat (20.1-10), the great white throne judgment (20.11-15), and the new heaven and new earth (21.1-8).⁵⁰⁵

⁵⁰⁴ The judgment and destruction of Babylon (17.1-19-10) is connected with the seventh bowl judgment. Wall, *Revelation*, p. 204, notes that the 'vision of Babylon's prostitute and her punishment functions as part of an extended footnote (17.1-19.10) that describes the contents of "the cup filled with the wine of the fury" of God's wrath (16.19b)'. Reddish, *Revelation*, p. 321, notes that John is not depicting a new event but is presenting more entirely the same destruction of Babylon in 16.17-21.

⁵⁰⁵ Archer, *I Was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day*, p. 254.

Revelation 17-18

As chapter 17 begins, an angel bids John to come, expressing his intent to show him the judgment of the great prostitute (vv. 1-2). John is carried away in the Spirit into a wilderness.⁵⁰⁶ In this chapter, the hearers will encounter more imagery that pertains to suffering and theodicy, the first of which is an image of a woman⁵⁰⁷ sitting on a scarlet beast⁵⁰⁸ that has seven heads and ten horns and is full of blasphemous names (v. 3). She is clothed in purple and scarlet and adorned with gold and jewels and pearls and has a golden cup.⁵⁰⁹ It is full of abominations and the impurities of her sexual immorality (v. 4).⁵¹⁰ There is a mysterious name on the woman's forehead which is 'Babylon the great, the mother of prostitutes and of earth's abominations' (v. 5).⁵¹¹ The hearers discover that the woman is drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of the martyrs of Jesus (v. 6).⁵¹² Again, the hearers encounter the shedding of blood which, by now, is anything but foreign to them. The appearance of blood once again reminds them of the various places blood has been mentioned in the narrative (1.5; 6.10; 12.11; 16.6). It also reminds of the

⁵⁰⁶ Perhaps the hearers would notice at this point that the ἐν πνεύματι phrases have all been connected to geographical points up to now. The first ἐν πνεύματι being on Patmos (1.9-10) and the second ἐν πνεύματι being in heaven (4.2). Such a connection would cause the hearers to suspect that being in the Spirit is connected to these geological places. Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 494, suggests that perhaps the hearers suspect that the wilderness is a place 'where God is active in prophetic and redemptive ways (Jn 1.23; 3.14)'. He also suggests the wilderness may be perceived as a place where Jesus' disciples take refuge (Jn 11.54).

⁵⁰⁷ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 853, notes that the woman is not the same as the beast but is aligned with the beast. He thinks the woman represents the part of the ungodly world that works with the state and brings about the persecution of the saints. Reddish, *Revelation*, p. 326, identifies her as Rome (v. 5) as Rome had killed the people of God, including Antipas and those Christians under the persecution of Nero. Yet, Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 244, does not just confine it to Rome. He posits that limiting it to Rome does not do justice to the 'richness' of the image. Rome is merely the 'latest incarnation' of Babylon, an idea that is expressed in various cities that oppress God's people. Revelation presents its hearers with 'the great city' that governs over the waters of chaos and the New Jerusalem from out of which come rivers of life.

⁵⁰⁸ Koester, *Revelation*, p. 673, notes that the beast is the demonic power that undergirds the woman's role. Both Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 853, and Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, pp. 241-42, note that the description of the beast in 17.3 is almost word for word the description of the beast in 13.1. Both the beast and the woman are described as κόκκινον ('scarlet') in color. This implies their work together to shed the blood of the saints.

⁵⁰⁹ See Jer. 51.7.

⁵¹⁰ Koester, *Revelation*, p. 685, notes John's use of satire for the purpose of lampooning his subject. Instead of a noblewoman, John portrays a debauched prostitute who is in a drunken stupor clinging onto the back of an outrageous beast. Rather than wine, the woman has sewage in her cup! The woman is not a peeress but rather a 'buffoon'.

⁵¹¹ B.R. Rossing, *The Choice Between Two Cities: Whore, Bride, and Empire in the Apocalypse*, (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999), p. 83, suggests that Babylon's motherhood suggests a 'mother city' which has given birth to daughter cities. This portrays Rome's expansive influence politically, economically, and religiously.

⁵¹² D. Razafiarivony, 'Is the Woman of Revelation 17 the Same Woman of Revelation 12?', *AJBT* 6.1 (2023), pp. 134-49, reacts to existing scholarship which suggests that the woman in chapter 12 is the same woman in 17.6. Razafiarivony's exploration contends that the women are not the same, rather exist in parallel.

brutal deaths of the saints (11.7-12; 13.10).⁵¹³ Hence, the blood functions once more as a verbal thread connecting the blood that the woman drinks with the blood of those who have suffered because of their faithful witness. This convergence suggests that the blood of the saints/martyrs⁵¹⁴ has been shed by the hands of the woman who has indulged and delighted⁵¹⁵ in such. This is the expression of ultimate idolatry.⁵¹⁶ With this in mind, the hearers would understand the judgment the angel announces upon the great prostitute in 17.1 to be the result of the suffering the prostitute has caused the people of God, particularly the souls under the altar. Thus, the judgment upon the prostitute who rides the beast is God's response to the cries of the souls under the altar. He vindicates their suffering.

The second image relevant to suffering and theodicy in chapter 17 is the ten horns upon the beast. The angel tells John that the ten horns⁵¹⁷ are ten kings who hand over their power and authority to the beast. And they make war on the Lamb (vv. 12-14). What would the hearers understand at this point? Whatever they would make of the ten horns/ten kings, they would likely hear Dan. 7.7-8; 20-25. These passages describe the ten horns of Daniel's fourth beast wherein one horn makes war on the saints until the coming of God's eschatological kingdom. The hearers would also take notice of the number ten. By this point in the narrative, ten has been used in association with three things: (1) the ten days of suffering for the church in Smyrna (2.10), (2) the ten horns of the great red dragon (12.3), and (3) the ten horns and diadems of the beast (13.1). It might not be going too far to suggest that all of these ideas converge here in 17.12,

⁵¹³ Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 253, notes that the double expression (saints/martyrs of Jesus Christ) may suggest that the OT saints are included in these deaths.

⁵¹⁴ Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 432, correctly notes the exegetic *καὶ* in v. 6 which connects τοῦ αἵματος τῶν ἁγίων with τοῦ αἵματος τῶν μαρτύρων Ἰησοῦ. Being exegetic, it would suggest that τοῦ αἵματος τῶν ἁγίων and τοῦ αἵματος τῶν μαρτύρων Ἰησοῦ are the same. The blood of the saints is the blood of the witnesses. Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 243, notes that the word *μάρτυς* in v. 6 comes close to its 'later' meaning ('martyr'). He argues that the term *μαρτύρων Ἰησοῦ* should be understood as an objective genitive ('witnesses to Jesus').

⁵¹⁵ Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 432, notes that the woman's intoxication may express her delight over the harassment of the saints.

⁵¹⁶ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 500, maintains that it is not going too far to draw a connection between the contents of the cup (v. 4) and the blood on which the woman is drunk. Though the filth does not morph into the blood, perhaps the connection suggests that the contents of the cup contain the filth and 'sewage' of hostility and violence toward those who follow the Lamb.

⁵¹⁷ Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, pp. 437-38, notes that these ten horns/ten kings are not to be understood as historical, rather metaphorical. They represent 'secular self-aggrandizement which seeks to usurp the justice and authority of God in any age and place'. These horns/kings are in coalition with Satan as noted by their number ten which shows their abundant power that comes from the demonic. They reign with Satan, go to war on the Lamb, and stand in opposition to the church. This appears to be an echo of Dan. 7.7-8 which begs a figurative interpretation. See Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, pp. 878-80.

suggesting that what is taking place has to do with the beast's collusion with Satan. This collusion would cause sorrow and great suffering for the people of God. In v. 14, the hearers learn that the ten horns/kings go to make war with the Lamb. Here is the first place in the narrative where it is explicitly stated that the beast and dragon make war on the Lamb. Prior to this point, their war has been upon those who follow the Lamb (11.7; 12.7, 17). Such a revelation would suggest that the beast and dragon's war on the people of God has been war on the Lamb the entire time. As such, it would not shock the hearers to discover that the Lamb conquers the ten kings/ten horns.

Here, the third image relevant to suffering and theodicy emerges in chapter 17 which is the reappearance of the Lamb. With the Lamb's reappearance, the term *νικάω* finds its way into the narrative again, reminding of the messages to the seven churches and the promises to those who conqueror (v. 14). Moreover, *νικάω* would remind of where the verb has most recently occurred in the narrative – in the vision of the sea of glass, in which those who conquered the beast were standing beside with harps in their hands (15.2). Thus, the hearers would likely understand the Lamb's victory over the ten horns/ten kings to be the people of God's victory as well. The people of God have shared the Lamb's suffering, now they share his triumph. Such a triumph would be heightened by the title John uses for the Lamb at this point: *ὅτι κύριος κυρίων ἐστὶν καὶ βασιλεὺς βασιλέων* ('for he is Lord of lords and King of kings') (v. 14).⁵¹⁸ This title communicates that the Lamb is unmatched by his opponents and enemies, having no rival to his kingship. The hearers would be encouraged, even delighted, to discover that the Lamb, who has no rival in his victory, is not alone in his victory. Now the narrative confirms what the hearers have suspected: the Lamb shares his victory with the *κλητοὶ καὶ ἐκλεκτοὶ καὶ πιστοί* ('called and chosen and faithful') (v. 14).

The *πιστοί* in v. 14 becomes the fourth image related to suffering and theodicy in chapter 17. The term would likely be an immediate giveaway that the ones who stand with Jesus are those who have suffered.⁵¹⁹ The hearers would be reminded of a number of instances in the narrative

⁵¹⁸ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 513, notes a number of things about this title that displays the Lamb's dominance over the kings of the earth, a few of which are to be mentioned here. First, the use of *κύριος* shows the close relationship the Lamb has with God. Second, this title is congruent with 1.5, where Jesus is identified as the ruler of the kings of the earth. Third, God is spoken of as the king (15.3).

⁵¹⁹ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 514, refers to *πιστοί* as the term 'par excellence' for Jesus' faithful obedience unto death (1.5; 3.14) and the saints who have suffered with him willfully.

wherein the faithful have suffered: (1) Jesus' example of witness and suffering unto death (1.5; 3.14), (2) the Smyrnaean church that was instructed to suffer unto death (2.8-11), (3) Antipas who suffered for his faithful witness (2.13), (4) those who overcome by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony (12.11), and (5) those who willfully lay down their lives and are slain with the Lamb (13.10). Perhaps even 1.5 would ring in the ears of the hearers at this point where the Lamb's unrivaled triumph over the kings of the earth occurs after his faithful witness and resurrection from his brutal death. If so, the hearers would now realize that they share in the rule described in 1.6, for they have been faithful to the Lamb and now they share in his reign over their oppressors. This reign would be understood as an answer to the prayers of the souls under the altar in 6.9 – those awaiting vindication for their suffering. Here, the faithful saints are not just said to have conquered their enemy (12.11). They do not only witness the destruction of their enemy (16.17-21). Now, their vindication becomes complete because they accompany the Lord of lords and King of kings.⁵²⁰

As the narrative moves forward, the ten horns and the beast hate the prostitute and make her desolate and naked. They devour her flesh and burn her up with fire. This graphic scene becomes the fifth image regarding suffering and theodicy that emerges in chapter 17. The hearers discover that the ten horns and the beast destroy the prostitute because God has put it into their hearts to carry out his purpose (vv. 16-17). Three metaphors are at play here that describe the prostitute's destruction: (1) stripping her naked, (2) eating her flesh, and (3) setting her on fire.⁵²¹ These metaphors show the prostitute's shameful end and total defeat.⁵²² What might the hearers think of the fact that the prostitute's defeat has come at the hands of the ten horns and the beast? They

⁵²⁰ Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 624, sees this reign as a complete fulfillment of the souls' cry in 6.9-11. God has answered them partially in the trumpets and bowls. But now he answers them fully by allowing them to participate in his rule (1.5).

⁵²¹ For reading texts that can be heard as supposed 'sexual terror', see J. König, 'The "Great Whore" of Babylon (Rev 17) as a Non-Survivor of Sexual Abuse', *Religions* 13.3 (2022), pp. 1-12, who offers her three suggestions for reading these texts in a 'responsible' way. T. Pippin, *Death and Desire: The Rhetoric of Gender in the Apocalypse of John* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2021), p. 67, suggests that the death of the prostitute is full of erotic tension which 'points to the ultimate misogynist fantasy'. Rossing, *The Choice Between Two Cities*, p. 88, seems not to concur with Pippin's reading on the basis of being uncertain that Ezekiel 16 and 32 are the 'model' for John's vocabulary. M. Selvidge, 'Powerful and Powerless Women in the Apocalypse', *Neot* 26.1 (1992), p. 164, suggests that John details the great city's downfall using 'rape' and 'cannibalism'. She even goes so far to say that the author 'describes her downfall so graphically that there appears to be a hint of joy in relating the gruesome story. If he could not continue to enjoy her "adulteries" in life, he could be satisfied even uplifted by watching her mutilating death.' Rossing, *The Choice Between Two Cities*, p. 89 points out, however, that rape language is not used in 17.6 ('seeing', 'showing', 'uncovering'). Moreover, she points out that the language John employs is 'generic city destruction imagery' that is commonly used in the OT without sexual connotations.

⁵²² See Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, p. 226.

would likely discern that the nature of evil, with which they have been at odds through the entire narrative, is so vile that it ends up devouring itself!⁵²³ Interestingly enough, and perhaps even more of a surprise, God seems to be behind what appears to be the self-destruction of evil. Though evil seems to do what it wants, the hearers would likely discern that God still maintains his sovereign control over it as evil is guided to its own destruction. This demonstration of divine sovereignty would be perceived as another part of God's vindication for those who have suffered, demonstrating that the forces of evil are subject to do God's will and are not free from his ultimate control. God's ultimate control over the power of evil would likely begin to cause the hearers to anticipate, with great hope, a grand ending. But there is more to be revealed about the destruction of Babylon before the end of the narrative.

As the hearers enter chapter 18, the first thing they encounter is an angel coming down from heaven declaring⁵²⁴ Babylon's fall⁵²⁵ followed by another voice⁵²⁶ calling for the saints to come out of Babylon because God has remembered its iniquities (vv. 4-5). Babylon's fall is the first image in chapter 18 that is related to suffering and theodicy. God's remembrance of Babylon's sin would likely cause the hearers to recall places in the OT where God remembers sin.⁵²⁷ In addition, the hearers would recall where God remembered Babylon the great and made her drink of his wrath just a few chapters earlier (16.19). From these instances, the hearers would gather that God acts in judgment when he remembers sin. Thus, the hearers would suspect that God's act in bringing down Babylon is judicial activity in response to her many iniquities,⁵²⁸ particularly its violence toward the saints. While the hearers are contemplating God's justice, the voice from heaven continues to speak, pleading that Babylon be paid back as she has paid back

⁵²³ Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, p. 226, notes that 'evil and injustice bear within themselves the seeds of their own destruction, and ultimately the whole edifice will come tumbling down!'

⁵²⁴ The declaration begins, 'Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great'. Leithart, *Revelation 12-22*, p. 214, thinks that this phrase forms an inclusio with 14.8 where it also says 'Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great'.

⁵²⁵ The unanimous agreement amongst scholars is that this lament over Babylon is a funeral dirge. See Reddish, *Revelation*, p. 359; Wall, *Revelation*, pp. 213-14. Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 255, notes that this dirge is not so much to express mourning but rather to announce Babylon's judgment. Boring, *Revelation*, pp. 185-86, notes that this dirge is a pastiche of biblical laments, comprised of quotations and allusions, which suggests the eschatological fall of evil and affirms the faithfulness of God. Contra Rossing, *The Choice Between Two Cities*, p. 103, who suggests that this is a 'city lament' that begins with the Mesopotamian lament tradition that made its way into the Hebrew prophets and eventually Greek city laments. Rossing points out its unique characteristics to support further that this lament is a city lament, including the dirge form, shifts in speakers, rhetorical questions, litanies, desolation imagery, and repetitive cataloging.

⁵²⁶ Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 257, considers the possibility of this voice being the exalted Christ.

⁵²⁷ Psalm 109.14; Jer. 14.10; Hos. 8.13.

⁵²⁸ See Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 640.

others. The voice even pleads for Babylon to be repaid double for her deeds⁵²⁹ – that as she glorified herself, she be given a like measure of torment and mourning (vv. 5-6). Perhaps the hearers would find significance in the construction διπλώσατε τὰ διπλά ('repay double'). The verb and object appearing side by side would perhaps suggest a *total* repayment.⁵³⁰ This language echoes Jer. 16.28 where God punishes evil and abominations. Thus, the hearers learn this punishment involves βασανισμός ('torment'), reminding of the fifth trumpet judgment – the punishment of the locusts – wherein the locusts were allowed to βασανισθήσονται ('torment') the earth dwellers, causing them psychological harm (18.7; cf. 9.5). If this is not enough to signal the defeat of Babylon, the hearers discover a triple form of punishment for her: θάνατος καὶ πένθος καὶ λιμός ('death and mourning and famine'). Such a punishment would not be lost on the hearers as it would remind of the pale horse and its rider, whose name is death, and its actions that cause famine and sorrow (6.7-8). Babylon is then burned with fire (18.8). This fire would remind of the fate of wicked cities in the OT which oppose the Lord, namely Sodom and Edom (Gen. 19:28; Isa. 34.10). Now, Babylon shares the same fate. All these calamities come upon Babylon in one day as the city learns that ἰσχυρὸς κύριος ὁ θεὸς ὁ κρίνας αὐτήν ('mighty is the Lord God who has judged her'). The hearers would likely acknowledge the term ἰσχυρὸς ('mighty') here as it would likely remind of various places in the narrative that this is used, especially where it is designated to describe the Lamb who was slain and is worthy to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing (5.12). Such an association would likely allude to the fact that the Lamb has heard the cry of the martyrs. He has not been deaf toward their plea for justice. In swift strength and power he has vindicated those who have suffered at Babylon's hands.⁵³¹ The kings of the earth associated with Babylon observe her suffering and swift

⁵²⁹ See M.G. Kline, 'Double Trouble', *JETS* 32.2 (1989), pp. 171-79, who posits that the key Hebrew and Greek terms for 'double' do not necessarily mean 'double'. This effects the idea of a double divine punishment for sin in Revelation 18. Instead of double, Kline supports διπλοῦν be rendered 'equivalent' in vv. 6b and 6c.

⁵³⁰ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 528.

⁵³¹ See Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, pp. 329-30.

destruction⁵³² and the merchants of the earth weep and mourn over her because no one buys their cargo anymore (vv. 10-17).⁵³³

A list of cargo goods occurs in vv. 10-17 and becomes the second image in Revelation 18 relevant for suffering and theodicy. Such a list ends with a startling item: *σωμάτων, καὶ ψυχᾶς ἀνθρώπων* ('slaves, that is, human souls').⁵³⁴ There are two ways the hearers could interpret this statement. First, it could suggest that the slaves are not *just* cattle or anything else mentioned on the list. They are more valuable – they are human beings!⁵³⁵ Or this statement could suggest the human souls, as slaves, are treated as a mere item such as livestock.⁵³⁶ Perhaps the hearers would consider one without eliminating the possibility of the other: the slaves, who are human souls, are treated merely as cargo items even though they are human beings who are far more valuable than cargo. Be that as it may, this startling item, and its position as last on the list, would be heard as reference to Babylon's exploitation of human beings, which caused horrendous suffering, in order to build its opulence and wealth.⁵³⁷ Thus, this is the height of Babylon's vices – its disregard for the sacredness of life on which its luxury has thrived.⁵³⁸ While those who profited from this wail in sorrow, the hearers learn that Babylon's magnificence has been stripped. God has repaid it for its evil, specifically its profiting from human suffering (vv. 14-19).

In v. 20, the hearers would be startled again by a third image relevant to suffering and theodicy in chapter 18. This is a command for heaven, saints, apostles, and prophets to rejoice

⁵³² Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 908, thinks that Dan. 4.19 LXX stands behind the 'one hour' in which Babylon's destruction takes place. If this is the case, the text echoes Daniel's amazement at Nebuchadnezzar's judgment. Beale uses source material to make a case that 'hour' was the shortest period of time known to the ancients and meant 'instantly'. Smalley, *The Revelation of St John*, p. 452, agrees and suggests that such an instantaneous judgment means that the punishment is 'catastrophic, sudden, and well deserved'.

⁵³³ Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 648, sees 'theodicy' here saying that 'theodicy is stressed' as the absolute justice of divine judgment. Such judgment is decried by the kings observing Babylon's fall.

⁵³⁴ The *καὶ* would likely be understood exegetically here.

⁵³⁵ See Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, pp. 370-71, who takes this position and maintains that the text speaks of the slave trade.

⁵³⁶ Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, p. 231.

⁵³⁷ See Keener, 'Suffering and Exploitation in Revelation'. See also C.R. Smith, 'Reclaiming the Social Justice Message of Revelation: Materialism, Imperialism and Divine Judgment in Revelation 18', *Transformation 7.4* (1990), pp. 28-33, who argues that Rome is not just destroyed by God for persecuting the church or even for its immorality. It is also judged for its *economic* oppression.

⁵³⁸ While Bauckham and Swete differ on how the construction *σωμάτων, καὶ ψυχᾶς ἀνθρώπων* would be heard, they agree that the degrading of human souls is the height of Babylon's iniquity.

over Babylon's destruction!⁵³⁹ The verb *Εὐφραίνου* ('rejoice') is not at all unfamiliar to the hearers. It would remind of two things: (1) It was used in 11.10 to describe the activity of those upon the earth when the two prophetic witnesses had been killed! The hearers are now observing a twist of fate which signals, with great irony, the arrival of divine justice. God certainly has not forgotten the suffering of his people nor those who have brought about their suffering. (2) *Εὐφραίνου* is used in 12.12 after the accuser is thrown down and the saints are announced as having conquered by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony. This connection would cause the hearers to associate Babylon's destruction as the defeat of the accuser and the victory of those who have been slain at his hands. Three⁵⁴⁰ groups, *οἱ ἅγιοι καὶ οἱ ἀπόστολοι καὶ οἱ προφήται* ('saints and apostles and prophets'),⁵⁴¹ now converge into one idea and proclaim triumph.

The narrative continues as a mighty angel hurls a great stone into the sea,⁵⁴² declaring Babylon's final judgment that seals its end (vv. 21-23). The hearers would discover one final startling thing at the end of this account of Babylon's fall: Babylon is not just guilty of the blood of the prophets and saints, but *all* who have been slain on the earth (v. 24)! The term *ἐσφαγμένων* ('slain') is the final image relevant to suffering and theodicy in chapter 18. This term, even the idea behind this term, is more than familiar to the hearers at this point. It would remind of the Slaughtered Lamb (5.6, 9, 12; 13.8) and the souls under the altar (6.9). Could its reemergence in association with *all* suffering suggest that, while the suffering of God's people is sacred, God has not forgotten about the innocent suffering of the entire world, such as those souls who have been brutalized in the slave trade (v. 13)? Perhaps the hearers would understand that the *ψυχὰς* in the

⁵³⁹ E.F. Lupieri, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse of John* (trans. M.P. Johnson and A. Kamesar; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), pp. 292-93, suggests that that the judgment in which God has given has two explanations: (1) God has avenged the wrongs his people have suffered and takes upon himself the task of carrying out the judgment that Israel would have passed had they'd been able or (2) God has taken the judgment that would have come upon spiritual Israel, as all humans are sinners, and redirects it towards Israel's enemies.

⁵⁴⁰ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 917, maintains three separate groups of people, noting that certain manuscripts omit the second *καὶ οἱ*. He suspects that such an omission is a scribal error. Moreover, he maintains that the reading these particular manuscripts do maintain (*τοῖς ἁγίοις ἀποστόλοις αὐτοῦ καὶ προφήταις*) is an unlikely readings due to the awkward use of *ἁγίοις* as it pertains to the Apocalypse.

