



The Dangers of the Apocalypse

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A church that uses the *Revised Common Lectionary*, such as the Episcopal Church to which I belong, will include regular readings of Revelation over three years. These readings feature tactical selections and excisions. The readings for All Saints Day this past fall in Year B, for instance, end the speech of God from the throne (Rev 21:5–8) at 21:6a, just before the condemnation of “the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted,” while in Year A the reading begins in 7:9, just *after* the sealing of the 144,000. Similarly, in Year C, readings from Revelation for the Second to the Seventh Sunday in Easter jump around the Apocalypse, scrupulously avoiding problematic passages such as 21:11–21 or, most significantly for our purposes here, 22:18–19.

The church has, after two thousand years, learned its lesson about fooling with Revelation. This essay will consider how literalistic readings of Revelation that were central or “mainstream” in the early church become “fringe” by the end of antiquity and have been there, for the most part, ever since. I will argue that such readings should be on the “fringe,” and that reading the text in context—whether in canonical context in the lectionary or social-historical context by means of critical methods—helps keep literalistic readings outside of the mainstream of Christian discourse.

The interpretation of Revelation has been a dividing line between the “fringes” of the church and the “mainstream” throughout Christian history—though the positions themselves have changed over time. Today we must continue to read Revelation in biblical and historical context to avoid the dangers of apocalyptic rhetoric.

THE HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY THROUGH AN APOCALYPTIC LENS

We could construct the history of Christianity in terms of the interpretation of Revelation, because it has, since the second century, been a dividing line between the “fringes” of the church and the “mainstream” church. These are of course highly problematical terms. What have been previously called the “mainstream” churches are now increasingly marginal both in North American society and culture as well as within the demographics of worldwide Christianity. But we continue to use the terms for now, because they represent a sociological and rhetorical dynamic in the early churches as well as in the twentieth century. The “mainstream” (or former mainstream) Protestant churches today might be defined by the fourteen denominations that use the *Revised Common Lectionary*, churches ranging from American Baptist and the ELCA to the UCC and the United Methodist. While “mainstream” is more often used for Protestant churches, for our purposes here we can include the Roman Catholic Church, which uses a different but similar lectionary.

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What was “mainstream” in the early church? That was a point of contention. By the late second century the group of Christians calling themselves “right-thinking” (*orthognomoi, orthodoxoi*) were trying to portray themselves as representative of the “mainstream” of Christianity. They opposed other Christian groups, such as the wide varieties now labeled gnostic Christians. A typical polemic by a proto-orthodox apologist such as Justin Martyr would be that those who only take the name “Christian” might not in fact be “true Christians.” Rhetorically, if not socially, the terms “mainstream” and “fringe” work for writers such as Justin and Tertullian, because they used that division to strengthen their positions within emerging Christianity and the Roman world. They claimed to represent the true majority of “right-thinking” or orthodox Christianity.¹

But the “mainstream” and “fringe” interpretations of Revelation in the second century, at least as defined by proto-orthodox writers, were opposite of the trends in the modern church.² Some of these earliest proto-orthodox Christians held what today would be called a literal, perhaps even fundamentalist view of the Apocalypse. Persecution of Christians was increasing in the second century, and John’s graphic visions of martyrdom seemed plausible. So too the descriptions of the millennial kingdom and new Jerusalem offered tangible rewards for martyrs.

¹“Mainstream” implies “centrist,” and early proto-orthodox writers tried to be seen in the middle of the range of competing Christianities. For a “flippant” but helpful “Three Bears” analogy, see Karen L. King, *The Gospel of Mary of Magdala: Jesus and the First Woman Apostle* (Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge, 2003) 39.

²For an accessible survey of the history of interpretation of the Apocalypse, see Arthur William Wainright, *Mysterious Apocalypse: Interpreting the Book of Revelation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993).

Both Justin (ca. 100–165) and Irenaeus (ca. 130–200) were *chiliasts*, from the Greek word for “thousand.” They believed literally in the thousand-year reign of the saints in Rev 20:4 and the actual, physical new Jerusalem in Rev 21–22.

