SOME QUESTIONS ON THE BIBLE'S LAST BOOK

2813 28 Sept 96
ELLIOTT THINKSHEETS
309 L.Eliz.Dr., Craigville, MA 02636
Phone 508.775.8008
Noncommercial reproduction permitted

Illness forcing me to miss the 2nd session of "The Book of Revelation for Today," I asked that you spend part of that session developing questions for me to respond to during at least part of the 3rd session. In the below, I hope you will recognize (though perhaps slightly altered) your questions (in italics).

1 *John "who" is the author? And why does it matter?* Of his role as an early Christian prophet in western Turkey, then Asia (Minor), we know much: of his identity, nothing except that he went by a Jewish name (in Hebrew, Yohanan; Greek [1.1,4,9;22.8])--so common that we know of some two dozen bearing it in the biblical period (e.g., Jn. the Baptist, Jn. Mark, the Jn. of the Gospel & 3 Letters [whose mind & language are very different from Jn. the Revelator's]).

Everywhere & always, famous names act as magnets for remembered sayings/writings. I call this **clumping**, & occasionally bump into a false reference of this type: something attributed to somebody famous though I know its source to be otherwise. As a literary type we call this "personal symbolism." E.g., when Jesus says "it says in David," he means the Psalter (some of which doubtless is from David). In the same vein, "Moses" means law & "Joshua" means war & "Elijah" signals all the prophets & "Aesop" means the collection of Greek fables; & "Homer" probably didn't compose all of Homer, or even "Shakespeare" all of Shakespeare. Interesting, but unimportant (except to scholars).

But worthy of note is an ancient phenomenon now considered unethical, viz. pseudepigraphy, attaching a famous name in order to "float" a piece of literature. "The Apocalypse of Adam & Eve" obviously wasn't written by them! Nor "The Apocalypse of Peter" by Peter (either the Peter of 1P. or the Peter of 2P.). The Bible's last book is the only known apocalypse written by the author whose name it bears!....You can understand, accordingly, that the NT canon was put together by **clumps**. The Jn. clump has the Gospel, the 3 Letters, & Rev. The Paul clump has 13 items (even including the essay-sermon ["Letter"] "To the Hebrews"), though probably only 9 are fully by Paul. The Peter clump has 2 items, 2P. certainly by a different hand than 1P.

Long answer to this question? I had to say it matters, but not as much as we, with our modern concern for accuracy of attribution, are tempted to think.

2 *Do we see the hope that is really there? The battle between good & evil within & without?* Jn. the Revelator would respond "I like that question; it's from inside what I was about." I showed you R.L.Jeske's commentary, whose title is from inside the author's intention: REVELATION FOR TODAY: Images of Hope. At this point I thought of Jn. as obeying his & our Lord's command "Feed my sheep" (Jn.21.17), & I decided to give to the church this morning a plaster cast (by one of my students) of a bas-relief of that Raphael painting. To all churches obeying/sinning/embattled (the "7" of 2.1-3.22 signifying the complete circle of churches his encyclical--each letter for all, all for each), to them & us all he addresses his apocalyptic message of **hope**. Look at the outline on p.2 of #2810. Hope is in the wrapper: the prolog's promise (1.1-8) & the epilog's fulfilment (22.6-21), as well as in the address to the churches (2.1-3.22) & in the visions (4.1-22.5). And the whole movement, the whole of Jn.'s ministry, begins with the Revelator's call (1.9-20) by the resurrected, victorious Lord Jesus. As for the "battle between good & evil within & without," it's easy to make comparisons/contrasts between then & now. The current issue of a superb periodical, BOOKS & CULTURE: A Christian Review (465 Gundersen Dr., Carol Stream, Il. 60188) has a Geo. Marsden article titled "Muzzling Religion" (in a special section on "Religion and Higher Education"), revealing a current parallel to the Roman Empire's efforts, as revealed in Rev., to muzzle the gospel. And "Reporting the Apocalypse" is Ethan Casey's review of secular apocalyptist Robt. D. Kaplan's THE ENDS OF THE EARTH: A JOURNEY AT THE DAWN OF THE 21st CENTURY (Random House/96), a frightening geopolitical spectacle--& on the facing page, an account of how Demi Moore, with "The Six-Million-Dollar Breast," corrupted her daughter (shades of Rev.17-18!).