⁵⁴¹ For references to these groups, see 5.8; 8.3, 4; 11.10; 13.7; 16.6.

⁵⁴² This imagery would likely remind of Jer. 51.60-64. Here Jeremiah writes all the disasters that should come upon Babylon into a scroll. He tells Seraiah that when he gets to Babylon he is to perform a symbolic act which is to read the scroll out loud and proclaim Babylon's judgment. Then, he is to take the scroll and tie a stone to it and throw it in the Euphrates. While it is sinking to the bottom of the river he is to announce that Babylon will sink in the same way and never rise again. See F.B. Huey, Jr. *Jeremiah, Lamentations* (NAC; Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1993), pp. 430-31.

slave trade, and all those souls who have suffered a similar fate, have now received justice with the souls under the altar because of the judgment that comes upon Babylon.⁵⁴³ Whatever the hearers would think, they would be assured that mighty is the Lord God who has judged Babylon, whose judgments are true and just.

Revelation 19.1-10

After the hearers have witnessed the fall of Babylon and its total destruction, they enter chapter 19 and are met with a loud voice that comes from a ὄχλου πολλοῦ ('great multitude'). The great multitude is the first image in Revelation 19 that is relevant to suffering and theodicy. The hearers are familiar with the term a ὄχλου πολλοῦ by this point. The multitude would remind the hearers of those standing before the Lamb in 7.9-10 who are clothed in white and holding palm branches. Perhaps the hearers would recall the standing, the white clothing, and the palm branches – symbols of conquering and triumph – as they hear the multitude cry with a loud voice Ἀλληλουϊά ('Hallelujah!') (v. 1).⁵⁴⁴ This term⁵⁴⁵ would be new to the hearers as they have yet to encounter it in the Apocalypse.⁵⁴⁶ Perhaps it would remind of the Psalms where the Psalter uses this term to give God praise for his faithfulness and saving action (Ps. 105:1-2).⁵⁴⁷ With the Psalms in mind, the hearers would perceive the multitude praising God for his faithfulness. He has made them conquer and has saved them by destroying Babylon, the cause for so much of their suffering.⁵⁴⁸ The hearers would likely keep this nuance of victory and vindication in mind as they move forward in hearing the contents of the heavenly hymn. What would be impossible for them to overlook is how the tone of Revelation 19 is already drastically different from

⁵⁴³ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 551, notes 'while the blood of God's people is worthy of judgment and vindication, in the divine view all human life (and blood) is sacred and its spilling does not go unnoticed, nor does it go unpunished!'

⁵⁴⁴ Boring, *Revelation*, p. 192.

⁵⁴⁵ The hearers will soon learn that they will encounter this term three more times (vv. 3, 4, 6). Wall, *Revelation*, p. 219, notes that the hymns which introduce chapter 19 parallel the commencement found at the blast of the seventh trumpet (11.15-18). He points out that both the hymns and the commencement involve a multitude of loud voices (11.15; 19.1, 6) led by twenty-four elders (11.16; 19.4). The worship is 'theocentric' (11.17; 19.1) and comes from 'both small and great' (11.18; 19.5) because God's wrath is executed (11.18; 19.2). This parallel shows God's total triumph through the seventh bowl, which completes the judgments. It provides 'hope that in the imminent future the returning Lamb will dispense eschatological blessings to those invited to his wedding feast'.

⁵⁴⁶ Leithart, *Revelation 12-22*, p. 254, notes that the expressions of joy here are the result of God's justice. He concludes that 'if there is no theodicy, there is no praise'. He uses the word 'theodicy' to describe God's justice in response to injustice, which results in the praise of the multitudes. Joy is the result of justice accomplished or justice that will be accomplished.

⁵⁴⁷ Koester, *Revelation*, p. 726.

⁵⁴⁸ Pattemore, *The People of God in the Apocalypse*, pp. 105-106, suggests that the celebration over the fall of Babylon is also a celebration that the martyrs have been vindicated. God has fulfilled their prayer from 6.10.

Revelation 18. Whereas chapter 18 would have reminded the hearers of a funeral dirge, Revelation 19 is a celebration! The hearers would perceive that the cause for such joy is the demonstration of God's faithfulness and justice toward the multitude who has suffered at the hands of Babylon.

As the hearers begin to hear the content in the heavenly hymn, it is confirmed that the multitude's joy is, in fact, the result of God's faithfulness in overcoming Babylon with his justice (vv. 2-3).⁵⁴⁹ Perhaps the hearers would note that the joy of the multitude is associated with God's justice in three ways. (1) The *ὅτι* clause appears in v. 2 and explains why 'salvation and glory and power' belong to God. It is *ὅτι* ('because') his judgments are true and just. Hearing this would likely cause the hearers to recall the altar in 16.7, which says the same thing. If the hearers have associated the voice from the altar in 16.7 with those who have been associated around the altar (6.9-11), then this affirmation would recall the souls under the altar in 6.9-11 and their cry for vindication.⁵⁵⁰ The hearers would think that the heavenly praise and joy is because God has vindicated the suffering of the souls under the altar. (2) Another *ὅτι* clause appears in v. 2 explaining why salvation and power belong to God. It is *ὅτι* ('because') he has judged the great prostitute. In doing so, God has set forth the supreme example of his faithfulness, which is a cause for the multitude's rejoicing and elation. (3) The connective conjunction *καὶ* ('and') in v. 2 tells us that the multitude rejoices because God has *ἐξεδίκησεν* ('avenged') on the great prostitute the blood of his servants. Such a statement would be thunderous to the hearers! They would recognize that the only other place in the entire narrative where a form of *ἐξεδίκησεν* is used is in 6.10 – in relation to the cry of the souls under the altar! This would stand as a clear sign to them that God's action in judging the prostitute is his vindicative action in responding to the soul's plea. Thus, the hearers would understand that God's faithfulness in hearing and responding to the

⁵⁴⁹ The explanation for why the saints praise is supplied in vv. 2-3, beginning with two *ὅτι* clauses: (1) 'for' his judgments are true and just and (2) 'for' he has judged the great prostitute.

⁵⁵⁰ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 554, suggests the hearers might understand that some of the voices heard earlier in the Apocalypse are now part of the heavenly crowd. Their presence among the heavenly crowd 'underscores these essential characteristics of God, that even though his judgments may seem to be delayed or absent altogether, they are true and righteous nevertheless'. Koester, *Revelation*, p. 735, understands 19.1-4 as God's action in turning evil against itself to destroy it and to deliver those who suffer. God has acted for 'as long as God delays judgment, the innocent continue to suffer'. Yet, here, Koester shows that God acts definitively as is proved by the smoke that comes up from Babylon 'forever and ever', meaning no revival of its oppression (v. 3).

cry of the innocent sufferer – for the blood which they shed and the blood which the prostitute had become drunk on – is cause for exclaiming ‘Hallelujah’!

As the hearers continue forward, they learn that, in addition to (1) the multitude, there are two other groups that give praise to God: (2) the twenty-four elders/the four living creatures and (3) a voice from the throne (vv. 4-5). Together these groups make up the second image in Revelation 19 that is relevant to suffering and theodicy. Perhaps the hearers would notice that these groups, together with the multitude, praise God for his justice drawing a contrast with the three groups who mourn the fall of Babylon: (1) the kings of the earth (18.9), (2) the merchants (18.11), and (3) the shipmasters (18.17). Seeing that three groups have mourned over Babylon’s destruction and now three groups rejoice over Babylon’s destruction would be significant. It suggests that God, and the people of God, have conquered evil and have overcome suffering.⁵⁵¹

As the hearers move to v. 6, they learn that John hears the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and the sound of many peals of thunder, which cries ‘Hallelujah’. This exhortation is the third image relevant for suffering and theodicy in chapter 19. At this point, careful hearers would note three hortatory⁵⁵² subjunctive verbs in the exhortation that follows:

χαίρωμεν καὶ ἀγαλλιῶμεν
καὶ δώσωμεν τὴν δόξαν αὐτῷ,
ὅτι ἦλθεν ὁ γάμος τοῦ ἀρνίου
καὶ ἡ γυνὴ αὐτοῦ ἠτοίμασεν ἑαυτήν.

Let us rejoice and exult
and give him the glory,
for the marriage of the Lamb has come,
and his Bride has made herself ready.

These verbs are *χαίρωμεν* (‘let us rejoice’), *ἀγαλλιῶμεν* (‘let us exult’), and *δώσωμεν* (‘let us give’). The first verb, *χαίρωμεν*, would recall a number of places in the FG where it has been used: (1) John the Baptist’s description of joy that takes place when the voice of the bridegroom is heard by the friend of the bridegroom (3.29), (2) the rejoicing that takes place at the future

⁵⁵¹ See Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 476; Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 667.

⁵⁵² Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, p. 464, notes that the hortatory subjunctive is different than a simple command. A hortatory subjunctive urges the hearers to unite with the speaker in a course of action which the speaker has already deemed to be the correct course of action.

harvest (4.36), (3) Abraham's gladness to see Jesus' day (8.56), (4) Jesus' rejoicing in knowing that the disciples would see Lazarus raised from the dead (11.15), and (5) the disciples' rejoicing upon seeing Jesus resurrected (20.20). Moreover, *χαίρωμεν* would also remind of Rev. 11.10 where a form of *χαίρω* is used when the earth dwellers rejoice over the two witnesses. The second hortatory subjunctive, *ἀγαλλιῶμεν* ('let us exult'), would, like *χαίρωμεν*, recall Abraham's rejoicing to see Jesus' day in Jn 8.56. Finally, the third hortatory subjunctive, *δώσωμεν* ('let us give'), would remind of the activity of the four creatures around the throne who give glory, honor, and thanks to God (4.9). It would also remind of those who do not repent and their refusal to give glory to God (16.9).⁵⁵³ Granted these three verbs would remind of the aforementioned instances, the hearers would find Christological and eschatological nuance behind how they are used in this exhortation (v. 7). For here, they would understand that suffering and justice converge with Christological and eschatological themes in this exhortation owing to the fact that these verbs are used in the Apocalypse in relation to suffering (the earth dwellers rejoicing over the two witnesses in 11.10) and justice (the earth dwellers who refuse to repent in 16.9). Thus, the hearers would likely discern that this exhortation to rejoice is tied to how God has handled the multitudes' suffering, bringing them justice through Jesus Christ.

The next thing that the hearers encounter is wedding imagery which emerges as the fourth image relevant to suffering and theodicy in chapter 19. The hearers learn that the exhortation to exult God and give him glory is also associated with the marriage of the Lamb (v. 7).⁵⁵⁴ The bride clothes herself with fine linen, bright and pure, which is the righteous deeds of the saints, and a voice⁵⁵⁵ tells John to write, 'Blessed are those who are *κεκλημένοι* ('called') to the marriage supper of the Lamb' (v. 9). The hearers would take special notice of the word *καλέω*,

⁵⁵³ For the treatment of how the hortatory subjunctive would be heard by the Johannine community, see Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, pp. 561-62.

⁵⁵⁴ Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, p. 235, points out the contrast between the bride and the prostitute and suggests that the conflicting images show a dichotomy of choice: follow the Lamb and participate in the Lamb's wedding feast or follow the beast and end up like Babylon. Furthermore, the people of God as God's bride would not be an image that the hearers would be unfamiliar with as it is commonly used in the OT (Isa. 54.1-8; Jer. 31.32; Ezek. 16.8-14; Hos. 1-3). Additionally, in the FG Jesus refers to himself as the bridegroom (Jn 3.29). None of this would be lost on the hearers. See Rossing, *The Choice Between Two Cities*, p. 1, who begins her monograph by suggesting that Babylon and Jerusalem are archetypal images (prostitute and bride) that show the dichotomy of the Empire's decay and the 'ultimate' blessing of God's people.

⁵⁵⁵ Ladd, *Revelation of John*, pg. 250, notes that the voice is possibly the angel of 17.1. Contra Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, pp. 567-71, who suggests that the hearers would understand John's intent to worship the speaker to be partly because of the ambiguity surrounding the identity of the speaker. Though the speaker is not immediately identified, eventually he identifies himself as a fellow servant with John (19.10).

recalling how it is used in Johannine literature. In the FG, it is a term associated with following Jesus (Jn 1.42) and believing in Jesus (Jn 2.2, 11).⁵⁵⁶ Hence, it is likely the hearers would associate those ‘called’ as being those who follow Jesus. Thus, they would understand that those ‘called’ to the marriage supper are the same as those who follow the Lamb wherever he goes (14.4). What the hearers would also recall is that *καλέω* is used elsewhere in the Apocalypse in relation to those who conquer suffering with the Lamb – those called faithful (17.14). Hence, the hearers would not only suspect that those called to the marriage supper are those who follow the Lamb wherever he goes, but also those faithful who conquer suffering with the Lamb.

Next, the hearers notice that John falls down at the feet of the one who has spoken to him in order to worship him. But the speaker rebukes John for it, informing John that he is a *σύνδουλός* (‘fellow servant’) and one of his *ἀδελφῶν* (‘brothers’) who holds the *μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ* (‘testimony of Jesus’). The speaker exhorts him to worship God and states that ‘the testimony of Jesus is the Spirit of prophecy’ (v. 10). John’s interaction with the speaker is the fifth image relevant to suffering and theodicy in chapter 19 for a number of reasons. (1) The hearers would not miss how the speaker has identified himself: a *σύνδουλός* with John and one of his fellow *ἀδελφῶν*. The only other place, up to this point, where the vocabulary *σύνδουλος* and *ἀδελφός* occur together is in 6.11. Here the souls under the altar are told that they must rest until the number of their fellow servants and brothers should be complete. Such a similarity would thunder to the hearers that the speaker is one of the souls under the altar who has been slain!⁵⁵⁷ (2) In further confirmation of the speaker’s identity, the hearers learn that it is the *μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ* (‘testimony of Jesus’)⁵⁵⁸ which makes this speaker a fellow servant with John and his brothers. The hearers would know by now that the testimony of Jesus is associated with suffering throughout the

⁵⁵⁶ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, pp. 567-68, notes a correlation between the wedding at Cana and the marriage supper of the Lamb. The disciples were invited to the wedding at Cana (Jn 2.11), and it is here they first believed (2.11). Hence, the term *καλέω*, as it corresponds to John 2 and Revelation 19, is a term of discipleship, suggesting that those at the wedding supper of the Lamb are those who believe in Jesus.

⁵⁵⁷ See Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 570.

⁵⁵⁸ If *μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ* is a subjective genitive, then it refers to the witness that Jesus maintained which is now maintained by his followers. Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 270, takes this position as does Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 486. If *μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ* is understood as an objective genitive, then it means that Jesus gave the testimony to believers and they, in turn, gave it to others. Knowing that John is often ambiguous, it suffices to say that one can be considered without dismissing the other. See Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 947, who notes the potential of the genitival phrase being understood both subjectively and objectively, ‘a subjective genitive connotes the idea that all true prophecy has its origin in the words and acts of Jesus; an objective genitive conveys the notion that all true prophecy manifests itself in testimony to Jesus’.

narrative (1.9; 11.7; 12.11, 17).⁵⁵⁹ Thus, it would be clear to the hearers that this speaker is a fellow sufferer. (3) Whatever the hearers understand the speaker to mean when he says ἡ γὰρ μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ ἐστὶν τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς προφητείας ('the testimony of Jesus is the Spirit of prophecy'), they learn the Spirit is closely associated with the testimony of Jesus and the suffering that comes along because it. Perhaps they would understand this saying to suggest that those who maintain the witness that Jesus maintained, both in word and in suffering, are empowered by the Spirit who has been sent out into the earth (5.6).

Revelation 19.11-21.8

The hearers come to 19.11 and encounter another Καὶ εἶδον which signals a new section in the text.⁵⁶⁰ The hearers are again met with the image of a white horse, and they discover that the one sitting on it is called Faithful and True. This is the sixth image in Revelation 19 that is relevant to suffering and theodicy. The hearers learn that in righteousness the rider judges and makes war.⁵⁶¹ The color of the horse, white, would stand out.⁵⁶² Up to this point, white has been used to symbolize the purity of Jesus (1.14; 14.14) as well as purity that has been achieved by those who follow Jesus with perseverance amidst trials (3.4-5). Moreover, white is associated with vindication, particularly the vindication of the saints who have persevered (2.17; 3.4-5, 18; 6.11; 7.9, 13; 19.14).⁵⁶³ Here, the idea of vindication would be intensified by the rider's name, πιστὸς καὶ ἀληθινός ('Faithful and True').⁵⁶⁴ Vindication is further emphasized by the fact that the rider

⁵⁵⁹ See also John (1.2, 9), Antipas (2.13), the souls under the altar (6.9-11), the two witnesses (11.3, 7), and the 144,000 (14.4).

⁵⁶⁰ Archer, *I Was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day*, p. 267, points out that seven Καὶ εἶδον constructions will be encountered from this point forward which will lead the hearers to the end (19.11-16, 17-18, 19-21; 20.1-3, 11-15; 21.1-22.6a). The first event which is described here – Jesus on the white horse – is the 'catalyst' for the other events that succeed it. Wall, *Revelation*, p. 227, points out that these events are not to be understood chronologically in the historical sense. Rather, they are to be understood as aspects of a single event.

⁵⁶¹ See Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World*, p. 105, who suggests that the coming of the justice Christ brings in the Parousia is proof of his loyalty to those who have kept his witness.

⁵⁶² An initial question the hearers would likely have is whether or not the white horse rider of 19.11 is the same as 6.2. Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 574, points out that the first white horse rider in 6.2 has a crown which is reminiscent of the overcomers in 2.10; 3.11; 4.4, 10. He maintains the hearers would likely understand the white horse rider of 19.10 to be connected with this overcoming and thus associate the white horse rider of 6.2 with 19.11. Contra Reddish, *Revelation*, pp. 366-67, who sees a difference in the white horse rider of chapter six and this horse and rider in 19.11. He notes that the rider in chapter six represents military victory and is one of the plagues upon the earth while this rider is Christ. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 950, notes that while the white horse rider in chapter six is most likely a parody of the rider in 19.11-21, the colors do still suggest the same thing – holiness and vindication through victory (though it is a parody of what comes in 19.11-21).

⁵⁶³ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 950; Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 488.

⁵⁶⁴ Perhaps this unique name would cause the hearers to recall an instance in 3 Maccabees where the writer places his hope in God's faithfulness, saying καὶ δὴ πιστὸς εἶ καὶ ἀληθινός ('indeed you are faithful and true') (2.11).

on the white horse κρίνει καὶ πολεμεῖ ('judges and makes war'). The present tense⁵⁶⁵ used in both of these verbs (κρίνει καὶ πολεμεῖ) would likely be perceived to convey a continuous sense. Thus the tense suggests that justice and vindication are an ongoing characteristic of the one who is called Faithful and True. This ongoing justice would encourage the hearers as it reinforces the notion that the eschatological justice of God, which has been promised to the sufferers, has arrived. This justice takes place in the form of 'war'. The hearers would not be unfamiliar with this terminology. Already 'war' has been associated with the Lamb and those who overcome (2.16; 17.14). Thus, the hearers would see the coming of the one called Faithful and True as a salvific act which grants the sufferers their due justice.

The description of the one on the white horse continues to unfold and the hearers learn that he is clothed in a robe dipped in blood! And the name by which he is called is 'The Word of God' (v. 13). This robe would be the seventh image in Revelation 19 that is relevant to suffering and theodicy. Once again, the hearers encounter blood language which they are quite familiar with by this point. It would likely remind the hearers of a number of things from within the narrative: (1) the death of Jesus wherein, through his blood, he demonstrated his love and loosed his people from their sins (1.5), (2) the death of the saints who have followed the Lamb faithfully (5.9; 6.9-11; 7.14; 12.11; 16.6; 17.6; 18.24; 19.2), and (3) the judgments of God and the Lamb who makes war (8.7, 8; 11.6; 16.3, 4; 17.14).⁵⁶⁶ Such imagery portrays Jesus' righteous judgment, made possible by the laying down of his own life as a suffering sacrifice.⁵⁶⁷ What would be peculiar to the hearers is that the white horse rider's robe is βεβαμμένον ('dipped') in blood. The only other time the verb βάπτω is used in the Johannine corpus is when Jesus dips the morsel of bread into the wine and gives it to Judas prior to Judas's betrayal (Jn 19.26). Perhaps

⁵⁶⁵ F.J. Ruiz-Ortiz, "Battle is over, raise we the cry of victory". Study of Revelation 19:11-21', *Isidorianum* 29.2. (2020), p. 42, notes the importance of the verbal sequencing in 19.11-21. He points out that most of the narration in 19.11-21 is in the aorist tense, though the nature of the white horse rider and his armies are in the present or imperfect tenses. Moreover, appearance of the rider, as in v. 15, utilizes the future tense as well as the subjunctive mood. He surmises that in this verbal sequencing 'John involves the whole history and expresses that God reaches all time'.

⁵⁶⁶ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 578.

⁵⁶⁷ Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things*, p. 176, suggests that the imagery of the white horse rider is similar to the imagery in 5.5-6 where John hears that the Lion has conquered and learns that the fulfillment of this conquering is through the Lamb. He posits that the great battle in 19.13 echoes Isaiah 63 wherein God treads the people in his anger. Yet, in 19.13 John sees the fulfillment of the great battle taking place through the divine warrior, Christ, who wears garments soaked in his own blood that he shed for the nations.

the hearers would likely understand Jesus' righteous judgment in connection with his betrayal which was part of his suffering.⁵⁶⁸

In v. 14, the hearers learn that the rider on the white horse is not alone. He is followed by the armies of heaven, the eighth image in Revelation 19 that is relevant to suffering and theodicy. Those in this army are arrayed in white linen and they are riding white horses. It is quite possible that the hearers would consider the army in white linen to be those saints in the narrative who have followed the Lord wherever he has gone (14.4) and who have made war with the Lamb – those called and faithful and chosen (17.14). Perhaps they would perceive the white linen to be wedding garments, discerning that these garments are identical to how the Lamb's bride has clothed herself (19.8).⁵⁶⁹ The hearers would also be mindful that that white linen has been associated with faithful saints (3.5) and the souls under the altar (6.11). Thus, seeing an army in white wedding garments, following Jesus, would likely suggest that the faithful who have suffered with Jesus now reign victorious with Jesus.⁵⁷⁰ Perhaps this notion of reigning with Jesus after having suffered would remind the hearers of 1.5-6, where faithful witness results in death only to result in reigning in victory.

In v. 15, the hearers learn that a sharp sword comes from the mouth of the one riding on the white horse with which he strikes down the nations – the ninth image relevant to suffering and theodicy in chapter 19. It is revealed to the hearers that the rider will rule them with a rod of iron and that he will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. Two details here communicate divine retribution upon God's enemies: (1) The rider on the white horse uses the sword from his mouth to *πατάξει* ('strike') down the nations. The only other time the verb *πατάσσω* ('strike') is used in the narrative is in Rev. 11.6 wherein the two witnesses strike the earth with plague. In recalling this, the hearers would perceive retributive punishment.⁵⁷¹ (2) The

⁵⁶⁸ See Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, pp. 578-79. Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things*, p. 177, notes that 'Christ can confront the nations because he has suffered for the nations'.

⁵⁶⁹ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 580.

⁵⁷⁰ Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things*, p. 177, suggests that the white garments represent those whom Christ has purified and are, in turn, summoned to a battle of faithfulness which is resistance to evil. It is through their faithfulness to Christ that they conquer evil. Thus, Koester concludes that the 'militancy' described here is faithful resistance to evil. 'When the wrath of God is unleashed, it is Christ, not his followers, who carries it out.'