Both Justin and Irenaeus place themselves firmly within the mainstream as representatives of the “apostolic tradition,” a late second-century construct for how “true doctrine” was passed from Jesus to the apostles to them. But we see in Justin’s treatment of Revelation that his literal chiliasm was disputed among “right-thinking” Christians. In the *Dialogue with Trypho* 80.1, Justin responds to Trypho’s question about the physical new Jerusalem in a way that shows some uneasiness with the diversity of views:

I and many others are of this opinion, and [believe] that such will take place, as you assuredly are aware; but, on the other hand, I signified to you that many who belong to the pure and pious faith, and are true Christians, think otherwise. Moreover, I pointed out to you that some who are called Christians, but are godless, impious heretics, teach doctrines that are in every way blasphemous, atheistical, and foolish.

Justin’s distinctions are interesting. “True Christians” can disagree about the millennial kingdom and the new Jerusalem, but that does not make them “godless, impious heretics.”

Justin’s literal view was becoming more “fringe” than mainstream as the second century progressed. Close to this time, between 150 and 175, an apocalyptic movement was started in Phrygia (the center of modern Turkey) by Montanus, Prisca, and Maximilla, called “New Prophecy” or Montanism by its opponents. Montanus prophesied that the new Jerusalem would descend imminently near the town of Pepuza.³ The movement included strong charismatic, ecstatic religious practices and an ascetic strain that spread to North Africa, attracting Tertullian (who rejects the proto-orthodox “bunch of bishops”).⁴ Literal belief in the new Jerusalem and expectation of the imminent end of the world, such as Justin had held, were not acceptable in the form spread by Montanus and his followers just a few decades later. Montanism was denounced by Apollonius in the early third century and eventually condemned by orthodox church councils.

What were the alternatives to such literal interpretation of Revelation? Without the development of allegorical interpretive methods by Christians in Alexandria such as Clement (ca. 150–215) and Origen (ca. 185–254), Revelation might not even have been in the running for the canon. In their skillful exegesis, problematic passages such as the descent of the opulent new Jerusalem to earth were interpreted as symbolizing something entirely different. Jewels stand for virtues and “the brilliancy of the stones reflect the brilliancy of the spirit” (Clement, *Paedagogus* [*Christ the Educator*] 2.12 [119.2]). In the record of a dispute over the interpretation

³See William Tabbernee, “Portals of the Montanist New Jerusalem: The Discovery of Pepuza and Tymion,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 11 (2003) 87–93.

⁴See Elaine H. Pagels, *Beyond Belief: The Secret Gospel of Thomas* (New York: Random House, 2003) 86.

of Revelation between third-century Egyptian bishops, literal interpretation of such passages is derogatorily called “fleshly” and “Jewish” and linked to an earlier Christian teacher and philosopher named Cerinthus, who was vilified as a heretic.⁵

“literal chiliastic millenarian positions move from the proto-orthodox ‘mainstream’ in the second century to the fringes of marginalized Christianity in the fourth”

The physical, “earthly” reward of gold and jewels in the new Jerusalem was one problem; the millenarian interpretation of Rev 20:4–6 another.⁶ This passage describes the rule of beheaded martyrs for one thousand years after the binding of Satan and before the final battle of Gog and Magog and the Last Judgment (Rev 20:7–15). This is the actual millennium anticipated by contemporary dispensationalist fundamentalist Christians and described in texts ranging from *The Scofield Reference Bible* to the *Left Behind* series. Literal chiliastic millenarian positions move from the proto-orthodox “mainstream” in the second century to the fringes of marginalized Christianity in the fourth. A late third-century commentary on the Apocalypse by Victorinus of Pettau expresses a strongly millenarian belief but incorporates some allegorical elements. Other Christian writers, such as Commodian and Lactantius, continue to express some moderated millenarian views. But after the Roman emperors moved from tolerance to acceptance and promotion of orthodox Christianity, millenarian views were even more strongly challenged. No imperial ruler, political or ecclesiastical, eagerly anticipated the destruction of the empire they now controlled. The status of Revelation as an authoritative scriptural text remained in doubt well into the fourth century. Eusebius (*Ecclesiastical History* 3.24–25) equivocates on whether Revelation is “in” or “out” of the still-fluid canon of scriptures. Origen had substituted an individual eschatology of the soul for the collective eschatology of the Apocalypse; in the imperial Christian church, this view prevailed, for the idea that all earthly institutions would soon disappear did not fit well with imperial theology and propaganda.