3 While love drives out fear, **fear** drives out hope. Two questions were here:

(1) *Pestilence--past or future or with us now?* Yes, all three. The bugs (including bacteria, viruses, & inbetweens) literally outweigh & keep ahead of

+

us. Human life is manifoldly designed to be fragile. Our Christian faith makes manifold use of, is thoroughly realistic about, this datum. There's more to fear than fear itself. And fear is itself designed to be a servant of love & of Love (God).

(2) *Why the scary depiction of heaven? A placed filled with creatures with many eyes, & a lamb standing as though it had been slain, with 7 horns & 7 eyes. It doesn't sound like an inviting place to be, that heaven. One might more easily expect a place of beauty, filled with warm fuzzy animals. How do you explain?* You want warm fuzzies? You got 'em, or something even more satisfying. More: heaven is a plus, hell is a minus. You get there & you're scared? You're in hell.

St.Peter told Mother Teresa to go back to earth. In her dream, he said "You can't come in here, we have no slums."

So there you have it. In the Bible's picture language, most intense in Rev., we live in a three-story universe. The last act of Verdi's "Aida" has a two-story stage. Imagine the possibilities of a three-story stage! In body language, last night we experienced three realities in the total lunar eclipse: we saw (1) sunlight, (2) the moon, & (3) earth's curved shadow on the moon. Stop, stand, be awed! Now, in soul language, the language of the imagination, the levels of reality are as really real as the realities of a lunar eclipse, though our religion-"muzzled" American educational systems tilt us toward believing that only body language ("natural" "science"!) is real.

So Rev. scares you? It intends to, because you need it! It's about the meaning of our life in & beyond this world, & that's not all warm fuzzy, though some folks make up a warm fuzzy religion for themselves (all promise, no threat; all reward, no punishment--as in the phrase "I don't believe in a punishing God").

The Lamb Jesus (5.6;22.1;Jn.1.28) was indeed "slain" to defeat the world's sins, God's sacrificial Lamb now (1.5-20) victorious, risen-&-exalted. Eyes everywhere? It's comforting-strengthening to know that no evil can be done out of, hidden from, God's sight....A Dutch farmer drove Loree & me across the border into Belgium, to see in Ghent one of the world's greatest paintings, Hubert & Jan van Eyck's "Adoration of the Lamb," an altarpiece in St.Bavon Cathedral. At the center of the upper folding-sections Christ sits seated as King of Heaven, who immediately below is the slain Lamb with the surrounding worshipers. Antiphonally, angel choirs above & processional & encircling crowds below are singing to the Lamb. The whole apocalyptic vision fills eye & heart with awe & peace--beyond fear. (You may see my B&W of it; I don't have a color repro.) The horizontal division between Christ the King & the Lamb reminds one of 4.1 ("a door standing open in heaven"); cp. Gn.28.17, Jacob's report on his dream experience as "This is the gate of heaven"; & cp. 6.1-4 in Is., who saw God in the temple; & Eze.1.1, for whom "the heavens were opened"; & Moses' seeing God "face to face" [Deut.34.10]; & Jesus [M.1.10 NIV], who "saw heaven being torn open")....Heaven, again: 21-22.

But notice that at the beginning of this first description of early Christian worship (4-5), we have the "elders" in a circle, worshiping (as Rev. is intended to be read aloud in public worship); only thereafter do we get the fantastic creatures (taken largely from Eze. & Is.6) & that most unusual Lamb. And remember: The whole scene was set up by (1.5) "him who loves us & has freed us from our sins...."

4 *Much of Rev. seems to be written in a code to protect the churches from further prosecution by government....Why did the canonists include it without giving us the keys to the code?* Code, yes; protection, no. Anything Christians wrote government suspected, & this attack on Rome is transparent. The hope message is clear to any intelligent reader; the major symbols are clear to Bible-saturated readers; & the minor stagecraft-details, in their impenetrability (by us), worry only those who falsely imagine they can mine from this book specific info about the future.

5 *Which of these 7 communities [2.1-3.22] is like ours?* All. *And what help do we find for our community?* Please take this as your last-session **assignment.**

6 On #2807.7, these words stand out for the respondent: *repent, faith, hope, forgiveness, love.*

7 *How much of the book is symbolic vs. actual?* The real Jn. & the real churches had symbolically described actual experience of what is eternally true (10 times in Rev.)