⁵⁷¹ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 581, notes that not only will the white horse rider strike down the nations, but he will also *ποιμανεῖ* (shepherd) them. The hearers might understand the action of shepherding to offer hope that, in the context of the return of Jesus where Jesus judges and makes war in righteousness, there is still hope for the conversion of the nations.

hearers would notice that the rider on the white horse will *πατεῖ* ('tread') the wine press of the wrath of God the Almighty. This language is not unfamiliar. It appears first in 11.2 wherein the nations 'trample' the holy city for forty-two months. Now the white horse rider tramples them! Moreover, the hearers would recall 14.19-20 where the winepress is 'trodden' and blood flows from it as high as the horse's bridle – an image filled with suffering. Thus, the various places 'tread' language is used in the narrative converge in 19.15, suggesting that the white horse rider has dramatically and decisively turned the fate around for the suffering people of God through his justice. Those who have trampled are now trampled and those who have caused suffering now suffer⁵⁷² at the judgment of he who has 'King of kings and Lord of lords' written on his robe and thigh (v. 17).⁵⁷³

Following this, an angel standing in the sun calls with a loud voice to all the birds in the air to gather at the supper of God and to eat the flesh of kings, captains, mighty men, horses and riders, and men who are both free and slave and small and great (v. 18). This supper imagery serves as the tenth image in chapter 19 that is relevant to suffering and theodicy. As the hearers consider the invited guests for the supper, they would likely be reminded of the list in Ezek. 39.18, 20: 'you shall eat the flesh of the mighty, and drink the blood of the princes for the earth ... and you shall be filled at my table with horses and charioteers, with mighty men and all kinds of warriors'. The hearers would notice that the list in 19.18 is more comprehensive than the one in Ezekiel 38, underscoring that no one escapes the judgment of God.⁵⁷⁴ Moreover, the supper motif would likely recall the marriage supper of the Lamb (19.9), causing the hearers to suspect that this feast is the antithesis of such. While the marriage supper gives life, this meal will turn into death! While the righteous feast, the wicked will be feasted upon!⁵⁷⁵ This ironic imagery points to explicit justice for the righteous and unequivocal judgment upon the wicked.

⁵⁷² Koester, *Revelation*, p. 766, notes that 'those who perpetrated the violence now suffer it themselves'.

⁵⁷³ For more on the thigh inscription, see J.R. Edwards, 'The Rider on the White Horse, the Thigh Inscription, and Apollo: Revelation 19:16', *JBL* 137.2 (2018), pp. 519-36, who suggests that the thigh inscription is a response to the inscription on the forehead of the great harlot. Edwards argues that the thigh image would recall the Apollo cult. This image is perfected in Jesus Christ.

⁵⁷⁴ Koester, *Revelation*, pp. 759-60, points out that the expanded list in Revelation includes the whole of society, maintaining that 'small and great' refers to low and high social classes. In 6.15, these groups were terrified by the sixth seal asking, 'who can stand?'. In 19.18, they ask no questions but persist in their rebellion to Christ and are judged.

⁵⁷⁵ Reddish, *Revelation*, p. 370 says, 'Like the redeemed who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb, the wicked of the earth will also participate in a great feast. The difference is that they will be the main course!'

But the scene does not end there. The hearers encounter the beast and the kings of the earth, and their armies, as they gather to make war against the rider on the white horse and his army. This battle is the eleventh and final image in chapter 19 that pertains to suffering and theodicy. The beast and the false prophet are captured and thrown into the lake of fire. The rest are slain by the sword that comes from the mouth of the rider on the white horse. The birds eat their flesh (vv. 19-21). While the hearers would observe a number of things in this scene, they would not miss the fact that no battle actually takes place, yet the wicked are completely outdone. The sulfur and fire, which are the fate of the beast and false prophet, would remind of 14.9-10 wherein those who followed the beast suffered the punishment of these very things. Now the beast and false prophet suffer the punishment of the wicked who followed them!

As the hearers come to chapter 20, they encounter another *Καὶ εἶδον* which marks a new transition in John's vision.⁵⁷⁶ The first image they observe in this chapter that is relevant to suffering and theodicy is an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand a key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. The angel seizes the dragon – who is also called the ancient serpent, the Devil, and Satan – and he is bound for a thousand years. Moreover, the dragon is thrown into a pit which is sealed over him so that he would not deceive the nations until the thousand years is up (vv. 2-3). This imagery would cause the hearers to recall 12.9, as it provides an explicit description of the cosmic force behind the people of God's suffering. So far, this cosmic force has attempted to destroy the faithful (12.4, 13). This activity is consistent with the description of the Devil in other places of Johannine literature where the Devil is described as 'a murderer' (Jn 8.44) and diabolical (1 Jn 3.8-9). The hearers would likely observe how the dragon's fate is framed, portraying its defeat:

καὶ ἐκράτησεν τὸν δράκοντα, ὁ ὄφις ὁ ἀρχαῖος, ὃς ἐστὶν Διάβολος καὶ ὁ Σατανᾶς, καὶ ἔδησεν αὐτὸν χίλια ἔτη.

And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years.

The verbs *ἐκράτησεν* ('seized') and *ἔδησεν* ('bound') surround the four-fold description of the cosmic enemy. It might not be going too far to suggest that this arrangement of verbs would

⁵⁷⁶ Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, pp. 243-44, sees four sections in chapter 20: vv. 1-3, vv. 4-6, v. 7-10, vv. 11-15. He suggests that chapter 20, and the millennium in particular, ties together the loose ends of the plot. This includes details such as how long until the people of God are vindicated (6.10) and the fact that the people of God will have a place on Christ's throne as promised in 3.21.

signal to the hearers the dragon's dismal fate. God is taking vengeance upon the dragon for, as the hearers next observe, the dragon is bound with a chain and detained for a thousand years. Perhaps this detainment would cause the hearers to be reminded of the church of Smyrna's plight (2.8-11), the first place in the narrative where prison language is used. In 2.8-11, the Devil is throwing some of them into *prison* for *ten days*. Now, God is throwing the Devil into the *abyss* for *one thousand years*! In both instances the verb βάλλω ('throw') is used to describe the activity of the one imprisoning the other.⁵⁷⁷ This precise language would signal the reversal of fate and vengeance. The hearers would understand this as God's justice for the suffering which finally comes at the end of the narrative. God, the righteous judge, throws the Devil into the ἄβυσσον ('pit')⁵⁷⁸ for one thousand years in return for the ten days the Devil had thrown some of the Smyrnaeans into φυλακὴν ('prison').⁵⁷⁹ The hearers would discern that, while God's vindication has not been immediate, it has certainly arrived and in a great way! The hearers might well consider that the ten days of persecution for the church in Smyrna pales in comparison to the thousand years that the Devil is bound.

Following the dragon's imprisonment, the hearers encounter the second image that pertains to suffering and theodicy in this chapter. This image is made up of thrones and those to whom the authority to judge was given (v. 4).⁵⁸⁰ Within the same image are the souls of those who had been beheaded⁵⁸¹ for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God. These are those who have

⁵⁷⁷ See Menzies, *The End of History*, pp. 61-66, whose Pentecostal reading of the binding of Satan closely parallels the proclamation of the gospel of the kingdom, suggesting an inaugurated eschatology. As a Pentecostal, he hears the binding of Satan as suggesting the necessity for a bold proclamation of the gospel.

⁵⁷⁸ It would not be inconsistent to compare the ἄβυσσος to a prison as the ἄβυσσος is regarded as a prison for punished, cosmic beings in apocalyptic Judaism. Its associations with immense depth and dead, hostile powers would likely have the effect of making it more frightening than a φυλακή. See O. Böcher, 'ἄβυσσος', *EDNT*, I, p. 4.

⁵⁷⁹ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, pp. 596-97, notes that 'the hearers would find poetic justice in the fact that the Devil who would cast some of those in the church in Smyrna into jail for ten days (2.10), is now being cast into the Abyss'.

⁵⁸⁰ Leithart, *Revelation 12-22*, pp. 312-15, notes that this image is the last explicit mention of the martyrs to appear in the narrative. When martyrs first enter the narrative, they are crying out under the altar (6.9-11). In 20.4, judgment has been passed in their favor. They now live 'enthroned' and 'fully human'. 'The new creation is not fully realized until the saints come to their thrones, sharing not only in the suffering witness but in the glory of Jesus.' For Leithart, the enthronement means being fully human and glorified in the likeness and image of God.

⁵⁸¹ Pattemore, *The People of God in the Apocalypse*, pp. 109-10, asks why John uses the verb πελεκίζω ('behead') instead of the word σφάζω ('slaughter'), considering there is a lack of precedence for describing Christian martyrs this way. Pattemore concludes that the change places the attention on literal martyrs and shifts attention to the 'life situation' the audience was familiar with under the Roman Empire. Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 601, suggests that the shift from σφάζω to πελεκίζω suggests an intensification of the visual nature of those who have been slaughtered.

not worshipped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their hands. John notes that they reign with Christ for one thousand years (v. 4):

Καὶ εἶδον θρόνους καὶ ἐκάθισαν ἐπ’ αὐτοὺς καὶ κρίμα ἐδόθη αὐτοῖς, καὶ τὰς ψυχὰς τῶν πεπελεκισμένων διὰ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ καὶ διὰ τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ οἵτινες οὐ προσεκύνησαν τὸ θηρίον οὐδὲ τὴν εἰκόνα αὐτοῦ καὶ οὐκ ἔλαβον τὸ χάραγμα ἐπὶ τὸ μέτωπον καὶ ἐπὶ τὴν χεῖρα αὐτῶν. καὶ ἔζησαν καὶ ἐβασίλευσαν μετὰ τοῦ Χριστοῦ χίλια ἔτη.

Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.

Two peculiar things in this imagery would likely strike the hearers. The first peculiar thing is the mention of those on the thrones. Such thrones would cause the hearers to recall the promise Jesus makes to the Laodicean church – those who conquer will join him on his throne (3.21). The second peculiar thing is the mention of ‘souls’. The appearance of the souls would take the hearers back to the first time ‘souls’ is mentioned in the narrative, where they met the souls under the altar (6.9-11). If the *καὶ* that precedes *τὰς ψυχὰς* is understood expegetically in v. 4, then it would serve as an explanatory ‘even’. Such a use of *καὶ* suggests that those who are beheaded *are* the ones who reign on the throne. The hearers now understand that the souls under the altar have become those who reign on the throne with Jesus, as promised to those who conquer in 3.21.⁵⁸² Once again, vindication, though delayed, has come in a great way. Thus, the hearers would associate this vindication with the one thousand years. Whatever the hearers would understand the one thousand years to be, they would discern it to be synonymous with the

⁵⁸² Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, p. 246, takes the reference of the souls who have been beheaded to be the souls in 6.9.

faithfulness of God who has vindicated the suffering of the people of God,⁵⁸³ inaugurating their eschatological reign.⁵⁸⁴

As the hearers come to v. 5, they learn that the rest of the dead do not come to life until the thousand years is over. The first resurrection becomes the third image in this chapter that is relevant for suffering and theodicy. The hearers learn the first resurrection would likely to be their resurrection – the resurrection of the righteous who have been faithful to Jesus amidst their suffering of which they are a part! The hearers learn that the second death has no power over those who are part of the first resurrection. Those who are part of the first resurrection will be priests with God and Christ and will reign with him a thousand years. In hearing that the second death has no power over those who are part of the first resurrection, the hearers would recall God's promise to the church in Smyrna in – 'the one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death' (2.11). Perhaps the hearers would find it peculiar that another instance occurs that causes them to recall the church of Smyrna. Such an occurrence offers them more confirmation that the one thousand years is to be heard in connection with the ten days of suffering that those in the church of Smyrna experienced. Be that as it may, the thousand years is mentioned a fifth time in just six verses, emphasizing the victory of those who have been faithful to Jesus. Perhaps this

⁵⁸³ There are various ways that the 'millennium' is viewed such as amillennialism, historic premillennialism, dispensational premillennialism, and postmillennialism. Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, pp. 260-63, dissuades his readers from attempting to interpret the significance of the one thousand years in any of these ways. He suggests that the purpose of the one thousand years is to show that 'the age of the martyrs' would be followed by a longer period of Christian ascendancy in which the martyrs who died would live and reign. Swete's understanding coincides with the idea of how the one thousand years contrasts with the ten days of imprisonment those from the church in Smyrna face at the hands of the Devil. It seems best for this reading to discern the significance of the one thousand years to be a sign of God's faithfulness that portrays God's vengeance on evil and his commitment to those who have suffered through that evil.

⁵⁸⁴ Boring, *Revelation*, p. 204, suggests that the one thousand years is 'intensely focused' on one thing and that is to portray 'the eschatological reign of the martyr church'. Boxall, *The Revelation of St John*, pp. 282, suggests that the one-thousand-year period portrays what the earth will look like when it is not ruled by oppressors. Hence, it is a world free from those who have cause God's faithful to suffer. Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, p. 108, points out that John has in mind the Jewish apocalyptic tradition and the notion of a temporary messianic reign on the earth before the final judgment and new creation (2 Bar. 40.3; Ezra 7.28-29; b.Sanh. 99.a). Bauckham suggests that once this idea is taken literally, it becomes impossible to understand within the narrative. John expected the suffering martyrs to be vindicated and the millennium is a concept used to portray this victory of the martyrs over the beast who has been the cause of their suffering throughout the narrative. For more on an approach to the one thousand years that reaches beyond the millennial debates, see M.H. Pohlmann, 'Revelation 20:1-10 within the overall paradigm theological thrust of John's Apocalypse', *In die Skriflig* 53.1 (2019), pp. 1-8, who suggests that the millennial debates have 'robbed' eschatological discussions of their focus, which includes the various aspects of Jesus' work including his triumphal return. He suggests that 20.1-10 is integrated with the entirety of the Apocalypse and should not be treated as an 'addendum'. Pohlmann explores the structure of Revelation and then sets 20.1-10 against the background of Psalm 90.4 to determine that the one thousand years should be understood to portray the Christian's triumph despite cosmic opposition – an opposition which will eventually see its end.

victory would remind of 1.5-6, where the churches are told that they are made a kingdom and priests because of the suffering of Jesus. Thus, this section is the realization of such victory.

No sooner than the hearers learn about the reign of the overcomers do they learn that Satan is released from prison⁵⁸⁵ when the thousand years have ended (vv. 7-11). Satan's release is the fourth image relevant to theodicy and suffering in this chapter. Upon his release, Satan comes out to deceive the nations, Gog and Magog,⁵⁸⁶ and to gather them for battle. They march up over the earth and surround the camp of the saints and the beloved city. Yet, fire comes down from heaven and consumes them. The Devil is ἐβλήθη ('thrown') into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet have been. The hearers learn that the evil triumvirate will be tormented day and night forever and ever. Whatever the hearers would think of this graphic scene, they would not fail to notice that the Devil is ἐβλήθη ('thrown') into the lake of fire. This term would likely remind of 20.3, where Satan was thrown into the abyss. It would also likely remind of 12.9 where Satan was thrown down to the earth. The hearers would observe a progression: first Satan is thrown down from heaven to earth (12.9). After, from the earth to the abyss (20.4). Last, from the abyss to the lake of fire and sulfur (20.10). Perhaps this progression would suggest to the hearers that God has been progressively working throughout the entire narrative to bring due judgment upon the Devil. The hearers would understand that God has not been passive toward their suffering, nor has he been absent amidst their suffering. His plan has been gradually at work. Moreover, the hearers would find it interesting that the evil triumvirate is tormented *ἡμέρας καὶ νυκτὸς* ('day and night'), forever and ever in the lake of fire (v. 10). This language is not unfamiliar to them. The four living creatures worship around the throne 'day and night' (4.8) and those who come out of the great tribulation serve God before the throne 'day and night' (7.15). Moreover, the devil has accused God's people 'day and night' (12.10). These ideas would converge in 20.10, suggesting a reversal of eternal fates. The one who accused God's

⁵⁸⁵ Here the place of Satan's binding, the abyss, is called a *φυλακή* ('prison'). This attests that the abyss functioned as a prison, though much more severe than just a prison. Osborne, 'Theodicy in the Apocalypse', p. 70, notes that Rev. 20.1-10 is the 'culmination' of theodicy in the Apocalypse. He sees Satan's release from prison and the nations' swift alignment with him – after reigning with Christ one thousand years – an element of the story that justifies the great white throne judgment and the casting of Satan and his followers into the lake of fire. Hence, whatever the hearers would think of the release of Satan, perhaps they would see it as useful in regard to theodicy.

⁵⁸⁶ Gog and Magog would likely remind of Ezekiel 38-39 where Gog is a person and Magog is the land over which he rules. Here it seems that John has adapted it, wherein Gog and Magog are symbolic of nations in rebellion against God. Such symbolism would likely be heard by the hearers as depicting God's overthrow of evil nations. See Reddish, *Revelation*, pp. 386-87.

people ‘day and night’ now becomes the eternally condemned. Such a twist of fortunes emphasizes the vindication of those who have suffered at the hands of the evil triumvirate.

Following this scene, the hearers encounter the fifth image relevant to theodicy and suffering in this chapter. This is a great white throne and the one seated on it. The dead, both small and great, are standing before the throne and the books are opened, including the book of life, by which the dead are judged (vv. 11-12). The hearers would find it significant that the throne is white. So far, white has been the color of Jesus (1.14; 14.14; 19.11). It has also been the color of the people of God who have suffered and have been vindicated by Jesus (3.4-5, 18; 6.11; 7.9, 13-14; 19.14). Thus, the throne would likely cause the hearers to anticipate further justice for God’s people as the judgment begins. In addition to this, the hearers would also have in mind that, earlier in the narrative, the souls under the altar have cried out for vindication before the throne (6.9-11). What makes this instance in vv. 11-12 unique is that these souls are not the only ones before the throne anymore. All of the dead are present. Perhaps the hearers would understand this as the final judgment and the conclusion of the sufferers’ vindication. What might the hearers think of the book of life? Given what has been said about it already in the narrative, the hearers know three things: (1) the one who overcomes will never be erased from it (3.5), (2) the book of life belongs to the Lamb who has been slaughtered from before the foundation of the world (13.8), and (3) those who are in the book of life are opposed to the beast (17.8).⁵⁸⁷ Such prior knowledge would inform the hearers that this judgment will favor those who have been faithful to Jesus in their suffering.

Following this, the hearers encounter the sixth and final image that is relevant for suffering and theodicy in this chapter: the judgment of the dead in whom the sea, Death, and Hades give up. This judgment takes place before God’s great white throne (v. 13). Death and Hades are thrown into the lake of fire,⁵⁸⁸ as are those whose names are not found in the book of life. Throughout the narrative, death has been a constant threat to God’s faithful witnesses (2.13; 6.9-11; 11.7; 12.1-6; 13.9-10). Now, death has been thrown into the lake of fire forever (v. 14). It is the death of death! In addition to death, the hearers learn that *anyone* who is not found in the Lamb’s book of life is thrown into the lake of fire (v. 15).

⁵⁸⁷ See Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 616.

⁵⁸⁸ What would the hearers think of the lake of fire and sulfur? Whatever they would think of it, it is likely they would, at minimum, understand it demonstrates that God’s justice demands that evil must be destroyed so that it cannot continue to harm God’s creation and people. See Reddish, *Revelation*, p. 391.

By the end of this section, the hearers have learned that the fate of the evil triumvirate, Death and Hades, *and* those who have identified with the beast, is the lake of fire. Here they remain day and night, forever and ever. The hearers would be aware that those who have suffered have received ultimate vindication and those who have persecuted the people of God have received due justice.

As the hearers enter chapter 21,⁵⁸⁹ they encounter another *Καὶ εἶδον* which marks yet another section of the vision. John sees a new heaven and a new earth.⁵⁹⁰ The hearers learn that the first earth has passed away and that the sea is no more (v. 1). John also sees the holy city, the New Jerusalem, coming down from heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband and a loud voice from the throne declaring that the dwelling place of God is with man (vv. 2-3). This voice⁵⁹¹ says that God will wipe every tear away from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away (v. 4). Following this, the one on the throne declares that he makes all things new (v. 5).

The first image that the hearers would find relevant to suffering and theodicy in this chapter is the sea which is no more. What might this mean?⁵⁹² Thus far, the sea in the Apocalypse has represented various things: (1) cosmic evil (12.18; 13.1; 15.2), (2) rebellious nations who cause God's people suffering (12.18; 13.1), (3) the place of the dead (20.13), (4) idolatrous trade

⁵⁸⁹ Töniste, *The Ending of the Canon*, p. 132, argues that Revelation 21-22 is not only the ending of the Apocalypse but also the ending of the canon (though not all canons place Revelation at the end, the Orthodox Tewahedo Church canon being one example). He suggests that when the Apocalypse was received it was placed at the end of a 'canonical collection'. This would impact how it was heard. 'Revelation is not only talking about the End, it *is* the end.'

⁵⁹⁰ Töniste, *The Ending of the Canon*, p. 141, points out that 21.1 echoes Isa. 65.17, which the hearers would likely hear, though the setting for Isaiah's visions is comparatively different. The setting for Isaiah's visions is 'rural' and includes animals and vineyards. The setting for John's visions, though including some of the rural imagery, is urban. Töniste posits that the idea of tending a garden has been replaced by ruling with Christ, thus in the visions to follow John departs further from the creation narrative than Isaiah.

⁵⁹¹ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 1046, suggests that the identity of this voice is either the cherubim around the throne of God or it is God, himself, speaking. A. Hoeck, 'Identifying the *Great Voice* in Rev. 21:3a', *Scripture Bulletin* 44.1 (2014), pp. 22-26, suggests quite certainly that the voice is related to one of the living creatures. Thomas, *Revelation 8-22*, p. 443, thinks it is impossible to identify the voice, but he determines it is not the voice of God.

⁵⁹² See J. Moo, 'The Sea That is No More: Revelation 21:1 and the Function of Sea Imagery in the Apocalypse of John', *NovT* 51.2 (2009), pp. 148-67, who suggests that the phrase 'the sea was no more' is better ascertained through new creation typology. Within this context, the elimination of the sea and night suggests that creation is brought beyond future threat of evil and chaos. Moo considers two paths that humankind had in the first creation: (1) to live in harmony with God or (2) ally itself with the serpent. When they opted for the latter, chaos was unleashed upon the earth, making the earth the abode of evil. 'Scripture may be largely a record of humankind opting for this latter path, but John's intent is to assure the churches that they have not been therefore abandoned to a world of sorrow, pain, and mourning.'

(18.10-19), and (5) the old creation (5.13; 7.1-3; 8.8-9; 10.2, 5-6, 8; 14.7; 16.3). While it is possible that the hearers might single one of these out, it is not impossible to think that the hearers would understand this to be a point of convergence. Here, all five of these ideas converge in the passing away of the sea. That is, there is no longer threat from any cosmic force. The rebellious nations which participated in the slave trade have met their end. Even death has passed away. This was part of the old creation wherein the people of God were sufferers.⁵⁹³ Careful hearers might further observe a chiasmic structure in vv. 1-5:

- A1 New heaven and new earth (1a)
 - B2 First heaven and earth passed away (1b)
 - C2 The sea is no more (1c)
 - D1 The New Jerusalem which is the bride (2)
 - D2 Dwelling of God with his bride (3)
 - C2 Death, sorrow, and pain is no more (4a-c)
 - B2 The former things have passed away (4d)
 - A2 All things are made new (5a)⁵⁹⁴

One particularity the hearers might observe in this chiasmic structure is the statement the sea *οὐκ ἔστιν ἔτι* ('is no more') is paired with the statement death, sorrow, and pain *οὐκ ἔστιν ἔτι* ('is no more'). This pairing would likely suggest to the hearers that the sea passing away is also the passing away of death, sorrow, and pain. Such a convergence would be an encouragement. Death, sorrow, and pain have been a constant threat to them throughout the narrative. Now, they are no more.

Along with the passing away of death, sorrow, and pain, the hearers learn that God⁵⁹⁵ *ἐξαλείψει πᾶν δάκρυον ἐκ τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν αὐτῶν* ('will wipe away every tear from their eyes').⁵⁹⁶

⁵⁹³ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, pp. 1042-43, makes these five observations about the sea and contends that all five of these observations are to be understood in the passing away of the sea.

⁵⁹⁴ See D.L. Mathewson, 'New Exodus as a Background for "The Sea Was No More" in Revelation 21.1.c', *TrinJ* 24.1 (2003), p. 245. Mathewson contends that the removal of the sea gives God's people hope because the things that threaten them are removed. Though these threatening things have caused chaos, they are 'within the sphere of God's power' and now are judged. Mathewson points out that the removal of the sea in 1c is lexically and syntactically paired with the removal of death and sorrow in this chiasmic structure.