A second key interpretive point in the marginalization of ancient millenarian views was Augustine’s contention that the binding of Satan (Rev 20:2–4) had already taken place in the activity of the church. Worried about the “ridiculous fancies” some Christians had construed from Rev 20, Augustine offered two key interpretive points in the *City of God*, Book 20. First, the thousand-year period is symbolic of “the whole duration of the world,” the earthly fullness of time. Thus Augustine tried to put an end to speculations about dates and times for this millennium to start and end, a point for which he had plenty of biblical proof texts. Second, this symbolic millennium has already begun in the time of the church, for that

⁵See Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 7.24.1–25.5.

⁶I have treated the imagery of wealth in Revelation fully in Robert M. Royalty, *The Streets of Heaven: The Ideology of Wealth in the Apocalypse of John* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1998).

is what binds Satan until the final end. Augustine saw the era of the church as an indefinite time in which the predestined would be saved and the reprobate damned. The millennium is upon us, says Augustine to his Christian audience in 420. There is no reason to wait for it. And as for the final, *final* end, do not count the days, for the thousand-year period is symbolic and “no one knows the day and hour except the Father.”

Augustine laid the millennium to rest in what could be called the “amillennial” position on Rev 20:4. His formulation borrowed elements from Alexandrian allegorical interpretation as well as the literal chiliasm of the earlier church. His interpretation was a scriptural, theological, ecclesiastical, and political *tour de force* that incorporated key problematic elements of early Christian interpretation: both literal and allegorical views of Scripture, both eschatological and spiritual views of the millennium, and both worldly and otherworldly views of the coming kingdom. Augustine was as “spiritual” or allegorical as Origen, but he anchored his interpretation of the Apocalypse in the church in such a way that it dominated from the fifth to the thirteenth century. Since the church established and controlled the millennium, and thus political rule on earth, the Augustinian interpretation was well suited for the development of church power in Europe. Furthermore, this interpretation, by transferring millennial power to the church hierarchy, attempted to neutralize subversive millennial readings that would both undercut church power by looking for an “age to come” that superseded the church, and appropriate church authority by placing the keys for understanding this future age in prophets outside of ecclesiastical control. Augustine set what became mainstream Catholic doctrine on the millennium for the Middle Ages and, in essence, down to today. The fringe had been redefined in terms of the book of Revelation. Outside Christian groups were those that took literal and imminent views of the millennial kingdom.

Such groups were not long in coming, although literary evidence for the late antique and early medieval period is sketchy.⁷ Charismatic prophets, often members of the lesser clerical orders, led groups of followers in eschatological movements that anticipated the millennial kingdom and the return of Christ. In contrast to modern fundamentalist dispensationalist interpretations, which are generally premillennial movements, these medieval prophets often had a postmillennial view. The dogmatic difference hinges on whether Christ’s return will precede the millennial kingdom, often after the rapture of the saints and the three-and-a-half-year period of tribulation (the premillennial view of the *Left Behind* series, which begins with the rapture), or whether the millennial kingdom established by the saints will end with Christ’s glorious return. This latter postmillennial view has tended to be the view of the groups that have provoked the strongest responses from ecclesiastical and political authorities. Such groups attempt to create the

⁷See Norman Rufus Colin Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970).

kingdom outside of society, church, and king. St. Boniface encountered one Adelbert, a prophet with a large following in eighth-century Germany, and an “Eon” or Eudes de l’Etoile in eleventh-century France also attracted large crowds. In the religious fervor of the first crusade, the “Tatars” of the People’s Crusade in 1096 followed the charismatic Peter the Hermit to Jerusalem, convinced perhaps that it was the heavenly Jerusalem they were going to.

