

APOCALYPTIC INTERPRETATION

Since the time of the great Reformation, there have been no less than **SIX PROMINENT THEORIES** of interpretation, each claiming for itself the palm of merit, and all demanding the unanimous suffrage of the Christian Church. They are subjoined in the following order:-

I. THE ANTI-PROTESTANT FUTURIST THEORY. The originator of this theory was a Spanish Jesuit priest, Ribera by name, who, A.D. 1585, published a Commentary on the Revelation, in which he laboured to turn aside the Protestant application of the Apocalyptic prophecies and symbols from the Church of Rome. The opinion had matured into settled conviction, in the minds of many, that the Great Apostasy, spoken of in the Scriptures, was Papal; and that the "Little Horn" of Daniel, the "Antichrist" of John, the "Man of Sin" mentioned by Paul, and the Apocalyptic "Beast," were all identical. Against this view Ribera originated the Futurist theory. It is so called, because it passes by the Papacy, overleaps almost the whole immense interval of time between the date of the Apocalypse and the distant future, and holds that the events symbolised in the Apocalypse refer to the immediate antecedents or accompaniments of Christ's second coming. It argues a parallelism between the events of the Seven Seals and the successive signs of Christ's coming, as specified in his prophecy on Mount Olivet. Antichrist is not regarded as the Papacy, but avowed infidelity.

II. THE ANTI-PROTESTANT PRATERITE (PRETERIST-ed.)THEORY. This was originated by a Spanish Jesuit also, Alcasar of Seville, who, A.D. 1615, published a work having in view the same end as Ribera, viz., to set aside the Protestant application of the Apocalyptic prophecies and symbols. Ribera endeavored to throw everything forward into the future. Alcasar endeavoured to throw every thing backward into the past. He stops short in the course of history, and makes all the Apocalyptic symbols to have been fulfilled within the first five six centuries. The Germanic Neronic Form; so called because it dates the Apocalypse (an essential point for interpreters) about the end of Nero's reign, A.D. 67 and because it is thus regarded by the critical, rationalistic school of German expositors, and by Professor Stuart in America. According to this view, the Apocalypse can only refer to the overthrow of Judaism and Heathenism, and the triumph of Christianity, but not to the Papacy. The early date, viz., A.D. 67, makes room for supposing a reference to the destruction of Jerusalem, A.D. 70; and the six centuries, for the overthrow of Heathenism, and the prevalence of Christianity, but not for the demolition of the Roman Catholic Church! The Papal Domitianic Form; so called because it fixes the date of the Apocalypse about the end of Domitian's reign, A.D. 96; and in this form prevails with the Papacy. Of course, this form of the theory excludes application of the symbols of the Apocalypse to the destruction of Jerusalem, which occurred twenty-five years previous to this date, inasmuch as the events recorded were to come into being after the time John wrote.-(Rev. 4:1). The fall of Judaism and the doom of the Roman Catholic Church are not referred to at all, but only the overthrow of Heathenism and the triumph of Christianity. Such is the loose and wholesale mode of generalising in these two forms of Praeterism (the latter of which has yet some truth), that any upstart has a precedent before him for applying the Apocalyptic symbols to the destruction of any enemy he please.

III. THE MODIFIED FUTURIST THEORY. This theory resulted from a conviction in the minds of the Futurists themselves that great violence had been done to the Apocalypse, by completely closing its lips upon the subject of the Papacy, and by causing it to pass over in silence the stirring events of more than a thousand years. Such a scheme was too dashing and bold to escape merciless criticism and ridicule. It failed to secure the respect and confidence of its own supporters. Certain Futurists have endeavoured to modify it; in other words, to Protestantise Futurism, and conciliate the friendship of the historical interpreters. The chief points of supposed improvement are two: 1. With reference to the violent plunge into the distant future; and 2. With reference to the anti-Protestantism. Thus, the white horse and rider of the first seal represent the triumphant progress of Christ and his gospel until now: (!) we are near (!) the time of the end, when the Papacy will become (!) the Apocalyptic Beast, and Rome the Apocalyptic Babylon, but not Antichrist; (!) and soon Antichrist will appear, when the remaining seals will receive their fulfillment, and then the grand consummation will take place.

IV. THE TYPICO-SPIRITUAL THEORY. We coin this name for want of a better designation, or rather because the advocates of it have not given a satisfactory one themselves. It holds that prophecy is not an anticipation of history, but deals alone with the idea of good and evil. A particular man, city, or nation, may be taken as the representative or type of such idea, to be fulfilled, as intimated, in a lofty, spiritual, but not low, historical sense. The details of literal history are not ample enough to satisfy the fore announced demands of prophecy. Thus, Rome Papal answers only partly to the Apocalyptic Babylon; and hence, as ancient Babylon was only partly the subject of anti-Babylonian prophecies, so Rome Papal is only partly the subject of anti-Papal prophecies in the Revelation. There can only be an imperfect historical fulfillment in any case; and we must wait for a realization, not literally, but spiritually, of the grand idea, viz., the downfall of the true Babylon, which is the world (!) as opposed to the church. The influence of German philosophy, in the fabrication of this theory, is evident.

V. THE PARALLEL SEPTENARY THEORY. This is one of the two principle Protestant theories which have divided the opinions of orthodox interpreters. It argues against considering the Apocalypse as a progressive whole evolving its events in continuous succession. Instead of regarding the seven trumpets as the development of the seventh seal, just as the seven vials appear to be of the seventh trumpet, it considers them as parallel chronologically, and supplementary to each other, each septenary running from John's time to the consummation. It is eminently a church scheme, the church itself being the subject of the prophetic figurations, in its sevenfold phase, from the beginning to the end. This theory was brought into repute by Pareus and Vitranga shortly after the Reformation.

VI. THE CONTINUOUS HISTORICAL (HISTORICIST-ed.) PROTESTANT THEORY. This was the principle theory which attracted the attention of the most orthodox and enlightened expositors until the earliest part of this century. It looks upon prophecy as an actual anticipation of veritable history. It regards each seal as successor to the preceding, in chronological order; each trumpet and each vial in the same way; and, objecting to the previous theory, maintains that the septenary of trumpets are subsequent to the septenary of seals, and the septenary of vials

subsequent to the septenary of trumpets. The exclusive church scheme is discarded, and the Apocalypse is viewed as setting forth, in regular progression and detail, the chief secular and ecclesiastical events of the existing dispensation. An anti-Papal solution is given to the symbols and predictions respecting the "Beast." It was the theory of the Waldenses, Wickliffites, and Hussites; and the great body of the Reformers in the 16th century-German, Swiss, French, English, generally received it. It has been the view of the vast majority of Scottish presbyterians. It was also the view of many prominent American divines, from Edwards to the 19th century Princeton theologians-the Alexanders, the Hodges, Miller, etc. It is preeminently the theory of the Reformation, and therefore has been violently opposed by Roman Catholics, prelatists, rationalising expositors and other foes of reformational principles.-L'Avenir

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