⁵⁹⁵ Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, p. 141, sees the activity of God in personally wiping away the tears of the sufferer as most significant. 'Whereas God's acts of judgment have been only indirectly attributed to his agency, through intermediaries, here God is said to wipe away the tears from the faces of his suffering creatures.'

⁵⁹⁶ Beker, *Suffering and Hope*, p. 96, notes 'Christians must proclaim emphatically *that* the God of Scripture is not a sadist; *that* he hates suffering in his good creation; and *that* suffering is fundamentally alien to his coming kingdom'. Reddish, *Revelation*, p. 401, cites Beker, noting that 21.4 is a text which reminds the reader of this. God

This wiping away is the second image that is relevant to suffering and theodicy in chapter 21. Such language would likely recall 7.17, where God gives similar eschatological promises to those coming out of the great tribulation, promising to wipe every tear from their eyes, as well. Perhaps the hearers would notice that the one who does not ἐξαιλείψω ('wipe') the faithful's name out of the book of life will ἐξαιλείψω ('wipe') away⁵⁹⁷ their tears instead (7.16-17; 21.4).⁵⁹⁸ Both the notion of the sea passing away and the tears of the sufferer being wiped away would recall the same thing – God has brought those things which cause suffering and, suffering itself, to a total and complete end.⁵⁹⁹

With this fresh in their mind, the hearers come to v. 6 and the one on the throne announces: Γέγοναν. ἐγώ [εἰμι] τὸ Ἄλφα καὶ τὸ Ὠ, ἡ ἀρχὴ καὶ τὸ τέλος ('it is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end'). This is followed by a promise that the one who conquers will be his son (v. 7). The various classes who do not conquer will find their fate in the lake of fire (vv. 6-8). This announcement is the third image that is relevant to theodicy and suffering in this chapter. The hearers would likely find two peculiar things about it: (1) They encounter the word Γέγοναν ('it is done!') again. This would likely cause them to recall 16.17, and the completion of the seven bowls prior to the fall of Babylon, where the seventh angel pours out his bowl and announces, 'it is done!'. If hearers have already connected Γέγονεν in 16.7 to ἐτελέσθη in 15.1 and Τετέλεσται in Jn 19.30, then they might consider 21.6 – the new heaven and new earth along with the ending of evil – in connection with God's work of redemption in Jesus and his justice in bringing judgment to the nations, even Babylon. (2) There is another promise given to the conqueror.⁶⁰⁰ This would remind of the overcomer language used for the faithful among the seven churches at the beginning of the narrative, bringing to mind the various promises they stood to inherit for their faithful obedience to Jesus. Yet, 21.7 offers those who conquer a

is opposed to suffering and pain and 21.4 is more than just an 'otherworldly hope' but a text that can sustain hearers during pain and agony and death and suffering, giving them hope here and now.

⁵⁹⁷ Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 312, seems to take special notice of the active agency of God in wiping away their tears. 'This is not an automatic effect. It is God, the gracious Comforter, who wipes away tears ... and affords joys with which sadness cannot subsist.'

⁵⁹⁸ See Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 625.

⁵⁹⁹ Reddish, *Revelation*, p. 401, notes that the sea being no more portrays the same thing as (just in different imagery) the evil triumvirate being thrown into the lake of fire – the defeat of evil. It is not too much to think that God wiping every tear from the eye of those who have suffered also conveys this, as well.

⁶⁰⁰ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 1057, addresses the chronology of this exhortation. How could an exhortation and promise be given to the overcomer after they have overcome? Beale notes that the focus here is on the completion of the process of overcoming at the end of life that is rewarded at the end of the world.

promise that surpasses them all: a promise that one will be God's υἱός ('son')! This would be a shock to the hearers. What might they make of such an extraordinary reward? Perhaps they would recall 2 Sam. 7.14 where a messianic promise is made to a son of David who would rule forever. Perhaps they would even go as far to think that this promise is a repurposing of the sonship that Jesus has inherited.⁶⁰¹ Be that as it may, they would have no doubt that being God's son is the closest and most intimate relationship possible with the one on the throne. Thus, at the end of the narrative, when suffering and death have passed away, the hearers learn that God has gone the full and ultimate distance possible to vindicate those who have cried out for justice: he calls them his own sons.

Implications of Revelation 17.1-21.8

Revelation 17.1-21.8 provides four major implications concerning what the hearers might hear in regard to suffering and theodicy:

First, God vindicates those who suffer: (1) God responds to the cries of the souls under the altar by vindicating their suffering through his judgment upon the prostitute (17.1); (2) the swift judgment of Babylon (18.8) suggests that God has heard the cry of those who have suffered throughout the narrative (18.8); (3) God remembers the brutal deaths of others who have suffered at the hands of Babylon, including those in the slave trade (18.24); (4) the joyful expression in 19.2-3 suggests that God has vindicated the suffering of the souls under the altar – as well as all those who have suffered in the narrative – setting forth the supreme example of his faithfulness; (5) the righteous judgment of Jesus is associated with his own death and the death of his faithful followers (19.11-14); (6) the white horse rider decisively turns around the fate of the suffering people of God through his justice and those who have caused the people of God to suffer now suffer themselves (19:15); and (7) the dragon is bound with a chain and detained for one thousand years suggesting a significant reversal of fate as the dragon's detainment compares with the church of Smyrna's plight (20.2-3; cf. 2.8-11).

Second, the faithful reign with Jesus: (1) the Lamb shares his triumph with those who have been faithful (17.14); (2) those who have followed Jesus (Jn 14.4) – particularly the faithful in the seven churches and those saints who have suffered throughout the narrative – are those called

⁶⁰¹ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 1058. Beale's argument that being called God's son could be a repurposing of the sonship Jesus has inherited is made under the presupposition that Christ remains unique as God's divine son. Only those whom Christ represents share in his inheritance and reign, receiving the benefits of his sonship.

to the marriage supper of the Lamb (19.9); (3) the army in white wedding garments following Jesus suggests that the faithful who have suffered with Jesus now reign victorious with Jesus (19.14); (4) those who reign with Jesus in 20.4 are the souls under the altar in 6.9-11 suggesting that 20.4 is a fulfilment of Jesus' promise to the churches in 3.21; and (5) those who have suffered become sons of God (21.7).

Third, evil is destroyed once and for all: (1) the prostitute's shameful defeat comes at the hands of the beast and ten kings suggesting that God is sovereign over evil, guiding evil to its own self-destruction by placing it in the heart of the beast and ten kings to destroy the prostitute (17.16-17); (2) Babylon is stripped by God because of its evils and Babylon suffers for benefitting from the suffering it has caused (18.13-19); (3) there is a progression in the narrative – first the Devil is thrown from heaven to earth (12.9), then from the earth to the abyss (20.3), and finally from the abyss to the lake of fire (20.10) – suggesting that God has been steadily at work throughout the narrative to bring judgment upon the Devil; (4) creation will no longer face a threat from cosmic forces in the new heaven and new earth, indicated by both the passing away of the sea (21.1) and the passing away of death (21.1-4); and (5) the notions of the sea passing away and the tears of the sufferer being wiped away suggest that God has brought those things which have caused suffering, including suffering itself, to a total and complete end (21.1-4).

Fourth, the faithful who maintain the witness that Jesus maintained, in word and suffering, are empowered by the Spirit: the Spirit is closely associated with the testimony of Jesus and the suffering associated with it. Thus, those who participate in the testimony of Jesus and suffer for it are those who have a close intimacy with the Spirit (19.10).

4.8 ἐν πνεύματι – A Great, High Mountain: New Jerusalem (21.9 – 22.5)

As the hearers come to 21.9, they are met with the final section of the text where they discover the last ἐν πνεύματι section. The hearers would notice that this ἐν πνεύματι section begins like the former ἐν πνεύματι section as one of the seven angels from the bowl judgments beckons to show John something (v. 9).⁶⁰² Here, John is carried away ἐν πνεύματι to a great, high mountain. The hearers would not be surprised to discover that this fourth and final ἐν πνεύματι construction is

⁶⁰² The first twelve words of 21.9 are the exact same as the first words in 17.1: Καὶ ἦλθεν εἷς ἐκ τῶν ἑπτὰ ἀγγέλων τῶν ἐχόντων τὰς ἑπτὰ φιάλας ('Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls').

also connected to a geographical location. Within the narrative, the ἐν πνεύματι phrases have moved along from Patmos (1.9-10), heaven (4.2), the wilderness (17.3), and now this ‘great, high mountain’.⁶⁰³ The high mountain would be significant to the hearers, recalling mountains as places of God’s presence in the OT (Gen. 22.2; Exod. 17.9-10). They would also discern mountains to be places of prophetic activity (Judg. 9.7; 1 Kgs. 18.20-46). If they were to recall the FG, perhaps they might see these mountains as a place of solitude (Jn 6.3, 15). Moreover, they would likely remind of Ezekiel’s experience wherein he was on a mountain when he saw the rebuilt Jerusalem (Ezek. 40.1-2).⁶⁰⁴

With the mountain fresh on their minds, the hearers encounter the holy city of Jerusalem coming down out of heaven. The holy city is the first image in this section that is relevant to suffering and theodicy, from which many other connected images emerge. The hearers would perceive a contrast between this heavenly Jerusalem and Babylon, especially since 21.9 has introduced this section the same way the previous section is introduced, which depicts the fall of Babylon (17.1). This is poetic justice. The God who destroyed Babylon for the sufferings it has caused now offers a new city to the sufferer wherein there is no suffering, sorrow, or pain.⁶⁰⁵

In v. 15, the angel measures the city and its gates and walls (vv. 15-17). The action of measuring would remind of 11.1-2 where John was given a measuring rod and told to measure the temple of God and the altar but not the outside court. Thus, the hearers would discern the measuring to signify protection, discerning the heavenly city to be a place where the people of God are secure from threat. Perhaps they would connect such protection with 21.4 which suggests that death, mourning, and crying have passed away. Those who have suffered are safe, once and for all.⁶⁰⁶

As the description of the heavenly city continues to unfold, the hearers might find it interesting that the πλατεῖα (‘street’) of the city is described as pure gold, like transparent glass (v. 21). Perhaps the word πλατεῖα would remind of the only other time a form of this word has

⁶⁰³ At this point, the ἐν πνεύματι construction would not only indicate structural continuity but it would be associated with geographical locations in the narrative.

⁶⁰⁴ See Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 636-38.

⁶⁰⁵ Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 545, notes ‘The systemic evil belonging to the religious and economic idolatry of Babylon ... is replaced by the loyalty and conquest over sin on the part of God’s people who trust the Lamb’.

⁶⁰⁶ Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 752, notes that the city of God suggests God’s protection over his people. ‘The city of God is forever guaranteed the presence and protection of God.’ Such protection is in keeping with the fact that there are no tears, no pain, no sinners, no sun or moon, no night, no impurity, and no shame or deceit.

been used in the narrative up to this point – when the brutalized bodies of the two witnesses lie in the street of Babylon and are shamed (11.8). While the first street in Babylon is one of suffering and shame, the street in the New Jerusalem is one of glory, honor, and splendor. This would likely be perceived as another instance of poetic justice, where fitting retribution is granted to the sufferer. What a magnificent ending the hearers would perceive this to be! But it is still not over.

The hearers now learn that there is no temple in the city because the temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb (v. 22).⁶⁰⁷ The city also has no need of sun or moon because the glory of God gives it light and the lamp is the Lamb.⁶⁰⁸ The nations use this light to walk and the hearers learn that the kings of the earth will bring their glory into the city (v. 24)⁶⁰⁹ This might be the biggest surprise for the hearers thus far! Up unto this point, the nations⁶¹⁰ and the kings of the earth⁶¹¹ have been opposed to God, even causing the people of God great suffering. By this point in the narrative, the kings of the earth have already been killed and thrown into the lake of fire (19.19-21; 20.8-10) and the nations have been judged by Jesus (19.15). Yet now they are coming into the heavenly city! How is this possible? Such a conundrum might challenge the hearers, especially in regard to the depth of God’s mercy.⁶¹² Whatever the hearers might think, is it possible this dialectical imagery would lead them to believe that, while God’s judgment and wrath is to be taken seriously, the mercy of God is so deep that the nations and kings of the earth have repented? Has this repentance led to conversion and participation in the heavenly city? Do those who have repented even include those who have been persecutors of the people of God?⁶¹³

⁶⁰⁷ Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 761, links the presence of the Lamb here to 5.6 where the Lamb is seen standing as slain. He then connects the temple imagery from the FG (2.19) wherein Jesus refers to himself as the temple. Osborne posits that the Lamb’s sacrificial death makes the temple unnecessary in the heavenly city. Perhaps the hearers would note that the ‘temple’ has suffered and has risen. The temple that was destroyed has conquered.

⁶⁰⁸ Perhaps the hearers would make another connection with Babylon for in 18.21 Babylon is thrown down and it is said that the light of a lamp will shine no more in it. Yet, the heavenly city is illuminated by the Lamb in such splendor that there is no need for cosmic light! Such a contrast conveys the total destruction of Babylon and the ultimate glory of the heavenly Jerusalem.

⁶⁰⁹ Such a Scripture is puzzling because the earth’s kings reappear in the narrative after already having been killed (19.19-21; 20.8-10) and thrown into the lake of fire.

⁶¹⁰ The narrative portrays the nations as being opposed to God’s agenda (11.9-13, 18), controlled by the beast (13.7), intoxicated and deceived by the prostitute (14.8; 17.15; 18.3, 23), deceived by Satan (20.3, 8), and judged by the white horse rider (16.17; 19.15). See Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, pp. 654-55.

⁶¹¹ D.E. Aune, *Revelation 17-22* (WBC 52c: Dallas, TX: Word, 1998), p. 1171, notes that the phrase ‘kings of the earth’ occurs eight times in the narrative (1.5; 6.16; 17.2, 18; 18.3, 9; 19; 19; 21.24) and only in 1.5 and 21.24 are they not hostile toward God. He also notes that this term is synonymous with ‘the nations’.

⁶¹² Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, p. 292, concludes that these words may allude to ‘some gracious purpose of God towards humanity which has not yet been revealed’.

⁶¹³ This text gives rise to the question of universalism. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 1097-98, believes that the ‘nations’ and ‘the kings of the earth’ do include those who have persecuted God’s people and have repented.

If the hearers discern these questions in the affirmative, they would think that the faithful witness of the sufferers has not been in vain. It has resulted in the conversion of the ones who have caused their suffering.⁶¹⁴ This adds to the profound effect of faithful witness and intensifies the meaningfulness behind the trials of those who suffer.

At this point the hearers learn that the city's twelve gates, which have been previously mentioned, will never be shut. These twelve gates surround the city: three on the east, three on the north, three on the south, and three on the west (v. 13). Never being shut, they provide continual, unrestricted access to the heavenly city. This is because there is no νύξ ('night') (v. 25). The use of νύξ would likely cause the hearers to be reminded of the FG wherein νύξ has threatening spiritual implications (Jn 3.2; 9.4; 11.10; 13.30; 19.39). Perhaps the hearers would think that the open gates, owing to the fact that there is no night, suggests the absence of evil and suffering. Night has been overcome by the work of Almighty God and the Lamb. Thus, the open gates recall 21.4 – there is no more mourning, or crying, or pain. Nothing detestable will ever enter the city to threaten them again (v. 27). Those who are written in the Lamb's book of life are secure forever.

As the hearers come to the final chapter in the narrative, the angel continues to offer a description of the heavenly city.⁶¹⁵ This description includes the river of the water of life, bright

However, he does not see a basis for suggesting that non-elect peoples will be part the heavenly city. Beale appeals to 21.27, where it states that those that do not have their names written in the book of life will not enter. He also appeals to the tradition of apocalyptic Judaism where only the elect dwell in the new creation (1 En. 45.4-5; cf. 91.16-17; 4 Ezra 7.74). For more, see Boring, *Revelation*, p. 226-31, who offers a 'reflection' entitled 'Universal Salvation and Paradoxical Language' in which he presents three views on 'universal salvation' and 'limited salvation', concluding that John is a dialectical theologian and presents both views paradoxically and, thus, guards against 'superficial consistency' that comes from sustaining only one side of the matter. Cf. Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, pp. 136-40, who offers a somewhat more nuanced view. He maintains that the mixing of particular and universal language brings together the OT promises of God's people and the universal hope of the nations that they, too, will be God's people. Bauckham, however, posits that this does not mean the salvation of every human being owing to 21.8 and 21.27, which suggest exclusion from the New Jerusalem.

⁶¹⁴ Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 763, does not see this conversion as an entire salvation for the nations and kings of the earth. Rather, he seems to see this salvation for only those who have repented. In that case, he is suggesting that the narrative reveals that there are those from out of the nations and kings of the earth who have repented. Osborne notes that John 'wishes to emphasize how God's mercy ultimately triumphs over evil and has redeemed some even from among "the kings of the earth"'.

⁶¹⁵ J.R. Middleton, 'A New Heaven and a New Earth: The Case for a Holistic Reading of the Biblical Story of Redemption', *JCTR* 11 (2006), p. 76, points out that the story of Scripture moves from creation to eschaton 'from a Garden (in Genesis 2) to a city (in Revelation 21-22)'. He points out that, while humanity has had a fall, humanity still, in some sense, has developed and has moved toward a creational mandate which has moved from the initial state of the earth to complexity. Redemption is the restoration of God's 'creational intent' for humankind. As far as God's intention is concerned, redemption includes society's interaction with the earth. Hence, Middleton admits he does not use the word 'heaven' to portray the eschatological hope as it deters from the 'legitimate biblical expectation' for the earthly experience to conform to the purposes of God.

as crystal, that flows from the throne of God and of the Lamb (22.1). The appearance of the river flowing from the throne of the Lamb would remind of four things: (1) the instance wherein the Lamb guides those clothed in white robes to the springs of living water and wipes every tear from their eyes (7.17), (2) the promise of the springs of living water the Alpha and Omega gives the conquerors (21.6-7), (3) the river that flowed out of Eden (Gen. 2.10), and (4) the river in Ezekiel's vision which flows south of the altar and refreshes everything it touches (Ezek. 47.1-12).⁶¹⁶

While the hearers are still pondering the flowing river, they would notice the tree of life, with its twelve kinds of fruit, is on both sides of the river. Perhaps this single tree would remind the hearers of the single tree in the Garden (v. 2; cf. Gen. 2.17).⁶¹⁷ Perhaps the hearers would consider that this heavenly city has replaced Eden.⁶¹⁸ Or perhaps they would wonder if Eden has been restored from the consequences of the curse or if the evil and suffering that came as a result of the curse has now been swallowed up. With this churning in their thinking, they learn that the leaves of the trees have healing properties. They are for the 'healing of the nations' (v. 2). How might the hearers understand this 'healing'? In the FG, healing is connected to eternal life (Jn 4.46-54. 5.1-18; 9.1-41; 11.1-57). Seeing that this text stands linked with the prior texts that mention the conversion of the nations in the heavenly city (21.3, 12-13, 24-26),⁶¹⁹ the hearers might understand this healing to be the conversion of the nations.⁶²⁰ Might the wounds they incurred in battle against God and the Lamb be healed here?⁶²¹ Is God's mercy so great that it has even extended itself to those who suffered in their rebellion against God? Whatever the hearers might discern, their thinking would be directed to the next detail within the heavenly

⁶¹⁶ There are a lot of interpretive possibilities for the river/water language used here. Perhaps it would remind of the life-giving water talked about in the Psalms (36.9; 46.4) or the Proverbs (10.11; 14.27). Or perhaps it would remind of Jesus as the living water in the FG (4.10-14) or the Holy Spirit is described as 'rivers of living water' in the FG (7.37-39).

⁶¹⁷ Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, p. 257, suggests that there is significance in the singular use of 'tree' in 21.2, evoking the image of the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2.9).

⁶¹⁸ Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 769, notes, 'Eden has become one with the city'.

⁶¹⁹ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 661.

⁶²⁰ Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 563, asks why 'therapy' is needed in the New Jerusalem. He suggests that it is for those who have chosen to remain outside of the dimension of the city and will therefore need the opportunity to accept the tree's leaves of healing. D.L. Mathewson, 'The Destiny of the Nations in Revelation 21:1-22:5: A Reconsideration', *TynB* 53.1 (2002), p. 139, suggests that this conversion should be understood as the 'end-time conversion of the nations'. Whereas the nations were formally depicted as those who followed the beast, now they come to the heavenly city to experience 'paradise life'.

⁶²¹ Sweet, *Revelation*, p. 311, suggests that the healing of the nations is done in memory of the 'carnage' of 19.17-21 or the 'smiting' of 11.5.

city's description: 'no longer will there be anything accursed' (v. 3). If the hearers are still thinking about Eden, it is likely they would understand this detail in connection with the curse upon the earth (Gen. 3.17-24).⁶²² The evil that threatened creation as a result of the curse no longer poses a threat. The thought of this might overwhelm the hearers with encouragement and excitement. But they discover there is more. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, they will see his face, his name will be on their foreheads, night will be no more, and they will reign⁶²³ forever (vv. 4-5).⁶²⁴ After an entire narrative full of suffering at the hands of evil, these promises would be quite a fitting ending – a grand finale, to say the least. The curse has been replaced by the presence of God and the Lamb and they see his face!⁶²⁵

The idea of seeing God's face is the second image that emerges in 21.9-22.5 that is relevant to suffering and theodicy. This image would likely cause the hearers to recall three things: (1) how Moses was only allowed to see the back part of God (Exod. 33.20), (2) the fact that the FG says that no one has seen the Father at any time except for the Son (Jn 1.18; 6.46), and (3) the thought that the longing of humankind, in its suffering and frustrated state, is to see God (1 Jn 3.21; cf. Pss. 11.7; 17.15; 42.2).⁶²⁶ Seeing God has been made a reality, at last! Humankind is in perfect accord with God. Evil and suffering, having been a constant threat, is no more. The people of God have been made into the likeness of God (1 Jn 3.2).

Next, the hearers might find it particularly significant that the name of God appears on God's servants' foreheads, the third image in 21.9-22.5 that is relevant to suffering and theodicy. At this point, the hearers would be reminded that, earlier in the narrative, the name was promised to

⁶²² Koester, *Revelation*, p. 824, connects that which is accursed to (1) the curse imposed by God after humans sinned (Gen. 3.17-24) and (2) the promise that Jerusalem will not fall under the curse of war but shall dwell in security (Zech. 14.11). See also Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 564, who agrees that Zech. 14.11 is echoed in 22.3. He notes that whereas John uses the term *κατάθεμα* ('accursed'), the corresponding noun, *ἀνάθεμα*, is used in Zech. 14.11 in the LXX. Both nouns, he suggests, render the Hebrew *קֶרֶם* ('curse') which means destruction because of sin and idolatry (Exod. 23.31-33; Lev. 27.28-29; Deut. 7.26; Josh. 7.22-26). Thus, the removal of the curse would be the removal of threat of destruction and would denote eternal safety.

⁶²³ Stevenson, *A Slaughtered Lamb*, pp. 218-22, suggests that the reign ('exaltation') of the saints is not lording over others. Because the symbols of the Apocalypse are the message then reigning with God means four things: (1) identity, (2) glorification, (3) access, and (4) service.

⁶²⁴ Töniste, *The Ending of the Canon*, p. 182, considers why there is 'so much repetition' between 22.5 and 21.23, 25. He considers three possibilities: (1) John is 'dumbstruck' by the visions and the presence of God, (2) these verses are a 'polemic' against those who worship the luminaires, or (3) John's sources – perhaps in 21.23, 25 he is following Isa. 60.19 and in 22.5 he is following Zechariah 14.

⁶²⁵ Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, p. 142, notes, 'To see God's face will be to know who God is in his personal being. This will be the heart of humanity's eternal joy in their eternal worship of God.' Töniste, *The Ending of the Canon*, p. 182, suggests that seeing God's face is the reversal of the curse, wherein the old order is replaced by the new order, and the curse is recast into a blessing.