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A major shift in millennial thinking and interpretation of the Apocalypse originated in Italy in the twelfth century. The Calabrian abbot Joachim of Fiore (1135–1202) formulated a system, the *concordia*, that shifted interpretation of the Apocalypse away from Augustine’s politically acceptable church view back to a more historical, and potentially more subversive, reading of the text.⁸ Joachim devised a dispensational notion of overlapping “states,” *status* in Latin (an idea that prefigures modern fundamentalist dispensationalism). The Apocalypse was the “inner wheel” in Ezekiel’s vision that unlocks the “outer wheel,” the meaning of the entire Bible and history itself. Thus revelation has a historical progression. The three states, marking the progression of history, corresponded to the persons of the Trinity.⁹ Each *status* had prototypes and emerging and evolving characters who prefigure the next age. The hierarchical *status* of the Father, an *ordo conjugatorum* (order of married laity) characterized by law, lasted from Adam to the birth of Christ. The priestly-clerical *status* of the Son, an *ordo clericorum* (order of clerics and monks), would last another forty or forty-two generations, ending sometime between 1200 and 1260. A crisis ended each *status* and ushered in the next. Joachim was convinced that the world was about to move from the *status* of the Son to the *status* of the Holy Spirit, “in which a renewed Church would reign in peace and contemplation.”¹⁰ Joachim was committed to monasticism and charismatic, mystical spirituality; these were the hallmarks of this third and final *status*. Abraham and Moses were the prototypes of the patriarchal *status* of the Father; Peter and Paul were the prototypes for the ecclesiastical *status* of the Son. For the eschatological *status* of the Spirit, John, the spiritual mystic and author of *both* the Fourth Gospel and Apocalypse (for Joachim), was the model of the new age, while Benedict of Nursia was the precursor of the monastic *status* to be.

⁸See E. Randolph Daniel, “Joachim of Fiore,” in *The Apocalypse in the Middle Ages*, ed. Richard Kenneth Emmerson and Bernard McGinn (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992) 72–88.

⁹Joachim’s revolutionary thinking about the Trinity, in reaction to movements in Scholastic theology (e.g., Peter Lombard), included locating the activity of the Trinity in history. See Bernard McGinn, *Visions of the End: Apocalyptic Traditions in the Middle Ages* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998) 127–128.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 129.

Joachim's interpretation of the Apocalypse was a new, literal, and somewhat optimistic view of the millennium, when the Holy Spirit would reign with the purified church of charismatic celibate monks (see Rev 14:4) in an *ordo novo*, a new order.¹¹ For a variety of reasons—enduring conflicts between Pope and emperor, the resurgence of Islamic power in the Holy Land under Saladin—his ideas took hold, and from the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries, and indeed to today in some traditions, millennial expectation and apocalyptic speculation were back in the center of religious discourse. Notable groups who took Joachite interpretation seriously include Ubertino of Casale and the Spiritual Franciscans and Fra Dolcino and the Apostolic Brethren.¹² Joachim reenergized historicized and potentially politically subversive readings of the Apocalypse, with one result being ideological challenges to ecclesiastical and civil authorities in Europe within some monastic and mendicant religious communities.¹³

Millenarian beliefs continued to surface in the late medieval and Reformation periods. But even in periods of more fervent apocalyptic belief, groups holding to a literal expectation of the imminent return of Jesus have been outside of the mainstream church. From the period of Joachim's rekindling of millennial beliefs to today, the list of Christian groups that held such beliefs is very long. Many have contemporary representatives that grew as the twentieth century waned. We do not meet many Waldensians, nor Ranters, Diggers, or Levellers today. But there are Quakers, who anticipated the coming of the millennium in the seventeenth century along with these last three groups. The Seventh Day Adventist church, a successor to the Millerites of 1844, who quit their jobs and sold all their possessions, has grown considerably. So, too, other churches that today might be considered moving from "fringe" to "mainstream," such as the Church of Latter Day Saints or Mormons, had origins that included imminent apocalyptic expectations.

THE RHETORIC OF THE APOCALYPSE

What do these examples tell us? The Apocalypse is a text of great power that has evoked strong millenarian movements, such as the Apostolic Brethren, but also great artistic achievements, such as Dante's *Paradiso*. And they suggest something about the origin and nature of the text itself. Granted, this sounds like a "where there's smoke there's fire" argument; but with Revelation, over the past two thousand years, there has been plenty of smoke *and* fire, so it's worth inquiring more deeply why this is the case.

Early Christian Communities

The problems we have been tracing in "mainstream" and "fringe" interpreta-

¹¹See Daniel, "Joachim of Fiore," 73, on this "sharp break."