⁶²⁶ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 663.

the one who conquerors (3.12). Perhaps it is possible such an image would take on added meaning here. Owing to the fact that the hearers have had Eden in mind up to this point, as well as the fact that the hearers are certainly familiar with the story of Cain (1 Jn 3.12), it might not be going too far to suggest that the hearers might associate the mark on God's servants' foreheads with the mark of Cain in some way. Perhaps they might think: (1) Cain's mark has been replaced by God's name (Gen. 4.15),⁶²⁷ (2) the name on the forehead represents protection just as Cain's mark protected him, (3) or the name on the forehead signals the reversing of the curse.⁶²⁸

Whatever the hearers might think about the name on the forehead, they again hear that night will be no more, reminding of the fact that evil has subsided once and for all (21.25). Also, they reign forever and ever. This is the most appropriate conclusion to the story as it brings the narrative full circle, recalling two things from the beginning: (1) the reign of Jesus and the people of God's inclusion in it (1.5-6) and (2) Jesus' promises to the conquerors in the seven churches, particularly the last promise which is to sit with Jesus on the throne (3.21).⁶²⁹

As the narrative subsides, the hearers would not be disappointed at how Jesus has kept his promises to those who have remained faithful to him despite their sorrow and pain. At minimum, they would likely think that God has answered the cry of the martyrs in 6.9-11 and has brought due justice. They would have to conclude that God has gone over-and-above in satisfying the sufferer through his bountiful mercy and unending goodness.

Implications of 21.9-22.5

There are seven implications regarding suffering and theodicy that emerge from Revelation 21.9-22.5:

First, God who has destroyed Babylon for causing suffering offers a new city to those who have suffered – a city where there is no suffering, sorrow, or pain. This is observed in a paradox, which is the heavenly city (21.9) being introduced the same way that Babylon is introduced prior to its fall (17.1).

⁶²⁷ Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 562.

⁶²⁸ Wall, *Revelation*, p. 87.

⁶²⁹ Inherent in the conclusion of the narrative is the fulfilment to the various promises to the seven churches. See Boxall's chart 'Fulfilment of Promises to the Conquerors' in Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 312, to observe how these promises are fulfilled in chapters 19-22.

Second, the heavenly city is a place where the people of God who have suffered are now secure from suffering. In 21.15, the angel measures the city, its gates, and walls. This denotes protection (11.1-2).

Third, the heavenly city is one wherein those who have suffered now experience glory and honor. This is a contrast to the shame those who have suffered have experienced in their earthly lives. This is observed by the contrasting use of *πλατεῖα* ('street') in the heavenly city (21.21) – which is made of gold – with the street of Babylon wherein the brutalized and shamed bodies of the two witnesses laid after their disgraceful deaths (11.8).

Fourth, the mercy of God is so deep that the nations and kings of the earth who have caused suffering are offered an opportunity to repent and be part of the heavenly city. This is understood by the fact that the nations and kings of the earth traffic into the holy city after being judged and destroyed (19.19-21; 20.8-10). The leaves that bring healing to the nations in 22.2 would likely reinforce the idea that the nations are converted through the mercy of God.

Fifth, the heavenly city replaces Eden. The imagery used of the heavenly city is associated with the Garden of Eden, indicating that the evil and suffering that has come because of the curse has been swallowed up. This imagery includes a river of water which flows from the throne of God (22.1; cf. Gen. 2.10), a single tree that stands on both sides of the river (v. 2; cf. Gen. 2.17), removal of the curse (v. 3; cf. Gen. 3.17-24), and God's name which perhaps seems to replace the mark placed upon Cain (cf. v. 4; Ge. 4.15).

Sixth, humankind comes into perfect accord with God as evil and suffering are removed once and for all, never to be a threat again. Such accord with God is indicated by the idea of seeing God's face (22.4). Up to this point, no one could see God's face (Exod. 33.20; Jn 1.18; 6.46; 1 Jn 3.21) though it has been humankind's great desire (Pss. 11.7; 17.15; 42.2). At last, it is a reality.

Seventh, the conquerors, having suffered, reign forever (22.5). The narrative comes full circle as the hearers learn the conqueror reigns forever in the new heaven and new earth. The reign of those who have suffered remind of two things: (1) the reign of Jesus and the people of God's inclusion in it (1.5-6) and (2) Jesus' promises to the conquerors in the seven churches, particularly the last promise which is to sit with Jesus on the throne (3.21). Those who sit on the throne include the souls under the altar, the two witnesses, and all those who have been faithful to Jesus.

4.9 Epilogue (22.6-21)

As the hearers come to 22.6, they would hear the angel proclaim that the previous words are trustworthy and true. This is followed by a construction that would be familiar to them: δειξαι τοῖς δούλοις αὐτοῦ ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι ἐν τάχει ('to show his servant what must soon take place'). This construction corresponds to the prologue in 1.1, hinting to the hearers that they are at the end of the narrative and in the epilogue.⁶³⁰

As the hearers come to v. 7, Jesus announces⁶³¹ that he is coming soon.⁶³² Such a promise, especially mentioned three times, would cause the hearers to anticipate that the time of Christ's reign is near. This is relevant to suffering and theodicy because it suggests that evil and suffering will soon be defeated. Filled with eschatological hope, the hearers are commanded to τηρῶν ('keep') the words of the prophecy (v. 7). The present active use of the participle would likely convey that obedience is an ongoing enterprise until Jesus comes. But what does this obedience look like? How can they keep the words of the narrative? Throughout the narrative, obedience has been associated with the seven Spirits who are before the throne (1.3-4; 14.12-13). Whatever the hearers might perceive, they would at least associate faithful obedience with Spirit empowerment. Spirit-empowered witness must continue in spite of their suffering until the culmination of their eschatological hope.

Jesus announces he is coming again for the second time, declaring he is the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end (vv. 12-13; cf. 1.8). This declaration would add confidence to the hearers inferring that nothing happens – especially in regard to evil and suffering – beyond his control. Following this declaration, the seventh and final beatitude of the narrative is offered, a blessing for those who wash their robes in white (v. 14). This beatitude would recall the great multitude who came out of the great tribulation, those having washed their robes in white (7.14). Careful hearers might note that the aorist ἔπλυναν ('washed') is used in 7.14 while the present, active πλύνοντες ('wash') is used in 22.14. Perhaps the change in tense would suggest to the hearers that 7.14 speaks of a specific point in time which the great

⁶³⁰ Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment*, p. 343. There are a number of elements in the epilogue that correspond to the prologue (22.6, 16; cf. 1.1; 22.20; cf. 1.1-2; 22.8; cf. 1.2; 22.7, 9, 10; cf. 1.3; 22.10; cf. 1.3; 22.16; cf. 1.4; 22.7, 12, 20; cf. 1.7; 22.13; cf. 1.8).

⁶³¹ There is often disagreement as to who is speaking in the Epilogue. It can be agreed that there are three speakers: the angel, Jesus, and John. See Reddish, *Revelation*, p. 423, for how he arranges these.

⁶³² This is the first of three times this announcement is made (21.7, 12, 20).

tribulation saints washed their robes while 22.14 speaks of a continual ongoing action.⁶³³ Thus, there is a convergence: washing implies ongoing faithfulness in spite of deep suffering.

In v. 17, the Spirit and bride say ‘come’ and there is an invitation for the one who hears to say ‘come’. Owing to the mention of the Spirit, the hearers would likely discern that Spirit empowerment in the life of the saints (‘Bride’ cf. 19.7-8) is what empowers their faithful witness throughout the narrative. Perhaps they’d note that the Spirit has been with them all along (1.3-4; 14.12-13), enabling them to follow the Lamb and ‘keep’ the words of the book in such extreme circumstances.

Finally, there is the third announcement by Jesus that he is coming soon (v. 20). This is met with ‘Amen. Come, Lord Jesus’ by John. Such a response would not be lost on the hearers as the narrative finally concludes. It is relevant for theodicy and suffering because the people of God have been crushed, dejected, tempted, and have experienced great suffering at the hands of cosmic powers. Now, with hopeful expectation owing to a revelation of the justice of God, the hearers would likely join in with John and cry ‘Come, Lord Jesus’⁶³⁴ as they pray for the things in the vision – namely those things which satisfy the cry of the souls under the altar (6.9-11) – to come to fruition.

The book⁶³⁵ ends with a benediction that bestows χάρις (‘grace’) on the people of God. This is precisely how the narrative began (21.22; cf. 1.4). While these are the only two mentions of grace in the entire narrative, the hearers might understand their placement to be strategic and meaningful, perhaps even an inclusio. Perhaps they might understand the grace of God in connection with the empowerment of the people of God by the Spirit. Perhaps they might think that grace is associated with the sustaining of the saints in suffering and has satisfied the cry of the souls under the altar. Perhaps they might discern that the grace has brought due justice to the evil triumvirate, offered healing to the kings of the earth, and has swallowed up evil and sorrow with a new Eden which is the heavenly city – an eternal paradise for those who have hoped in

⁶³³ See Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 407.

⁶³⁴ See Reddish, *Revelation*, p. 431, who offers insight to the Greek phrase *marana tha* that is used in ancient Greek manuscripts. Reddish suggests that its use through the NT and the *Didache* point to an eschatological use of this phrase. If he is correct, this would undergird the intensity of the yearning for the culmination of the eschatological hope being expressed in this passage.

⁶³⁵ Leithart, *Revelation 12-22*, p. 416, concludes that the Apocalypse is a ‘martyr book for a martyr church, a record of God’s faithfulness to encourage the faithful in the present and through ages to come’.

God in spite of their suffering. It might not be going too far to suggest that grace permeates the entire story.

Implications of Revelation 22.6-21

The epilogue brings the narrative to the end and corresponds to a number of the elements in the prologue (22.6, 16; cf. 1.1; 22.20; cf. 1.1-2; 22.8; cf. 1.2; 22.7, 9, 10; cf. 1.3; 22.10; cf. 1.3; 22.16; cf. 1.4; 22.7, 12, 20; cf.1.7; 22.13; cf. 1.8). The epilogue offers five implications concerning what the hearers might hear in regard to suffering and theodicy:

First, the three announcements that Jesus is coming (21.7, 12, 20) anticipates the time of Jesus' reign, when evil and suffering are put away forever.

Second, obedience to Jesus' words must continue until he comes. The present, active use of *τηρώων* ('keep') would suggest that faithful witness must carry forward. Thus, obedience is associated with the empowerment of the Spirit, helping the people of God to maintain their witness until Jesus comes (1.3-4; 14.12-13).

Third, the Spirit in the life of the saints is what empowers their faithful witness amidst their suffering (19.7-8). In v. 17, the Spirit and bride say 'come' and there is an invitation for the one who hears to say 'come'. This suggests that the Spirit has been with the people of God all along (1.3-4; 14.12-13), enabling them to follow the Lamb and 'keep' the words of the book in such extreme circumstances.

Fourth, the people of God look for the coming of all that is promised with hopeful expectation. Having suffered much at the hands of the triumvirate of evil, God's people join with John in saying, 'Come, Lord Jesus' (22.20). This is a prayer for the fulfillment of those things in the visions of the Apocalypse which would satisfy the souls under the altar (6.9-11) and bring about a new heaven and new earth, free from suffering.

Fifth, God's *χάρις* ('grace') seems to be part of the entire narrative. The only two mentions of grace are in the prologue (1.4) and in the epilogue (22.21). Might this be an inclusio that could be understood to suggest that grace is part of the whole story? Perhaps the grace of God is associated with the Spirit's empowerment. Perhaps grace helps to sustain the faithful through suffering and plays a part in satisfying the cry of the souls under the altar. It might be discerned that grace is connected to the justice brought to the evil triumvirate, the healing offered to the kings of the earth, and the destruction of evil which gives way to a new Eden for those who have hoped in God in spite of their own suffering.

Overall, this narrative reading of the Apocalypse has suggested that the Apocalypse is not a theodicy in the classical sense. There is no explanation within the text for why suffering occurs nor is there any attempt to reconcile the goodness of God and the existence of evil. Yet, God does not ignore suffering. He responds loud and clear to those who suffer. As God acts on behalf of the sufferers, the sufferers are exhorted to follow the Lamb who conquered in his suffering. Their unwavering faithfulness is to be done in hopeful expectation of the victory of God and it is to be done through the empowerment of the Seven Spirits of God. In the next chapter, this study shall make overtures toward a Pentecostal theodicy based upon the implications of this reading.

TOWARD A PENTECOSTAL THEODICY IN LIGHT OF THE APOCALYPSE

5.1 Introduction

The final chapter of this study seeks to contribute to the ongoing studies in the Apocalypse by offering approaches toward suffering and theodicy that have emerged from my narrative reading of the text. In this exploration, I have examined the Apocalypse as useful for informing its hearers how to respond when suffering is present. Here, I offer what seems to be the central message of the Apocalypse as it pertains to suffering and theodicy. I use my observations from the Apocalypse to make overtures for the emerging conception of Pentecostal theodicy.

5.2 What the Apocalypse Reveals about Suffering and Theodicy

First, this exploration has demonstrated that the Apocalypse is not a theodicy in the classical – philosophical/theoretical – sense. It *does not* seek to answer *why* people, particularly the people of God, suffer because of evil or what it means to suffer at the hands of God. It never seeks to explain the origin of the cosmic evil that afflicts the people of God, where the impulse for serving this evil comes from – as in the cases of those who follow the beast – or why the benevolent Creator has designed a reality wherein both good and evil coincide (Revelation 12). This exploration has also demonstrated that the people of God who experience suffering and evil remain faithful to Christ as they react through applied spiritual response. This makes for a practical theodicy.¹

¹ See G.M. Stevenson, ‘Perspectives on Evil in the Book of Revelation’, in C.K. Koester (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Book of Revelation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 275, who says, ‘Unlike theodicies, which tend to focus on abstract, theoretical, and universal *explanations* of evil, Revelation’s focus is on specific, personal, and contextual *experiences* of evil. Revelation’s concern, therefore, is showing its audience how to live faithfully in the midst of such experiences.’

The texts central to suffering because of evil begin in the description of Jesus, who is the first to be revealed as having suffered (1.5). After this, the hearers are told that John has experienced some form of tribulation and suffering (1.9). Suffering is prevalent in the community of the seven churches – particularly Smyrna (2.8-11) and Pergamum wherein is Antipas (2.13). At the fifth seal, the souls under the altar inquire about their unjust suffering with a painful cry of lament (6.9-11) and later the two witnesses experience a brutal, shameful, and disgraceful death at the hands of the beast (11.1-10). There is not an attempt by God, or a representative of God, to offer a theoretical explanation for these instances of suffering at the hands of evil that would satisfy the expectations insisted by a theodicy in the classical sense. Yet, there are subversive spiritual responses toward human and cosmic evil,² found in these instances, that enable the community of God’s people to continue in their love and faithfulness of God without being overcome by the evil that causes their suffering.

The first spiritual response is the writing of the Apocalypse itself, by John on Patmos, who does so under the instruction of Jesus who tells John to ‘write’ (1.19). D. Hellholm notes that,

² Swinton, *Raging with Compassion*, p. 5, understands ‘resistance’ to be ‘critical and countercultural ways of encountering and dealing with evil’. Swinton, *Raging with Compassion*, p. 57, later builds upon this and says that such resistance is ‘faithful participation in Christ’s redemptive movement in the world now and in the future’. Throughout his work, Swinton uses the word ‘defiance’ interchangeably with ‘resistance’. A separate definition of ‘resistance’ is found in R. Albertz, *A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period*, vol. 2: *From Exile to the Maccabees* (trans. J. Bowden; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1994), p. 564, who notes that Hellenistic Israel ‘developed a new apocalyptic theology of resistance’. As a result, Yahweh religion developed into an eschatological religion of redemption. Such resistance is portrayed in Jewish apocalyptic literature. A.E. Portier-Young, *Apocalypse Against Empire: Theologies of Resistance in Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), p. 4, uses Albertz’s formulation of an ‘apocalyptic theology of resistance’ as a way forward for her own work. In her examination of various apocalypses (Daniel, The Apocalypse of Weeks, The Book of Dreams), Portier-Young suggests that the apocalyptic perspective envisions a relocation of power, redefining the possible and real, thus enabling the work of resistance. Portier-Young is careful to note that there is a ‘spectrum’ of what ‘resistance’ looks like including everything from over-throw and replacement of structures of dominance to contesting hegemony. She finds three major points in the spectrum that provide her a conceptual framework: (1) domination and the hegemony that reinforces domination provides the conditions for and object for resistance; (2) acts of resistance proceed from the intention to limit, oppose, transform, or reject hegemonic institutions; and (3) resistance is effective action. Portier-Young points out that acts of resistance do not need to be dramatic, large-scale events. J.C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987), p. xvi, shows that resistance can be ‘everyday’ forms of ‘peasant’ resistance such as foot-dragging and feigned ignorance. Such acts allow individuals to maintain their dignity and a way of life meanwhile not accepting conditions as they are. In this section, I have chosen to refer to such ‘resistance’ as ‘spiritual response’. The term ‘spiritual response’ is not necessarily suggesting that those in the Apocalypse were responding to the political rearrangement of the Empire. Rather, their spiritual responses were responses to God and his Spirit, and in defiance of the kingdoms of the world under the influence of evil until they became Christ’s. Through these actions they participated in Christ’s redemptive movements toward the new heaven and new earth when God would vindicate their suffering, forming them both pastorally and theologically. See U-W. Low, ‘Wait, Witness, Worship: (Limited) Human Agency as Resistance in the Book of Revelation’, *ABR* 70 (2022), pp. 101-15, who suggests that these actions are limited for the faithful in the Apocalypse to ‘waiting’, ‘witnessing’, and ‘worshipping’.

while each apocalypse has its own specific function, apocalypses are ‘intended for a group in crisis with the purpose of exhortation and/or consolation by means of divine authority’.³ U-Wen Low concurs and adds that writers of apocalyptic material wrote texts that encourage resistance (spiritual response) to evil.⁴ Thus ‘writing’ becomes an ‘everyday’ spiritual response that refuses to accept the world the way it is – under the power of the evil triumvirate (Revelation 12-13) – and re-envision the way the world will be when the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of Christ (Rev. 11.15).⁵

In addition to ‘writing’, there are three other ‘everyday’ spiritual responses, performed by those who suffer, which add to a practical theodicy: ‘waiting’, ‘witnessing’, and ‘worshipping’.⁶ As it pertains to ‘waiting’, in Rev. 6.9-11 Jesus commands those who have suffered a brutal death like unto his to ἀναπαύσονται ἔτι χρόνον μικρόν (‘wait a little longer’). Waiting is God’s instruction to those who have enquired about their own suffering. It is the practical deployment of the patient endurance which Jesus commends in the churches of Ephesus (2.3), Thyatira (2.19), and Philadelphia (3.7). This waiting could also be observed in the church of Smyrna who is μέλλεις (‘about to’)⁷ suffer. Moreover, the church in Smyrna learns that their time of suffering will be ten days in which they will presumably have to wait. Furthermore, later in the narrative the nations trample the city three and a half years (11.2) and the beast out of the sea exercises its authority 42 months,⁸ both time periods wherein the people of God must wait in the midst of their sorrow.

As it pertains to ‘witnessing’, such is observed in Antipas (2.13) – whom Jesus refers to as ὁ μάρτυς μου ὁ πιστός μου (‘my faithful witness’) – the souls under the altar who were killed for their witness (6.9), and the two witnesses who were killed by the beast upon finishing their testimony (11.7). Finally, the prostitute holds the cup of the witnesses’ blood on which she is

³ See D. Hellholm, ‘The Problem of Apocalyptic Genre and the Apocalypse of John’, *Semeia* 36 (1986), pp. 26-27.

⁴ Low, ‘Wait, Witness, Worship’, p. 102. In building off of Low, I am using the term ‘spiritual response’ (in place of his term ‘resistance’) as I am emphasizing that the actions he calls ‘resistance’ happen in response to God and his Spirit.

⁵ Portier-Young, *Apocalypse Against Empire*, p. 44, notes that apocalyptic texts are disruptive to oppressive hegemonies and enable readers to reimagine a world that is governed by God and not oppressors.

⁶ See Low, ‘Wait, Witness, Worship’, pp. 109-13.

⁷ Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 66, notes that the church in Smyrna would be ‘anticipating’ suffering. Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 129, suggests that μέλλεις portrays the ‘immediacy’ of the suffering. If this is the case, they would be waiting for suffering to occur and would have to endure when it came.

⁸ Low, ‘Wait, Witness, Worship’, p. 109.

drunk (17.7) showing that suffering and death are tied to witness.⁹ Despite the suffering that comes of witness, Low notes that ‘witnessing is strongly implied as a key way for humans to participate in God’s defeat of evil’¹⁰ and points to Rev. 12.11 ‘they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimonies’. Moreover, Low notes that witnessing is a ‘call to overcome evil by actively inducting new members into the believing community’.¹¹

As it pertains to ‘worshipping’, Revelation is a narrative about worship.¹² M. Archer notes that worship *is* faithful witness which often appears in the ideas of patient endurance.¹³ This is noted in the churches of Ephesus (2.3), Thyatira (2.19), and Philadelphia (3.7). Moreover, Antipas’ death is faithful witness (2.13) and thus an act of worship unto God. If Revelation is perceived as an alternative to worshipping the Roman cult, then worshipping God is a spiritual response that enables the worshippers to re-envision the suffering caused by the beast and to ‘receive a foretaste of what awaits them’.¹⁴ Moreover, worship is seen being performed by the 144,000 who were martyrs that came out of the great tribulation (7.1-14). Thus, the great multitude is a ‘model’¹⁵ for worship to be emulated by the community which experiences suffering.

While the Apocalypse is not a theodicy in the classical sense, it instructs sufferers and their communities to enact these four ‘everyday’ spiritual responses: (1) writing, (2) waiting, (3) witnessing, and (4) worshipping. These are resonances of grace – embodiments of theology – which enable the practitioner to ‘come up here’ (4.1) and re-imagine their suffering being transformed from their ten-day imprisonment (2.10) into the one-thousand-year imprisonment of the evil behind their suffering (20.3). Thus, spiritual responses¹⁶ – practical theodicy – can shape theological imagination, enabling individuals to see sides of God that mere rationale is unable to

⁹ Low, ‘Wait, Witness, Worship’, pp. 110-12.

¹⁰ Low, ‘Wait, Witness, Worship’, pp. 111.

¹¹ Low, ‘Wait, Witness, Worship’, pp. 111-12.

¹² Archer, *I Was in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day*, p. 298.

¹³ Archer, *I Was in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day*, p. 298.

¹⁴ Archer, *I Was in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day*, p. 173.

¹⁵ Low, ‘Wait, Witness, Worship’, pp. 112.

¹⁶ These responses should not be limited to *just these* four examples of everyday resistance found in the Apocalypse. They serve as models for everyday forms of resistance to evil and the suffering it causes.

deliver,¹⁷ whether such individuals themselves are suffering, whether someone they know is suffering, or whether they are ministering to someone suffering.

Second, the Apocalypse shows that spiritual responses which form a practical theodicy *must* be Spirit empowered. Suffering because of evil is one of the central themes of apocalyptic literature, including the Book of Revelation.¹⁸ It appears in the prologue at the forefront of the narrative (Revelation 1), emerges in the various situations occurring among members of the Johannine community (Revelation 2-14), and is present at the end of the narrative when evil is defeated once and for all (Revelation 15-22). Simultaneously, the Apocalypse is structured around four ‘in the Spirit’ phrases (1.10; 4.2; 17.3; 21.10) which function as literary markers that assist the hearers as they encounter the text.¹⁹ Yet, more than just literary markers, these phrases indicate the Spirit has a central function in the text.²⁰ One of these is enabling the saints to overcome the evil and suffering that permeates the text by maintaining a faithfulness to Jesus.²¹ Thus, Spirit empowerment is necessary to endure and overcome suffering and evil.²²

In the Apocalypse, this Spirit empowerment is realized in the spiritual responses of writing, waiting, witness, and worship. Owing to the Spirit’s appearance in the narrative as ‘the seven Spirits of God’ (1.4; 3.1; 4.5; 5.6) sent out into all the earth, these spiritual responses should not be understood as acts of human determination, stoic fortitude, or passionate activism. Rather, they are Spirit enabled actions of divine grace. In the case of writing, John is commanded to ‘write’ immediately after perceiving he is in the Spirit (1.11). Thus, the undertaking of writing the Apocalypse is the first and initial activity of John when he is in the Spirit. From this point

¹⁷ This is not to say that embodied theology will eventually lead to the explanation for solving the two aforementioned propositions involved in classical theodicy. However, it could lead to enough understanding of the character of God to sustain one’s hope in spite of being without an answer.

¹⁸ See G.R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Bible Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), p. 276, who adopts his definition of Apocalyptic from Rowland, Aune, and Collins. Within this definition, he says that apocalyptic ‘encourages readers to persevere in the midst of their trials’. Further, he notes that ‘the visions reverse normal experience by making the heavenly mysteries the real world and depicting the present crisis as a temporary, illusory situation’. In other words, Osborne sees suffering and evil as a central component of apocalyptic literature. Stevenson, *A Slaughtered Lamb*, pp. 92-102, locates four characteristics of apocalyptic rhetoric which illustrate its transformative function: transcendence, determinism, symbolism, and dualism. These illustrate Revelation’s transformative function in relation to suffering and evil. Hence, Stevenson seems to see the narrative’s rhetoric working toward a central feature which is how Revelation deals with evil and suffering.

¹⁹ See J.C. Thomas, ‘The Spirit in the Book of Revelation’, in C.R. Koester (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Book of Revelation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), p. 244.

²⁰ Archer, *I Was in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day*, p. 299.

²¹ Stevenson, ‘Perspectives on Evil in the Book of Revelation’, p. 286, sees three ways in which saints achieve victory: repentance, witness, and endurance.

²² Stevenson, ‘Perspectives on Evil in the Book of Revelation’, p. 286, notes that Revelation is a ‘war story’.

forward, John is told over and over again what to write (1.19; 2.1, 8, 12, 18; 3.1, 7, 12, 14; 10.4; 14.13; 19.9; 21.5), as his writing is prophetic activity, enabled and guided by the Spirit. In the case of waiting, the Spirit's involvement in this spiritual response is explicitly observed in 14.12-13 wherein there is a call for the endurance of the saints and the Spirit's assurance that those who endure will be given rest. Prior to this call, there are two separate scenes depicted. The first scene is that of the 144,000 who follow the Lamb (14.1-5). The second is the judgment of those who follow the beast (14.6-11). The call for the saints' endurance is made directly after these two scenes, suggesting that worshipping the beast means an escape from suffering. However, it will not lead to eternal rest, rather eternal torment. Only by patient endurance and waiting can they achieve eternal rest, which the Spirit ensures.²³ Thus the Spirit's assurance of rest gives them motivation for patiently waiting through their suffering – without trying to escape it by siding with the beast – making patient waiting a Spirit-enabled spiritual response toward cosmic evil. In the case of witnessing, the prototypical model for witnessing in the narrative – the account of the two witnesses (11.1-14) – reflects Zechariah's vision of the lampstand and olive trees which (Zech. 4.1-14) demonstrates that the spiritual response of witness is 'not by might, nor by human power' but the empowerment of the seven Spirits of God. In the case of worship, the entirety of Revelation portrays worship as, 'engagement with and participation in the Spirit of God'.²⁴ This is observed throughout the Apocalypse, most acutely in the heavenly throne room visions (Revelation 5-6) wherein John's entrance is only possible because he is in the Spirit (4.1). Though John suffers on Patmos, Spirit empowered worship transforms this suffering space into a sacred space. John does not escape his suffering. Rather, his worship is a spiritual response to the reality of suffering and 'provides the in-breaking of eschatological time' and 'the chaos of everyday existence is overcome by the presence of the eternal Spirit'.²⁵

Third, the Apocalypse shows that spiritual responses which form a practical theodicy are communal practices which shape faithful communities that conquer. The Apocalypse is a communal narrative written to a community (1.11) and heard by a community (2.7, 11, 17, 29;

²³ See Lee, 'Rest and Victory in Revelation 14.13', pp. 357-58.

²⁴ Archer, *I Was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day*, p. 299.

²⁵ See C. Bridges Johns, 'The Light That Streams from the End: Worship Within the Coming Christendom', *LP* 12.3 (2003), p. 14.

3.6, 13, 22; 13.9; 22.18-19).²⁶ Furthermore, the narrative is permeated with communal elements such as uniform clothing (3.4-5, 18; 4.4; 6.11; 7.9, 13-14; 22.14), corporate exhortation and rebuke (1.11; 2-3), joint worship (Revelation 4-5; 14.3; 21.2), shared identity (7.9-17; 14.1; 19.9; 22.14), social bonds (2.10, 13; 7.9-10; 14.1-3; 19.7-9), and homogeneity of purpose (2.7, 11, 17, 26-28; 3.5, 12, 21; 13.10; 2.11; 13.10). The community in the Apocalypse is also eschatological.²⁷ As an eschatological community, it accepts the reality of evil and suffering (2.10; 6.9-11; 13.10), recognizes the cosmic – even dualistic – nature of their conflict (11.7; 12.7-8; 13.7-8),²⁸ experiences the presence of the Spirit (5.6), participates in global evangelization through prophetic witness (11.1-7; 22.2), and hopes in the Parousia of Jesus unto a new creation (22.17). Moreover, the community resists cosmic evil and suffering together. Concerning writing as a spiritual response, John does not compose a private letter but rather a collective letter written in terms ‘constitutive’ to the community.²⁹ Its pastoral nature implies John is attempting to shape a community that faces evil and suffering that it might hear and obey what the Spirit says to the churches and overcome.³⁰ Waiting as a spiritual response is also communal: patient endurance is practiced together (2.3, 19; 3.7) and those suffering unjustly must wait together for vindication (2.10; 6.11). Witnessing is communal in that the people of God’s shared witness, in spite of suffering, brings about the conversion of the nations (11.7) and

²⁶ See R.L. Jeske, ‘The Spirit and Community in the Johannine Apocalypse’, *NTS* 31.3 (1985), p. 457, who notes that John is writing to a community wherein, due to his direct contact being broken off with the community, he as a prophet has become a prophetic writer and the community his hearers.

²⁷ Jeske, ‘The Spirit and Community in the Johannine Apocalypse’, pp. 458-59, applies the work of A. Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 1960), pp. 20-21 and V. Turner, *The Ritual Process* (Chicago, IL: Aldine, 1969), p. 106, in calling the communities within the Apocalypse ‘liminal’. Liminal refers to ‘a stage of existence which is on the *threshold* of a new world, in transition of a previous world’. Jeske points to J. Gager, *Kingdom and Community* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1975), p. 56, for applying ‘liminal properties’ toward early Christian communities and furthers this by applying it toward the Johannine community in the Apocalypse. The properties he identifies, though he does not limit them to these, include ‘acceptance of pain and suffering’, wherein Jeske points to the souls under the altar (6.11), as well as continuous reference to mystical powers (1.10; 4.2; 17.3; 21.10). He suggests that liminal properties are expressive of the community John is writing and they become the mechanism wherewith he identifies with the community as he writes to them.

²⁸ Gorman, *Reading Revelation Responsibly*, pp. 15-16, notes that cosmic, *ethical* dualism is at the core of the Apocalypse. More than just *ethical* dualism, *temporal* dualism – a form of dualism which divides history into the current age and the age to come – also exists within the Apocalypse. In the current age, there is the reality of evil and suffering while in the age to come there is justice and peace.

²⁹ Jeske, ‘The Spirit and Community in the Johannine Apocalypse’, p. 458.

³⁰ Gorman, *Reading Revelation Responsibly*, p. 25, notes ‘the earliest Christian manifestations of prophecy, to the extent that they have been preserved, come to us wrapped in letter form and written by early Christian leaders who wrote to shape Christian communities’. Gorman goes on to point out that, though Revelation is an apocalyptic prophecy, it is a pastoral letter that shares a writing style with NT letter writers who intended to shape Christian communities.

enables God's people to overcome the dragon together. Worship is also communal. The Apocalypse would have been read and heard when churches gathered for worship, thus the context for discerning the Apocalypse is communal worship.³¹ Communal worship permeates the Apocalypse, especially moments of worship that occur when intense suffering has just taken place (4.1-11; 5.9-14; 11.15-18; 14.1-5; 15.3-8). Participation in these practices form the people of God in the Apocalypse to stand against cosmic evil, maintain their faithfulness to Jesus in spite of suffering, and thus fulfill the command that Jesus gives the community of churches to conquer.

Fourth, the Apocalypse shows that spiritual responses which form a practical theodicy reveal new aspects of God that the community may not have considered, forming new ways of understanding biblical texts. After receiving the command to write, John sees the inaugural vision of Jesus (1.11-19). The command to write frames the vision (1.11, 19) associating the writing, itself, with the characteristics of Jesus in the vision. Moreover, the characteristics of Jesus in the vision bring together various characteristics of God from the OT including Zechariah's lampstands (Zech. 4.2), the 'son of man' (Dan. 7.13), the Ancient of Days (Dan. 7.13), the fiery furnace (Dan. 3.6), the man with a gold belt (Dan. 10.4-6), Ezekiel's vision of a wheel (Ezek. 1.24), the man in linen (Ezek. 9.11), Isaiah's mouth like a sword (Isa. 49.2), and the face of the Lord from Judges (Judg. 5.31).³² Thus, new meaning from the text is negotiated as John writes the vision.³³ Throughout the narrative, new aspects of Jesus are revealed in the saints' waiting and patient endurance: the church in Ephesus learns that Jesus holds the seven stars in his right hand (2.1), the church in Smyrna learns that Jesus is the first and last (2.8), the church in Thyatira learns that Jesus has eyes like a flame of fire and feet of burnished brass (2.18), and the church in Philadelphia learns that Jesus has the key of David (3.7). As the souls under the altar wait (6.11), the entire narrative unveils new dimensions of God's faithfulness as he works to answer their cry and vindicate their unjust suffering. The souls under the altar learn that God's judgments are true and just (15.3; 16.7; 19.2) despite their suffering.³⁴ This is particularly evident where the saints sing the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb (15.3) in

³¹ Archer, *I Was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day*, p. 302.

³² See Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 103.

³³ See Fee, *Revelation*, pp. 16-17, who notes how the vision of Jesus, though connected to characteristics of God from the OT, works toward 'creating a new collage of images'.

³⁴ It may not be insignificant that there are three declarations of God's just and true ways, which may signify the totality of his divine justice.

response to the soul's cry in 6.9-11.³⁵ New aspects of God's faithfulness emerge through waiting and patient endurance, lending new meaning to the song of Moses (Exodus 15) particularly in relation to the work of the Lamb. New aspects of God are also learned through witness. In 1.5, the people of God learn what R. Hays calls, 'the central mystery of the Apocalypse': 'God overcomes the world not through a show of force but the suffering and the death of Jesus'.³⁶ As the saints join Jesus in this faithful witness, this mystery further unfolds to them as they learn they conquer the way Jesus conquered (1.9; 2.13; 6.9-11; 11.7; 12.11; 13.7). Blount states that conquering 'does not mean that a believer "wins" ... Conquest does, however, mean that ultimately the believer will, like Christ, through the very act of witnessing, overwhelm the bestial forces of draconian Rome and obtain eschatological relationship with God.'³⁷ Thus, the people of God learn, in their witness, the mystery that God's plan of conquest in overcoming cosmic and earthly enemies is accomplished through his own suffering witness, and their continued witness. This offers new ways for the community to hear texts pertaining to the death and resurrection of Jesus and their participation in it.³⁸ New aspects of God are also discovered as the saints worship. In the heavenly throne room visions, a reversal of images is presented concerning Jesus: John is told that Jesus is the Lion of Judah, but he sees a Lamb standing though it has been slain (5.5-6). 'On one level this is simply the recital of history: Jesus just did not match up to the grand and regal messianic expectation of the Hebrew tradition. But John is also making a bold theological assertion: the Lamb *is* the Lion. Jesus is the Messiah, but he has performed his messianic office in a most extraordinary way, by his death.'³⁹ This 'reversal of value' is a surprising twist that takes place during worship spiritual response, offering new overtures about the Messiah and initiating new ways for OT Messianic texts to be heard and understood by the Johannine community (Isa. 53.7).⁴⁰

³⁵ See Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, p. 456.

³⁶ Hays, *Moral Vision*, p. 174.

³⁷ B.K. Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary* (NTL; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), p. 52.

³⁸ Boring, *Revelation*, p. 75, notes that the church continued in developing its understanding of Jesus after his passion. This is demonstrated in 1.5 where titles are attributed to Jesus that he never used of himself during his earthly ministry in order to describe what he has accomplished through his witness in death and resurrection.

³⁹ Barr, 'The Apocalypse as a Symbolic Transformation of the World', p. 41.

⁴⁰ Ladd, *Revelation*, p. 86, notes that the Jews did not know what to do with the Suffering Servant text (Isaiah 53). In their estimation, 'Messiah was to be a victorious, conquering king who would overthrow the power of evil, not be crushed by them'. Ladd notes that Rev.5.5-6 helps bring together three prophecies that were seen separate by the Jews: the conquering king of Isaiah 11, the reigning son of Daniel 7, and the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53. Thus, within a context of worship as resistance to suffering, separate OT prophecies come together in a vision of Jesus as Lion/Lamb.

Fifth, the Apocalypse shows that spiritual responses which form a practical theodicy contribute toward the conversion of the nations. The effort of God's people to resist evil and suffering is not without effect. Spiritual responses to suffering are resonances of grace wherein God supplies the sufferer grace to resist evil in return, ministering grace to those beholding their suffering. Thus, spiritual response becomes a mechanism of conviction that moves those beholding their spiritual response toward repentance. The Book of Revelation is enfolded by the grace of God. Careful hearers might observe this explicitly in an *inclusio* wherein the only two mentions of *χάρις* (1.4; 21.22) frame the entire narrative. One of the most significant displays of grace is found within the center of the narrative. Here the two witnesses are overcome by the beast and die a painful and disgraceful death (11.7-9). They are resurrected after three and a half days and ascend to heaven (11.11-12). An earthquake takes place at their ascension wherein seven thousand people are killed and those who are not killed 'were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven' (11.13). Here the church's witness is portrayed in the two prophets. The majority of those who observe their witness convert to worship the God of Israel.⁴¹ Thus, 11.1-13 portrays the witness of the church succeeding to make converts in the midst of their own suffering caused by cosmic evil (11.7). Following this account, a fuller account of the prophetic witness of the church amidst the forces of evil is offered (Revelation 12-14).⁴² Revelation 12.7 shows the church's witness takes place in a cosmic setting that goes back to the garden of Eden; Rev. 13.1-10 gives a fuller account of the suffering witness that takes place in the cosmic setting of 11.7; and Revelation 14-15 portrays the church as the 'army of the Lamb' who conquers evil through their suffering witness. Within Revelation 14-15, the conversion of the nations is portrayed in the grain harvest (14.14-16). This is accomplished through the 144,000 (the church as the 'army of the Lamb') who have been *ἡγοράσθησαν* ('redeemed') from humanity as the first fruits (14.4), an idea that would recall 5.9 wherein the Lamb's blood *ἡγόρασας* ('redeemed') God's people. This suggests that the army of God, in their witness as a spiritual response to evil, has become a sacrifice ('the first fruits') which is responsible for the reaping of the whole harvest

⁴¹ See Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, pp. 283-84, who notes:

The story of the witnesses (11.3-13), which occurs roughly at the centre of the whole book ... contains the central statement of the message of the unsealed scroll: the way the church's prophetic witness to the point of death is to lead to the conversion of the nations. The rest of Revelation expands on this theme of the church's witness, setting it in a broader context and elaborating on its results.

⁴² See Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, p. 285.

– the conversion of the nations (14.14-16).⁴³ Thus, Revelation 11-15 portrays the witness of the people of God, empowered by the Spirit of God, conquering the evil that causes their suffering. Such witness leads to the conversion of the nations. Thus, the center of the narrative shows that the working out of God’s grace through the witness of his church is a spiritual response that leads to global evangelization.

Sixth, and finally, the Apocalypse shows that spiritual responses which form a practical theodicy are eschatologically hopeful.⁴⁴ Bauckham notes that John’s visions open his readers’ world and expand their vision spatially into heaven and temporally into the eschatological future, enlarging their understanding into what is divinely transcendent.⁴⁵ This transcendent and eschatological effect reveals a much larger picture that tells a much fuller story about the suffering of the people of God – one that includes the certainty of divine vindication and justice. It does not reveal a dichotomy between the world which is here-and-now and the world which is to come. It reveals that God rules his creation *now*, despite the reality of cosmic evil and suffering, and his kingdom will eventually overthrow cosmic and earthly evils in time. Such apocalyptic imagery does not point to a separate utopian world in which the hearers should long for escape. It reveals the true state of how the world really is through the perspective of divine transcendence and demonstrates how God is at work to make the kingdoms of this world the kingdoms of our Lord and his Christ. Bauckham suggests that apocalyptic imagery merely reveals the hearers ‘day-to-day world’ and puts it into heavenly and eschatological perspective.⁴⁶ Thus, the Apocalypse offers practical, ‘day-to-day’ Spirit empowered responses to evil that are from a transcendent, eschatological perspective. These practices are informed by the reality of how the world actually is under the rulership of God and how the God who rules is working out his justice to vindicate his people’s suffering. Thus, acts of practical theodicy are eschatologically hopeful. This is true for the writing, waiting, witnessing, and worshipping that is observed in the Apocalypse.

John’s practice of writing as spiritual response (1.11; 21.5) is done in eschatological hopes that comes through the revelation that God is both Alpha and Omega (1.8; 21.6) and coming to

⁴³ See Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, pp. 284-92.

⁴⁴ Collins, ‘Towards the Morphology of a Genre’, p. 9, posits in his widely accepted definition of apocalyptic that apocalyptic ‘envisages eschatological salvation’.

⁴⁵ Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, p. 7.

⁴⁶ Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, p. 8.

make all things new (1.7-8; 21.5). The visions he experiences adjust his current perspective into an eschatological perspective where he sees God reigning as all in all in the present world, as well as God's future reign, in order to execute his justice and divine vindication. In effect, John's writing is a spiritual response to the cosmic order behind the people of God's suffering, describing this transcendent truth to his community so that they, too, may see eschatologically and hope as he hopes, in spite of the evil and suffering they experience. Waiting as spiritual response is done in eschatological hope as the souls under the altar are told to rest in conjunction with being given white robes (6.9-11). This giving of white robes serves as a provisional gesture: it indicates to the souls under the altar that their waiting will result in eschatological conquering and a place at the marriage supper of the Lamb (19.8).⁴⁷ Thus, their patient endurance is performed in eschatological hopefulness. This hopeful waiting demonstrates that it is only a matter of time until the evil order is overthrown by God's kingdom – when God's suffering people become the people who have conquered. Witnessing as spiritual response is done in eschatological hope portrayed by the church in Smyrna who is called to be faithful unto death (2.8-11). Their faithfulness serves as a witness (1.5) though this faithful witness is not expected of them without God first giving them promise of the crown of life – an eschatological guarantee which would suggest to them the prospect of eternal life. Thus, their witness in the face of death becomes a spiritual response to the finality of death which has been overcome by the work of Jesus who died and is forevermore and has the keys of Death and Hades (1.18). Worshipping is done as spiritual response as all worship in the Apocalypse is done with eschatological hopes. Archer notes, 'the Apocalypse portrays for the hearers the goal of worship: to be New Jerusalem, to be intimately united with God and the Lamb in a state of unhindered worship and adoration'.⁴⁸ This is most explicitly portrayed in the throne room worship of Revelation 4-5 which 'anticipates the eschatological goal for all creation to worship God and the Lamb'.⁴⁹ Moreover, worship scenes in the Apocalypse are filled with those who suffered and gave their lives while on the earth (7.9-17; 14.1-5; 15.1-8).⁵⁰ That those who have suffered are seen worshipping 'bolsters the hearers in their own practice of worship in the midst of potential suffering'.⁵¹ Thus, worship is a

⁴⁷ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World*, p. 64.

⁴⁸ Archer, *I Was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day*, p. 305.

⁴⁹ Archer, *I Was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day*, p. 304.

⁵⁰ Archer, *I Was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day*, p. 304.

⁵¹ Archer, *I Was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day*, p. 304.

practical response to suffering performed in eschatological hopes that anticipate uniting with God around his throne – along with the others who have suffered beforehand – and exulting him for his vindication and justice (15.3; 16.7; 19.2).

5.3 Pentecost at a Funeral

Having offered what the Apocalypse reveals about suffering and theodicy, particularly how the Apocalypse informs its hearers to respond when suffering is present, it is now in order to provide a case study from the heart of the early Pentecostal movement that demonstrates how early Pentecostals approached suffering. This case study provides a step in making overtures toward a Pentecostal theodicy, a practical theodicy that is informed by the central message of Revelation as it pertains to spiritual response to suffering.

In the May 1908 edition of *The Apostolic Faith*, a testimony appears wherein the Pentecostal community demonstrates practical theodicy the way it has been designated through this exploration of the Apocalypse. In this testimony, Pastor Clark Eckert was called to preach at the funeral of a little child, just three months old. Both the mother and father were non-believers and the mother, especially, was reported to have been deeply pained about the child's death. She clung to the child for the three months of its sickly existence. The mother did not have the strength to participate in the funeral service. After seeing the corpse, she fainted and was brought to a bed where she lay prostrate during the burial, unconscious and consumed by overwhelming grief. Before leaving, Pastor Eckert and his wife went to speak to the mother and the mother asked Pastor Eckert's wife to sing over her. A simple folding organ was set up by the mother's bed and Pastor Eckert's wife sang 'I Remember Calvary', wherein the mother sprung up and pleaded for Pastor Eckert's wife to sing more songs wherein she sang 'Anchored in Jesus', 'Lean Upon the Arms of Jesus', and 'Mansions in Heaven'. By the last chorus, the mother was smiling and waving her hands and had the 'light of heaven in her face' and began to testify about mansions in heaven and how she would go there to meet her baby. Soon after, the mother began to sing and Pastor Eckert reports 'we recognized "divine voice," and she was singing and speaking in a foreign language just as they did on the day of Pentecost'. Following this, the newly saved mother began to testify that Jesus is coming soon and began exclaiming how good God is saying, 'Why He just came down and washed me clean, took away all of my sorrow and pain, and then just came in Himself and filled me. Oh you don't know how good He is!'

Pastor Eckert and his wife remained with them nearly two hours as the mother's strength was restored. By the time they left, Pastor Eckert reports that several who were opposed to the baptism with the Holy Spirit and speaking in other tongues had been convinced. Later, they came across the mother at a cottage prayer meeting, and she was still testifying and praising God and speaking in tongues. Pastor Eckert ends the testimony saying, 'We had prayed very earnestly for God to use the death of the child to save the parents; and before going to the funeral, I had gone off to my place of secret prayer and asked God to make it a Pentecostal funeral. And he answered in such a wonderful way that we were made to understand more fully what Paul meant in Eph. 3:20. Glory to God! What can be too hard for our Father.'⁵²

The six aforementioned observations from this exploration's reading of the Apocalypse are demonstrated in this testimony. This suggests the way early Pentecostals approached suffering is in harmony with the Apocalypse, even if the early Pentecostals were not self-consciously aware that the way they approached suffering is in harmony with the Apocalypse.⁵³ That is to say that practical theodicy, as understood from the Apocalypse, is a suitable approach for Pentecostal theodicy.

The first observation is that the Apocalypse is not a theodicy in the classical – philosophical/theoretical – sense. The people of God in the Apocalypse react to suffering and evil through applied spiritual response. This is conducive for Pentecostals because they are practitioners more than philosophers; doers not logicians. In Pastor Eckert's testimony, praxis is prioritized over theory. Those present react to suffering through 'everyday' spiritual responses. The simple act of setting up a folding organ by the bedside of the grieving woman followed by Mrs. Eckert's modest singing is equivalent to the acts of writing, waiting, witnessing, and worshipping demonstrated in the Apocalypse. This simple reaction functions as a resonance of grace and enables the mother to be 'raised up'. 'Then, with the light of heaven in her face' she describes the mansions in heaven wherein she would be reunited to her 'darling babe'. This is followed by an exclamation that 'Jesus is here' and her own jubilant singing. Acts as simple as setting up an organ and singing modestly cause the mother to 'come up here' (Rev. 4.1) and

⁵² *AF* 2.13 (May, 1908), p. 3.

⁵³ Early Pentecostals never once use the word 'theodicy' in their periodicals or literature (at least, not from 1906-1920). To suggest that they were self-consciously attempting to fulfill a framework for doing theodicy would be anachronistic. This example demonstrates that the way that early Pentecostals worked through suffering makes practical theodicy a fitting way forward for a Pentecostal engagement with theodicy, in that it is home to modes central to early Pentecostal praxis.

reimagine her pain and suffering. Thus, simple spiritual responses shape the Pentecostal theological imagination in suffering. Such responses enable the grieving to see sides of God that mere rational theory cannot reveal.

The second observation is that the Apocalypse shows that spiritual responses that form practical theodicy must be Spirit empowered. This is fitting for a Pentecostal theodicy because Pentecostals are people of the Spirit.⁵⁴ Land points out that Pentecostals believe God is present by the ‘activity’ of the Spirit ‘in and among’ believers. For early Pentecostals, ‘it was this concrete, visible work of the Holy Spirit in worship and witness which was being received in these last days’.⁵⁵ If worship and witness are understood as spiritual responses, then God is present among Pentecostals in their suffering through the activity of worship and witness. The empowerment of the Spirit working through ordinary ministry activity transforms a funeral into a sacred space where God is known and experienced, making it ‘Pentecost at a funeral’. An in-breaking of eschatological time comes as a result and the chaos of grief and sorrow is overcome by the presence of the eternal Spirit. Thus, Spirit empowered action *is* the Pentecostals’ theological engagement with suffering. Acts of genuine ministry performed in times of suffering produce theological significance that cannot be determined by theory devoid of practice.

The third observation is the Apocalypse shows that spiritual responses which form a practical theodicy are communal practices which shape faithful communities that conquer. The Pentecostal community is similar to the Johannine community in the Apocalypse as they, too, are an eschatological community. Land notes that Pentecostals understand that ‘the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost constituted the church as an eschatological community of universal mission in the power and demonstration of the Spirit’.⁵⁶ This eschatological demonstration of the Spirit’s power takes the form of praxis as B.L. Campos points out, Pentecostal experience is the ‘community’s mode of being, doing, and living’.⁵⁷ Typically for Pentecostals, these modes of being, living, and doing have included communal spiritual responses to evil such as fervent prayer, seeking for discernment, confession of sin, intercessory prayer, the use of doctors,

⁵⁴ See Z.M. Tackett, ‘As People of the Gospel’, *JPT* 29 (2020), p. 16.

⁵⁵ Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, p. 50.

⁵⁶ Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, p. 52.

⁵⁷ B.L. Campos, ‘From Experience to Pentecostal Theology’, paper presented to the Encuentro Pentecostal Latinoamericano (trans. J. Beaty and S.J. Land; Buenos Aires, Argentina, 1989), pp. 1, 4, 5 in Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, p. 36.

exorcism/deliverance, and the pursuit of holiness.⁵⁸ Pastor Eckert's testimony demonstrates Pentecostal modes of being, living, and doing – communal responses – such as grieving together with the bereaved at the funeral and rejoicing together in God's goodness at the cottage prayer meeting. Moreover, after receiving Spirit baptism, the mother comes to the Eckert's prayer cottage and offers her testimony, which includes her 'wonderful experience'. The mourning mother's elation and joy, which are demonstrated in her testimony, song, and own countenance – in spite of painful loss – is its own mode of being, another spiritual response, that contributes to the formation of the community both theologically and doxologically. Thus, the Pentecostals accept the reality of evil and suffering and, together, they respond to this reality through the Spirit. As a result, the community matures into faithful followers of Jesus that conquer in spite of the reality of evil and suffering.

As Pentecostal theology has continued to develop, it has taken into consideration how spiritual responses continue to impact and form its communities, particularly those communities that include individuals suffering with impairments.⁵⁹ S.M. Fettke raises this thought with regard to his own son who was born with autism. Fettke considers how the Pentecostal community has long identified with the power and perfectionist emphases of the holiness community that applied these emphases to those with impairments of various sorts. This triumphalist perspective has long caused Pentecostal communities to neglect those with impairments because they are not able-bodied or charismatic.⁶⁰ In light of such neglect, Yong proposes the communal practice of hospitality, which he refers to as a charism and virtue.⁶¹ 'Such a fellowship of the Spirit fears neither death nor hardship, much less disability, and is therefore poised to be the kind of hospitable community that can welcome and embrace those diagnosed with little potential for life as most of us know it.'⁶² The result of this communal practice of hospitality is that 'the Spirit of hospitality further transforms the communion of saints in and through their process of caregiving. This is because the process of inclusion affects both the individual and the

⁵⁸ See Thomas, *The Devil, Disease and Deliverance*, pp. 306-15.

⁵⁹ In using this language, I share the sentiments of Fettke, 'The Spirit of God Hovered Over the Waters', p. 171, n. 1, in designating those with disabilities or impairments: 'My paper struggles between making the point that the disabled should not be known only by their disability and finding an appropriate way to speak of the disabled as people who happen to have a disability to so called "normal" people'.

⁶⁰ Fettke, 'The Spirit of God Hovered Over the Waters', pp. 177-78.

⁶¹ A. Yong, *Theology and Down Syndrome: Reimagining Disability in Late Modernity* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007), p. 222.

⁶² Yong, *Theology and Down Syndrome*, p. 224.

community.’⁶³ J. Moltmann expresses the value those suffering with impairments offer to the community of God’s people saying, ‘Congregations without any disabled members are disabled and disabling congregations’.⁶⁴ Fettke understands this and, at the end of his article, shows overtures toward construction of a Pentecostal praxis for integrating persons with impairments into Pentecostal ministry.⁶⁵ Thus, people with impairments are not only the recipients of hospitality but they also offer hospitality through the Spirit making ministry not just *to* people who have impairments but something done *with* people who have impairments. ‘The church is fully the charismatic fellowship of the Spirit insofar as she is an inclusive community of hospitality wherein the disabled and nondisabled together welcome, befriend, and embrace the stranger, the marginalized, and the disenfranchised.’⁶⁶ Thus, the action of hospitality, both received by persons suffering impairments and given from persons suffering impairments, becomes a communal activity of response – both spiritual and eschatological – to the suffering.

As Pentecostal theology continues to develop, it should consider other communal forms of praxis to be spiritual responses to suffering. As Yong notes, ‘when certain habits, virtues, and practices are cultivated, they shape and form the dispositions, commitments, and values of communities and individuals in those communities’.⁶⁷ Whether it be fervent prayer for the sick, grieving with those who grieve, or the integration of those with impairments into ministry so the Spirit can minister through them, these practices shape and form Pentecostal communities and the individuals in these communities, making them faithful to Jesus amidst unexplainable suffering and enabling them to conquer together unto the coming of Jesus.

The fourth observation is that the Apocalypse shows that spiritual responses, which constitute practical theodicy, reveal new aspects of God that the community may not have considered. Seeing such aspects creates new ways of understanding biblical texts. The Apocalypse, in demonstrating that spiritual responses toward suffering reveal new aspects of God, is conducive for Pentecostals because Pentecostal theology is formed through experience of (and participation in) Christ. Regarding Pastor Eckert’s testimony, every action taken within this event is full of meaning and becomes formative for the community. This includes Pastor Eckert’s

⁶³ Yong, *Theology and Down Syndrome*, p. 224.

⁶⁴ J. Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001), p. 193.

⁶⁵ Fettke, ‘The Spirit of God Hovered Over the Waters’, pp. 181.

⁶⁶ Yong, *Theology and Down Syndrome*, p. 225.

⁶⁷ Yong, *Theology and Down Syndrome*, pp. 223-24

prayer offered beforehand, the time taken to minister to the mother, the setting up of the organ, and each hymn Pastor Eckert's wife sung to the heartbroken mother. Only *after* these responses are offered and their results ensue do the Eckert's negotiate any theological meaning from the text. Pastor Eckert notes how the events which unfolded at the 'Pentecostal funeral' enabled the community to understand the meaning of Eph. 3.20 in the midst of this tragic situation. Thus, the Eckert's responses are resonances of grace – embodied theology – which inform the community's interpretation of Scripture in the midst of suffering. Such responses, and the meaning they reveal from the text, break through the hopelessness that things must always be the way they are and strengthen the community to love God and maintain a faithful witness.

As Pentecostals experience God, their understanding of the text – and the God in the text – develops. C.E.W. Green suggests that interpretation requires reading and rereading 'in ways that trouble and thwart us into participation with Christ, into the wisdom God is and gives'.⁶⁸ At the same time, Land posits that, for Pentecostals, 'to abide in the Word was, *simultaneously* to abide in Jesus and the written Word'.⁶⁹ Thus, there is a theological circuit at work: reading invites Pentecostals into participation with Christ and participation with Christ invites Pentecostals into new ways of reading. Yong notes this circuit within a Pentecostal context saying, 'experience and interpretation are mutually informing and correcting elements in any community of knowers'.⁷⁰ C. Bridges Johns shares a similar conviction: 'Pentecostal theology is an ongoing exercise in praxis within the larger epistemological structure of divine-human encounter. Pentecostal hermeneutic involves a dialectic between present experience and biblical witness'.⁷¹ Thus, Bridges Johns argues that there can be no distance between theory and practice within the scope of Pentecostal theology and epistemology. K.J. Archer sums it up by going so far to say that 'faith is the primary context in which interpretation takes place' for Pentecostals.⁷² This was true of early Pentecostals for whom, 'new experiences would often be the occasion for finding new insights into Scripture. Familiar Scriptures would take on a new meaning. But the beliefs, actions, and practices would all have to be tested by the Word'.⁷³ These experiences extended to

⁶⁸ Green, *Sanctifying Interpretation*, p. 153.

⁶⁹ Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, p. 66 (emphasis mine).

⁷⁰ A. Yong, *Discerning The Spirit(s): A Pentecostal-Charismatic Contribution to Christian Theology of Religions* (JPTSup 20; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), p. 181.

⁷¹ C. Bridges Johns, *Pentecostal Formation: A Pedagogy Among the Oppressed* (JPTSup 2; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), p.100.

⁷² Archer, *Spirit, Scripture, and Community*, p. 258.

⁷³ Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, p. 67.

the early Pentecostals' experience within suffering. In an edition of *The Bridegroom's Messenger*, E.W. Slaybaugh points out three ways of knowing Christ: (1) salvation, (2) Spirit baptism, and (3) suffering. He suggests that it is through these that the people of God become conformed to the image of Christ, as the Spirit works in people during suffering to form Christ in them. '[He] enlightens and enlarges our spiritual vision and understanding and deepens and intensifies our desires and love for Christ, and then magnifies and reveals Christ in greater beauties of his glory than we ever beheld Him before.'⁷⁴ As Slaybaugh points out, this formation includes further enlightenment, spiritual vision, and understanding which impact Pentecostal affections. That is to say, spiritual responses toward suffering, accomplished through the empowerment of the Spirit, will inevitably form Christ within Pentecostals – affecting how the community understands the text and feels towards the Spirit in their hearts. This impact upon affections enables a renegotiation of texts with which Pentecostals are already familiar, giving such texts a larger dimension of meaning. Such a renegotiation of texts is similar to how the Spirit enabled spiritual responses toward suffering in the Apocalypse – writing, waiting, witnessing, and worshipping – impacted the spiritual vision and affections of those in the Apocalypse and led to a new understanding of OT texts. Pentecostals should expect their own spiritual responses – and the grace ministered by the Spirit in and through them – to inform their community's interpretation of Scripture in ways that break the despair of hopelessness, lend genuine comfort, and bolster faith in Jesus as savior, sanctifier, Spirit baptizer, healer, and coming king amongst even the greatest of sorrows.

The fifth observation is that the Apocalypse shows that spiritual responses, which form a practical theodicy, contribute toward global evangelization. With regard to what took place at the funeral, Pastor Eckert concludes by describing the impact it had on evangelism: 'We have a band of seventeen baptized saints here who speak in tongues as the Spirit gives them utterance. Several hungry hearts are still seeking and people are being convinced of sin.' It is not going too far to suggest that Pastor Eckert was looking at how the small picture (the events which transpired at the funeral) fit into the big picture (global evangelism). Each spiritual response, and its corresponding effect, was part of the broad scope of how God was at work in the world. This should not be surprising as Pentecostalism has been a missionary movement from its

⁷⁴ *TBM* 6.130 (April 1, 1913), p. 4 (bracket added).

beginning.⁷⁵ The first years of the movement were characterized by missionaries who traveled ‘on faith’ to the far ends of the earth even before having any formal training.⁷⁶ G.B. McGee points out that a ‘Pentecostal paradigm’ emerged as ‘radical Evangelicals’ began expecting apostolic ‘signs and wonders’ and supernatural interventions to be the norm in their ministries.⁷⁷ Yet, McGee notes that Pentecostal missiology has matured⁷⁸ beyond expecting signs and wonders. Prophetic witness has come to constitute more than just ‘exhortation for personal piety’ and has turned into a more holistic approach.⁷⁹ The Apocalypse demonstrates that practices of grace in times of suffering, such as maintaining faithful witness to Jesus in the face of cosmic evil, can be part of this wholistic approach as spiritual responses have the potential to lead to conversions and impactful evangelization. As missionaries, Pentecostals bear witness to God’s eschatological society. This is exemplified in the values of the people of God, such as mercy and justice. Spiritual responses which embody these values confront those beholding these acts. They serve as an example of the kingdom to come and challenge the nations to repent.⁸⁰ Thus, the people of God proclaim the gospel in word and deed, but they do so ‘as the merciful and just society that functions as the sign and instrument of salvation’.⁸¹ When the prospects of miraculous power are not fulfilled and when theoretical explanations fail in times of painful suffering, grace can be ministered through spiritual response as practical theodicy. The exercise of these responses is the God of grace at work inside of the people of God through the seven Spirits of God – the result of which is convicting and able to make converts, as Pastor Eckert seems to suggest.

The sixth observation is that the Apocalypse shows that spiritual responses which form a practical theodicy are eschatologically hopeful. This is relevant for Pentecostals because

⁷⁵ Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh*, p. 145. See also V. Johnson, ‘Eschatology and Mission: A Pentecostal Perspective’, *AJPS* 23.1 (2020), p. 94.

⁷⁶ G.B. McGee, ‘Pentecostal Missiology: Moving Beyond Triumphalism to Face the Issues’, *Pneuma* 16.2 (1994), p. 275. An example of entering missionary work before acquiring formal training can be found in *AF* 1.1 (October, 1906), p. 4, under the heading ‘Missionaries to Jerusalem’. This is an account of three missionaries who were baptized in the Spirit and leave to be missionaries in Jerusalem. One of them, known as Bro. Johnson, is said to have received seven different prayer languages including Arabic and another, known as Sister Leatherman, is said to have received the Turkish language. Johnson, ‘Eschatology and Mission’, p. 97, notes that Pentecostals engaged in missions without getting bogged down with time consuming prerequisites, such as mission boards, because they were pragmatic. As he puts it, ‘missionaries went without aptitude testing’.

⁷⁷ McGee, ‘Pentecostal Missiology’, p. 278.

⁷⁸ McGee, ‘Pentecostal Missiology’, p. 275.

⁷⁹ McGee, ‘Pentecostal Missiology’, p. 281.

⁸⁰ See Macchia, *Tongues of Fire*, p. 370.

⁸¹ Macchia, *Tongues of Fire*, p. 369.

Pentecostals are eschatologically oriented people.⁸² This is demonstrated quite clearly in Eckert's testimony. After the grieving mother is baptized in the Spirit with the evidence of speaking in tongues, she says, 'Jesus is coming soon. He told me.' Following this, she sings in English about the second coming of the Lord. The ministry she received through the Eckert's spiritual responses created eschatological hope in spite of her suffering. Her expectations shifted away from grief and shifted toward the ongoing work of God in the Lord's second coming.

It was not uncommon for early Pentecostals to look toward the Lord's coming in times of suffering. This is because Apocalyptic expectation is deeply engrained in the Pentecostal ethos. Van Johnson notes:

If Apocalyptic expectation put the promises of God on the clock, then Pentecostals set their watches fast. Urgency ... meant that desperate times called for prioritizing one's actions in light of the world to come. Worldly pleasures were identified and denounced. Earthly aspirations were replaced by future considerations. Most importantly, it was their sense of time that channeled their interpretation of Spirit Baptism in a missional direction.⁸³

The Pentecostals' apocalyptic expectation has lived within various eschatological streams from the time of early Pentecostalism until now. L.R. McQueen points out three. The first stream is classic dispensationalism. The second is a 'middle trajectory' where classic dispensationalism is influential, though there are apparent theological and methodological differences. The third stream is one in which classic dispensationalism has not influenced the way Pentecostals articulate eschatology.⁸⁴ McQueen concludes that 'the more a given work takes Pentecostal theology and spirituality into account, the less dispensational it appears to be'.⁸⁵

Though McQueen has shown that not all Pentecostals were dispensational, it cannot be denied that classic dispensationalism, including the pretribulation rapture doctrine, was theologically attractive to a large part of the movement.⁸⁶ Pentecostals were attracted to dispensationalism because they held the understanding that their movement was the 'herald of the end' and 'the last great revival before the coming of God'. The 'novelty doctrine of the secret

⁸² M.K. Thompson, *Kingdom Come: Revisioning Pentecostal Eschatology Thought* (JPTSup 37; Blandford Forum: Deo Publishing, 2010), p. 49, posits that Pentecostalism is a movement fired by eschatology.

⁸³ Johnson, 'Eschatology and Mission', p. 95.

⁸⁴ L.R. McQueen, *Toward a Pentecostal Eschatology: Discerning the Way Forward* (JPTSup 39; Blandford Forum: Deo Publishing, 2012), pp. 57-59.

⁸⁵ McQueen, *Toward a Pentecostal Eschatology*, p. 58.

⁸⁶ This does not negate what McQueen has shown and that is there was eschatological diversity among early Pentecostals. However, the large majority of Pentecostalism did eventually succumb to Scofieldian dispensationalist eschatology. See Thompson, *Kingdom Come*, pp. 49-50.

rapture' fulfilled their expectations of an imminent Parousia.⁸⁷ This attraction seems to have grown over time. Beginning with the Wesleyan-Holiness stream of the Pentecostal movement, McQueen shows that the saints at Azusa, in the earliest part of the movement, were not dispensational and did not hold the view of the secret rapture.⁸⁸ Yet, an eschatological shift occurred after 1912 in *The Bridegroom's Messenger*. Here, the rapture became an event that the Pentecostals believed they needed to prepare for in order to escape the tribulation.⁸⁹ The prevalence of classic dispensationalism grew to become more widespread as classic dispensationalism seems pervasive in *The Church of God Evangel* and *The Pentecostal Holiness Advocate*.⁹⁰ Pertaining to the periodical literature within the Finished Work stream of the Pentecostal movement, McQueen concludes that classic dispensationalism is the only model of eschatology present (with few exceptions) and it is accepted 'as is' without any dialogue about other eschatological systems.⁹¹ Thus, over time, classic dispensationalism grew within the North American Pentecostal movement.

M.K. Thompson refers to the penchant the Pentecostals developed for classic dispensationalism and the secret rapture to be 'a matter of unfortunate circumstantial happenings'.⁹² While the thought of an imminent Kingdom inspired early Pentecostal missions, the adoption of a rapture doctrine led succeeding generations of Pentecostals to sit around and wait for a secret event to occur.⁹³ Both Thompson and McQueen believe the long-term effect of this has put a kink in Pentecostal mission, activism, and spirituality. In light of this, Thompson and McQueen have called for a revisioning of Pentecostal eschatology in dispensational streams that remains true to Pentecostal emphases with a particular importance on the agency and activity of the Holy Spirit.⁹⁴ This revisioning is consistent with McQueen's observation that suggests the more serious Pentecostals are about their spirituality, the less dispensational they will be.

⁸⁷ See Thompson, *Kingdom Come*, p. 53.

⁸⁸ McQueen, *Toward a Pentecostal Eschatology*, p. 74, shows within *The Apostolic Faith*, the Azusa saints' eschatology did not fit dispensational categories. Rather, it was shaped by the 'holistic and apocalyptic nature of early Pentecostal spirituality'.

⁸⁹ McQueen, *Toward a Pentecostal Eschatology*, pp. 81-82. See also McQueen, *Toward a Pentecostal Eschatology*, p. 96. Here, McQueen points out that, in spite of the emergence of the rapture doctrine in *The Bridegroom's Messenger*, Pentecostal eschatology did not have a 'linear', commonly held position between 1907-1920. There was still a variety of eschatological systems present in *The Bridegroom's Messenger*.

⁹⁰ McQueen, *Toward a Pentecostal Eschatology*, p. 141.

⁹¹ McQueen, *Toward a Pentecostal Eschatology*, p. 198.

⁹² Thompson, *Kingdom Come*, p. 53

⁹³ Thompson, *Kingdom Come*, p. 53.

⁹⁴ Thompson, *Kingdom Come*, p. 58; McQueen, *Toward a Pentecostal Eschatology*, pp. 200-201.

Thompson makes first steps toward constructing this revisioning in the final portion of his monograph wherein he concludes with overtures toward healing and the final justification of the cosmos. He posits that the charismatic presence of the Spirit in the present world underscores a new reality that is to come. It demonstrates the inbreaking of God's kingdom and eternal deliverance from evil and suffering. This forms an already/not yet dialectic for Pentecostals. It is through this dialectic that Pentecostals interpret their present experiences instead of having to interpret their experience through the past which is fraught with sin, and failure, and suffering.⁹⁵ Thompson points to holy living, stewardship of the earth, praying for the sick, and social reconciliation⁹⁶ as Pentecostal expressions which involve the agency and activity of the Spirit and point toward eschatological renewal. These 'day-to-day' activities are charged with eschatological hopefulness. They allow one to interpret reality with the inbreaking of God's Kingdom in mind without placing sole emphasis on the present (being overcome with existential dread) and without placing sole emphasis on the future (resorting to eschatological escapism). They honor the here/now dialectical lens, demonstrating a lived hopefulness that maintains the tension of the already and not yet in times of suffering.

McQueen works toward the revisioning of dispensational eschatology in the conclusion of his monograph by reflecting on the Book of Revelation. After engaging Revelation 21-22 in order to offer an example of a Pentecostal theology that is shaped by the Five-Fold Gospel and Pentecostal spirituality,⁹⁷ McQueen considers how contemporary culture can engage his narration of Pentecostal eschatology, suggesting two things. First, Pentecostals should 'reappropriate' the Book of Revelation and read it in the present tense as a text to be entered into in order to be challenged and be transformed by the Spirit.⁹⁸ On one hand, this means departing from the 'futurist script' to determine where the world is on the timeline of biblical prophecy. On the other hand, it means focusing on how the church can fulfill its role as a faithful witness to the nations. Second, McQueen suggests that Pentecostals should discern that the beast of Revelation 13 is 'within our own tradition, perhaps even our own hearts, in the construction of "Christian empires" built without regard for the poor and in exaltation of personalities which we have been

⁹⁵ Thompson, *Kingdom Come*, p. 152.

⁹⁶ Thompson, *Kingdom Come*, pp. 145-53.

⁹⁷ McQueen, *Toward a Pentecostal Eschatology*, p. 284.

⁹⁸ McQueen, *Toward a Pentecostal Eschatology*, p. 286.

eager to worship'.⁹⁹ Instead of looking suspiciously for a historical figure to be the beast, McQueen proposes that one ought to look into their own heart for places where they have distorted the gospel. Both reading the Book of Revelation as a text that is relevant to the present and reflecting upon one's own heart are activities that allow the Spirit to 'bring the ultimate realities of the future to bear on our present experience of redemption'.¹⁰⁰ One either finds themselves in the throne room visions or finds themselves sharing the apathy of Laodicea.¹⁰¹

It may not be infringing on Thompson's and McQueen's work to point out that holy living, stewardship of the earth, praying for the sick, social reconciling, hearing the text as relevant for the present, and discerning self-reflection can be considered forms of practical theodicy. Each of these 'day-to-day' acts are spiritual responses that react to the reality and current order of evil and suffering, pointing to higher reality that exists and new order that is coming. By praying for the sick, Pentecostals exhibit the final healing of the body. In living holy, Pentecostals demonstrate salvation has begun. By taking care of the earth, Pentecostals express a coming material recreation – a world without chaos, brutality, and violent forces of natural destruction.¹⁰² Through social reconciliation, Pentecostals point toward a final social reconciliation without oppression and unforgiveness for the past.¹⁰³ In treating the text as relevant for the present, Pentecostals become more committed to their role as faithful witnesses to the nations.¹⁰⁴ Through discerning self-reflection, Pentecostals demonstrate that one's loyalties must belong to God and not the beast. These spiritual responses demonstrate that practical theodicy is Spirit-empowered eschatology in action. They locate Pentecostals in the present and point toward the age when God will wipe away every tear and death, crying, and pain shall be no more. Through practical theodicy, Pentecostals join the community of the Apocalypse in their approach to present suffering, responding with hopefulness unto the coming new creation.

5.4 Practical Theodicy

As theodicean studies have broadened, there seems to be an interest among Pentecostals as to what a uniquely Pentecostal theodicy should look like. A. Yong suggests that the outpoured

⁹⁹ McQueen, *Toward a Pentecostal Eschatology*, p. 291.

¹⁰⁰ McQueen, *Toward a Pentecostal Eschatology*, p. 286.

¹⁰¹ McQueen, *Toward a Pentecostal Eschatology*, p. 286.

¹⁰² Thompson, *Kingdom Come*, p. 150.

¹⁰³ Thompson, *Kingdom Come*, p. 153.

¹⁰⁴ McQueen, *Toward a Pentecostal Eschatology*, p. 290.

Spirit has affected the late modern world upon various theological lines, theodicy being one of them. Yong considers what theology as theodicy might look like: ‘Pentecostal theology will be reflection on the fallenness of the human condition and on the divine response of the outpouring of the Spirit’.¹⁰⁵ Yong’s statement purports that theodicy is part-and-parcel with a Pentecostal theology. Perhaps it is not stretching Yong’s observation too far to say that the outpoured Spirit has affected Pentecostal theology, giving Pentecostals a uniquely distinctive way of approaching theodicy. But which approach to theodicy is suitable for a Pentecostal approach?

Both Fettke and Castelo suggest that the way forward for Pentecostals is to follow an approach that is ‘practical’ or ‘pragmatic’, even ‘pastoral’. Fettke notes, ‘a pentecostal theodicy would likely fall heavily on the side of pastoral concern’.¹⁰⁶ While he contends that this does not neglect (and even includes to some extent) intellectual pursuit (making this current exploration possible for a Pentecostal!), the priority of a Pentecostal theodicy is on the work of the Spirit in ways that comfort and give peace. This is fitting for Pentecostals’ ‘existential’ and ‘utilitarian’ approaches to faith. After all, a Pentecostal’s response would not include presenting the sufferer with a litany of competing theodicies to help them make sense of their pain! Castelo’s reflections are similar. In the concluding pages of his work, he notes that the priority response to the problem of evil is ‘not to explain but to feel for the purpose of being moved to action’.¹⁰⁷ Castelo proposes that true engagement leads to a ‘form of doing’. ‘Rather than postulating analyses and theories, Christians ought to be about the business of healing and repairing the world in light of their vision of God’s in-breaking kingdom.’¹⁰⁸ Castelo relies on S. Hauerwas who acknowledges the limits of intellectual pursuit in the understanding of suffering, suggesting that it is not a metaphysical problem in need of a solution but rather a practical challenge that begs a response.¹⁰⁹ Though not a Pentecostal, Hauerwas shares similar sensibilities toward the problem of suffering and evil:

That Christians now think the problem of suffering renders their faith in God unintelligible indicates that they now are determined by ways of life that are at odds with their fundamental convictions. For the early Christians, suffering and evil ... did not have to be ‘explained’. Indeed, it was crucial that such suffering or evil not be ‘explained’ – that is, it was important

¹⁰⁵ A. Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), p. 31.

¹⁰⁶ Fettke, ‘A Practical Pentecostal Theodicy?’, p. 168.

¹⁰⁷ Castelo, *Theological Theodicy*, p. 94.

¹⁰⁸ Castelo, *Theological Theodicy*, pp. 97-98.

¹⁰⁹ S. Hauerwas, *God, Medicine, and Suffering* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), p. 51.

not to provide a theoretical account of why such evil needed to be in order that certain good results occur, since such an explanation would undercut the necessity of the community capable of absorbing suffering.¹¹⁰

J. Swinton, whom Fettke follows in using the terminology ‘practical theodicy’, uses Hauerwas’ observation to propose this way forward for theodicy. He takes seriously Hauerwas’ suggestion of creating communities capable of absorbing suffering so people may sustain their faith in God until the Parousia.¹¹¹ To do this, Swinton proposes ‘practices’ which he defines as particular forms of ‘meaning-filled actions that are informed by Scripture and tradition, inspired by the Holy Spirit, and learned through participation within particular forms of community’.¹¹² These practices meet human need and go a step further in creating new needs which draw attention to aspects of God in which people are not always aware.¹¹³ The results of these practices cause the community to rethink, even reimagine, their current perspectives and their current understanding of God, including the nature of his character and his ongoing purposes. Such practices are forms of ‘embodied theology’ among the community that reveal theological truth.¹¹⁴ They result from grace and find their ‘dynamism’ in the power of the Spirit.¹¹⁵ As such they are ‘resonances of grace’ which bolster faith and hope amidst the suffering and tragedies of life that result in hopelessness.¹¹⁶ These Spirit-empowered spiritual responses¹¹⁷ bear witness, even amidst deep

¹¹⁰ Hauerwas, *God, Medicine, and Suffering*, p. 49.

¹¹¹ Swinton, *Raging with Compassion*, pp. 70-71.

¹¹² Swinton, *Raging with Compassion*, p. 80. In defining ‘practice’ Swinton finds helpful C. Dykstra and D.C. Bass’ definition of Christian practices: ‘things Christian people do together over time to address fundamental human needs in response to and in the light of God’s active presence for the life of the community’. See C. Dykstra and D.C. Bass, ‘A Theological Understanding of Christian Practices’, in M. Volf and D.C. Bass (eds.), *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), p. 18.

¹¹³ Swinton, *Raging with Compassion*, p. 81.

¹¹⁴ Swinton, *Raging with Compassion*, pp. 81-82. At the intersection of practice and theology, Swinton looks to M. Volf who says, ‘Practices are essentially belief-shaped, and beliefs are essentially practice-shaping’. See M. Volf, ‘Theology for a Way of Life’, in M. Volf and D. C. Bass, *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), pp. 245-63.

¹¹⁵ Swinton, *Raging with Compassion*, p. 82.

¹¹⁶ Swinton, *Raging with Compassion*, p. 83.

¹¹⁷ Swinton, *Raging with Compassion*, p. 47, refers to these actions as ‘resistance practices’. Resistance practices ‘enable people to persevere and sustain their faith in the midst of evil until the time comes when there will be no more suffering and tears’. Swinton, *Raging with Compassion*, pp. 72-75, gives two examples of these ‘resistance practices’ – which he seems also to refer to as ‘gestures of redemption’ – amidst the most heinous evil one can imagine, the Holocaust. In the first anecdote, Swinton relays a story in which prisoners shared breadcrumbs with each other in spite of having their ration of bread stolen from them by the Kapos. In the second anecdote, he relays how some walked through the huts comforting others by giving away their bread. He notes that such resistance practices and gestures of redemption have ‘hidden powers’ to break through the hopelessness with protest suggesting the possibility that things will not always be the way they are. Instead of evil winning outright, meaning appears. While the pain and suffering remain, resistance practices enable the eschatological imagination to envisage the defeat that has been dealt to death.

suffering, that things are not the way that they should be and that things will not always be the way they are. But they must be ‘practiced’ as continual practice of them forms those in the community into who they are and forms the community, itself, into what it is. ‘When we practice theodicy, we become the type of people who know what evil is and how to resist it.’¹¹⁸

Swinton assures that practical theodicy *is* a theodicy because it explores and responds to the problem of evil.¹¹⁹ He defines practical theodicy as:

The process wherein the church community, in and through its practices, offers subversive modes of resistance to evil and suffering experienced by the world. The goal of practical theodicy is, by practicing these gestures of redemption, to enable people to continue to love God in the face of evil and suffering and in so doing prevent tragic suffering from becoming evil.¹²⁰

Swinton notes that practical theodicy is not just a generalized response to evil.¹²¹ It is a theological and eschatological response that ‘mirrors’ God’s providence for the world, bringing relief from what evil does. Finally, Swinton notes that the ‘tools’ of practical theodicy are ‘particular forms of communal, ecclesial practice that are inspired by the Holy Spirit and intended to reflect and embody aspects of and response to the redemptive actions of God in, to and for the world’.¹²²

That Swinton’s practical theodicy is defined well-enough to build upon is evident in B. Sollereeder’s work wherein Sollereeder uses practical theodicy to construct a ‘compassionate theodicy’.¹²³ Her compassionate theodicy does not deviate from practical theodicy; it innovates

¹¹⁸ Swinton, *Raging with Compassion*, p. 84.

¹¹⁹ Swinton, *Raging with Compassion*, pp. 46-68, notes that there is no real universal definition for ‘evil’. Because philosophy fails to give this definition, he posits that the enterprise of philosophical theodicy is ‘suspect’. If evil cannot be tied down, how can a rational answer be given? As such, Swinton moves the theodicy conversation away from the question of its existence (its origin and where the impulse to rebel against the divine will comes from) to our response to evil. He suggests that discovering ways to respond to evil is, in and of itself, a theologically rich and complex undertaking – even more so than finding answers to the two irresolvable propositions of how God can be good, and evil can still exist. Swinton eventually divides evil into two categories, moral and natural, and maintains that not all suffering is ‘evil’ – though all forms of suffering have the potential to become evil. Though all forms of suffering are ‘tragic’, they are not all ‘evil’. That being stated, he notes that evil is ‘everything that stands against God and his intentions for the well-being and transformation of human beings and God’s creation’. This definition shows that evil is not necessary for human suffering, though suffering becomes evil when it ‘blocks the process or the re-creation of the good in Christ’ and when ‘it impedes the purposes of God for human beings’. Because evil takes the form of those things which separate humans from God’s providential love, then theodicy is a problem that requires a practical response. However, this does not fail to acknowledge theodicy intellectually. Rationale is just not an end.

¹²⁰ Swinton, *Raging with Compassion*, p. 85.

¹²¹ Swinton, *Raging with Compassion*, p. 85.

¹²² Swinton, *Raging with Compassion*, pp. 85-86.

¹²³ See Sollereeder, ‘Compassionate Theodicy’, pp. 382-95.

with it.¹²⁴ Through the compassionate theodicy approach, the theodicy acts a coach, exploring the kinds of theodicies that suffering people maintain and helping them to take their own journey to make sense of their suffering. As a result, the sufferer becomes the theodicy and the sufferer is always correct when it comes to what the interpretation of the suffering may mean. Her work shows that Swinton's practical theodicy allows room for innovation and exploration. In following Sollereeder, I, too, am attempting to innovate with Swinton's practical theodicy to form a Pentecostal theodicy which has been informed by the Apocalypse.¹²⁵

Swinton's approach to theodicy is fitting for building a Pentecostal framework for a Pentecostal theodicy for two reasons. First, Pentecostals are doers before they are thinkers. Castelo notes, 'Pentecostals were and continue to be "doers" before they are "thinkers"'. When they do self-identify, Pentecostals usually opt for considering themselves as a "movement" on the go rather than an institution that is self-reflective and maintenance-oriented.'¹²⁶ The Pentecostal attitude toward suffering that Castelo is describing is embodied in Sister Hutchins, whose testimony is found in *The Apostolic Faith*, which includes her heartfelt and instant obedience to the voice of God calling her to go to Monrovia, Liberia, Africa. She testifies that God called her to go on the 28th of July, 1903. With not enough fare for a streetcar, she believed the Lord would make a way and by the 15th of September, 1903 she testifies, 'I am all ready and down to the Mission with my ticket and everything prepared, waiting to have hands laid on and the prayers of the saints, and expect to leave at eight o'clock from the Santa Fe station en route for Africa. We expect to go to Mt. Coffee, Monrovia, Liberia.'¹²⁷ Later, in the December edition of *The Apostolic Faith*, an update shows Sister Hutchins well on her way.¹²⁸ Sister Hutchins is one example of many among the early North American Pentecostal tradition suggesting that a Pentecostal theodicy must prioritize pneumological praxis over philosophical explanation.¹²⁹

¹²⁴ Her theodicy is unique in two ways: (1) it is written strictly for those who suffer and (2) it focuses only on the intellectual questions. Her critique of practical theodicy is that, despite it being praxis-oriented, it remains a 'pre-eminently theoretical' activity performed by clergy and professors.

¹²⁵ This is not to suggest that this theodicy will be entirely adequate. As Rice, *Suffering and the Search for Meaning*, p. 25, notes, no approach to evil and the problem of suffering entirely accounts for evil and suffering and no approach is 'universally' appealing.

¹²⁶ D. Castelo, 'The Improvisational Quality of Ecclesial Holiness', in J.C. Thomas (ed.), *Pentecostal Ecclesiology* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2010), p. 89.

¹²⁷ *AF* 1.2 (October 1906), p. 1.

¹²⁸ *AF* 1.4 (December 1906), p.1.

¹²⁹ Macchia, *Tongues of Fire*, pp. 239-40, suggests 'all we can do is bear witness and in doing so seek to explain what the scripture implies about faith in the midst of suffering, knowing all the while that we stand before a mystery that ultimately cannot be grasped'. Macchia's assertion is a step in the right direction as it prioritizes bearing witness

The second reason Swinton's framework is fitting for building a Pentecostal theodicy is because the praxis involved centers: (1) Scripture and tradition, (2) the role of the Spirit, and (3) the participation of the community – the three components which make up the Pentecostal hermeneutical triad. This approach is congruent with J.C. Thomas' sensibilities in approaching the text, namely the Apocalypse. Since Thomas insists on a 'multidimensional' reading of the text that includes the authority of Scripture, sensitivity to the Spirit, and interaction with the Pentecostal community,¹³⁰ a practical theodicy insists on a multidimensional approach to evil and suffering that (1) allows the Scripture to speak to our experiences with evil and suffering, (2) discerns the work of the Spirit and receives his empowerment in the face of evil and suffering, and (3) forms communal practices which resist and transforms evil and suffering to bring hope to the community which enables it be faithful in spite of the reality of evil and suffering until Jesus comes.

5.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have offered a contribution toward a Pentecostal theodicy, using the framework of practical theodicy. I have shown through my reading of the Apocalypse that the Apocalypse is a text which shows how God's people might respond when suffering is present. While there is profuse suffering in the Apocalypse – especially for those who follow the Lamb – there is no attempt at reconciling the goodness and omnipotence of God with the reality of evil and suffering in the world – neither by human, supernatural, or divine agency. Even when there is explicit inquiry about suffering (6.9-11), theoretical/philosophical explanations are absent. Yet, spiritual responses are pervasive and are practiced by the faithful company of God's people. These responses are Spirit empowered resonances of grace which inform the community's interpretation of Scripture – and the meaning it negotiates from Scripture – in light of the suffering their community experiences. The result of these responses is an eschatologically hopeful community that serves Jesus with an empowered witness, observed by those who dwell

over explanation and discourages 'trivializing' suffering which often comes as the result of poorly constructed theodicies. Macchia is also pneumological in his approach to theodicy saying, 'the question to be asked in the midst of suffering is not why God predestined such a thing to occur but rather how we discern and align with that which God did predestinate, Jesus Christ, for us and in us by the Spirit of God'. For Pentecostals, Macchia succeeds in leaning the project of theodicy away from a philosophical burden when suffering is present and places priority on the work of the Spirit.

¹³⁰ Thomas, 'Reading the Bible From Within Our Tradition', p. 120.

on earth. Moreover, I have also shown through Pastor Clark Eckert's testimony, 'Pentecost at a Funeral', that the early Pentecostals approached suffering similar to the way the suffering people of God in the Apocalypse approached it – through these spiritual responses. Thus, the Apocalypse makes a significant contribution toward a theodicy that is apropos for Pentecostals. Such a theodicy enables Pentecostals to consider the problem of evil and suffering within a more developed theological framework, germane to their tradition.

The final chapter of this study will offer a compilation of the conclusions regarding suffering and theodicy in the Apocalypse that have emerged from this Pentecostal exploration.

CONCLUSION

6.1 Contributions of this Thesis

This study makes a number of contributions to a theology of suffering in the Apocalypse as well as to the emerging development of Pentecostal theodicy.

First, this study provides the most comprehensive exploration of the most recent research of the themes of suffering and theodicy in the Apocalypse. It has shown that few works have appeared which are devoted exclusively to suffering and theodicy in the Apocalypse. Moreover, few works have appeared that are devoted to individual texts that are important to suffering and theodicy in the Apocalypse. Furthermore, it has shown that a number of works appear on themes related to suffering and theodicy in the Apocalypse but are not in conversation with one another. This study puts these works into dialogue together. Extraordinarily, there has been no concentrated attention given to suffering and theodicy in the Apocalypse by Pentecostal scholars. This exploration seeks to provide a more serious Pentecostal interaction with suffering and theodicy from the Apocalypse.

Second, this study presents a Pentecostal reading strategy that follows the most current and up-to-date advances in Pentecostal hermeneutics. This reading strategy is centered around the triad of Scripture, Spirit, and Community which stands at the heart of the Pentecostal approach to Scripture. It also follows Pentecostal developments in *Wirkungsgeschichte* and narrative/literary analysis.

Third, this study offers the first reception history of how early North American Pentecostals understood suffering and theodicy from the Apocalypse by examining early Pentecostal periodical literature from 1906-1919. Both the Wesleyan-Holiness and Finished Work

publications, despite their differences on healing and eschatology,¹ align quite seamlessly here. Both traditions recognize that there are various forms of suffering, including Christian suffering. Neither tradition ever went beyond the explanation that suffering was the result of the fall. Their efforts in engaging suffering were not theoretical, but practical. Thus, each tradition displayed practical theodicy through the labors of missions and pastoral care. Each tradition also admitted that if God did not remove suffering, it could have benefits and be a spiritually formative experience, though, this notion was not an attempt at a rational theodicy. Finally, both streams relied most on Revelation 2-3 and Revelation 19-22 to understand suffering and theodicy from the Apocalypse.

Fourth, this study currently provides the most comprehensive narrative/literary approach to the theme of suffering and practical theodicy in the Apocalypse. I offer a narrative hearing of the entire Apocalypse with special attention given to places in the text that are more explicitly concerned with suffering and practical theodicy, including 1.5-6; 2-3; 6.9-11; 11.1-13; 17.1-21.8. This narrative hearing demonstrates that the Apocalypse is not a theodicy in the classical sense. However, it makes overtures toward practical theodicy by instructing the people of God how to maintain faithfulness to Jesus in spite of the reality of cosmic evil and suffering.

Fifth, I have contributed to the ongoing studies in the Apocalypse by offering approaches to suffering and theodicy that have emerged from my narrative reading of the text. I have put my observations into conversation with Pentecostal scholars and other scholars adjacent to Pentecostal scholars in this area. Such a contribution welcomes all readers to hear the Apocalypse as a text that demonstrates practical ways to respond to evil and the suffering it causes through the power of the Spirit until Jesus comes. It also bids Pentecostals to recognize practical theodicy as the approach to suffering that is most fitting for the Pentecostal hermeneutic and ethos.

Sixth, this study contributes to how Pentecostal scholars have been thinking about theodicy and has made overtures toward the construction of a Pentecostal theodicy.

Seventh, this study makes contributions useful for Pentecostal orthodoxy, orthopraxy, and orthopathy. As it pertains to orthodoxy, this study has suggested that a Pentecostal theology of suffering is formed through spiritual response to suffering. Spiritual response forms Christ within Pentecostals and informs their community's interpretation of Scripture in ways that break the

¹ See Archer, *I Was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day*, p. 117.

despair of hopelessness and lend comfort. As it pertains to orthopraxy, this study has suggested that the fitting actions to be taken when suffering is present are those actions which are accomplished through the empowerment of the Spirit. Spirit empowered action *is* the Pentecostals' theological engagement with suffering. Acts of genuine ministry performed in times of suffering produce theological significance that cannot come through theory alone. As it pertains to orthopathy, this study has suggested that Pentecostals endure when suffering occurs through eschatological hopefulness. In spite of the horrors of suffering, Pentecostals hope as God hopes. They envision a future where God reigns as all in all in the present world.

6.2 Suggestions for Further Research

In light of this exploration, there are a number of opportunities for further research to be suggested.

First, my reading of early Pentecostal literature focuses more on how Pentecostals sought to explain suffering without giving too much consideration to how Pentecostals understood the ontology of evil. It would be interesting to learn if the Wesleyan-Holiness and Finished Work streams shared a similar perspective on the ontology of evil. It would also be interesting to discover how their ontology of evil was shaped.

Second, owing to the renaissance taking place in the Apocalypse among Pentecostals, it would be beneficial for additional treatments of the Apocalypse to be rendered through the employment of a Pentecostal reading strategy. Such treatments might include, but not be limited to, explorations of other themes in the Apocalypse through narrative/literary analysis or the use of *Wirkungsgeschichte* in early Pentecostal periodicals to determine how early Pentecostals heard other themes in the Apocalypse.

Third, it would be beneficial for other books of the Bible, aside from the Apocalypse, to be explored using a Pentecostal reading strategy.

Fourth, my reading of the Apocalypse demonstrates that there are various kinds of suffering that take place in the Apocalypse: Christian suffering, non-Christian suffering, innocent non-Christian suffering, and ecological suffering. Due to the limits of this exploration, this reading focuses on human suffering, mostly Christian. It leaves more room to explore, at considerable depth, more complex forms of non-Christian suffering, innocent non-Christian suffering, and ecological suffering. It should also be noted that most of the commentaries, monographs, and

journal articles that explore suffering in the Apocalypse focus mainly on Christian suffering. While this can be explained by the fact that the majority of the Apocalypse *is* concerned with Christian suffering, there is enough non-Christian, innocent non-Christian, and ecological suffering in the Apocalypse to warrant a new exploration.

Fifth, though the field of theodicy has long been considered a theoretical/modernist enterprise, it has shifted its course and has become friendly toward innovation. This has created room for Trinitarian theologians to engage the project, leading to helpful contributions that have brought the Triune God into focus in place of the impersonal God of deism. There now exists a robust opportunity for theodicean studies to explore the problem of evil and suffering beyond the restrictions of modernity. What else might further research – with emphasis on Spirit-empowered praxis for the negotiation of Scripture meaning – discover about the goodness of God in relation to evil and suffering if it should take advantage of the opportunities now afforded in the project of theodicy?

Sixth and finally, this exploration has made advances toward practical – and Pentecostal – theodicy by building significantly on the work of those who have engaged the field such as S. Hauerwas, J. Swinton, S.M. Fettke, and D. Castelo. Where might practical – and Pentecostal – theodicy go from here should it be developed further through a similar engagement with another biblical text?

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