¹²See Umberto Eco, *The Name of the Rose* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983). Eco's engaging and complex novel uses this time period for a widely varied exploration of semiotics, Aristotle, the rise of rational philosophy, and the classic English detective novel.

¹³See Cohn, *Pursuit of the Millennium*.

tions of Revelation have much to do with the historical sensibilities a community brings to bear on the text. From the earliest spiritualist interpreters such as Origen to modern existential theologians and literary critics, the mainstream approach has been to dehistoricize Revelation's powerful visions. In contrast, literal interpretations, which include ancient chiliastic readings, medieval Joachite movements, and modern fundamentalist dispensationalism, are radically historical readings of Revelation as a script for the future.

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But there are other historical options besides millenarian ones. New Testament scholars bring historical criticism—which focuses on the social and historical context of the text's production and the views of its author and audience—to bear on the Apocalypse. This scholarly approach is also radically historical, anchoring the text in the first century. For some Christians, historical-critical methods emphasize author, audience, and social context to the point where they cannot reconcile that method with existential or theological questions of the meaning and applicability of Scripture to their lives. In the case of Revelation, however, for many “mainstream” Catholics and Protestants, historical-critical methods bring clarity to a troublesome text. Viewed historically, much of the bizarre imagery in the Apocalypse starts to make some sense. Revelation's imagery can be decoded in the context of the seven cities in Asia Minor addressed in chapters 1–3 and the Roman Empire of the late first century. The motifs and images themselves, we have learned, are typical of Second Temple Jewish apocalyptic texts, even if they are somewhat unusual when compared to other New Testament texts. Jewish seers and prophets had visions of, and *from*, heaven; *1 Enoch* and *4 Ezra* are helpful points of comparison to Revelation. Furthermore, the polemic against the beasts, Babylon, and the kings of the earth can be seen as an attack by John on Rome. Babylon is clearly identified with Rome in Rev 17:9 and 17:18. The two beasts in Rev 13, one from the sea and the other from the land, represent some aspect of the imperial cult practiced in many cities in Asia Minor, for instance Ephesus and Pergamon. Even the infamous, and perplexing, number 666 in 13:18 can be understood as a cryptic reference to Nero Caesar, whom some ancients believed would return from the East to conquer the empire. Situating these images—beast, Babylon, 666—in historical context defangs the apocalyptic rhetoric by placing these references in the Christian communities of the past rather than the future, whether that future is conceived of as thirteenth-century Europe or twenty-first-century North America.

Recognizing Revelation's historical setting also gives us a new insight on its rhetoric. That Revelation opposes Rome has become close to consensus within historical-critical scholarship in the last twenty-five years. But what many readers have overlooked is that John and his immediate circle of disciples express their op-

position to Rome, the imperial cult, and Greco-Roman culture through opposition to Jews and other Christians who do not share their ideology. Historical criticism shows that Revelation was also written against other Christians with a different view on the beliefs or practices appropriate for a follower of Jesus.¹⁴ The internal polemic is clearly on the surface in the seven messages in chapters 2–3, where Christ attacks teachers and prophets such as “Jezebel,” “the Nicolaitans,” “false apostles,” and even “those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but are lying.” These are the real targets of Revelation: the actual teachers, preachers, coreligionists, neighbors, and assorted members of the churches of Asia who opposed John’s radical apocalyptic-prophetic program.

Rhetoric of Apocalypse

This historical-critical claim about the origins of the Apocalypse as a text written against other Christians brings a new perspective to the dangerous, violent rhetoric of Revelation against its enemies. These enemies are not just the “demonic” Roman administrators and priests imaged as beasts, harlots, and kings (who likely never read the text). Rather these are other Christians. The text is written for, and *against*, other believers in Jesus Christ.

Some of these Christians might have held views eventually labeled “gnostic” by later second-century orthodox writers. They could have had radically different notions from John and his prophetic circle about Christ’s identity, humanity, or who will be saved. Revelation’s views on those important issues, of course, could be challenged as well. As we have seen, literal interpretations of the sealing of the 144,000 and the millennial kingdom have been rejected or reinterpreted by mainstream Christians. At the same time, these (hypothetically) “proto-gnostic” opponents of John could have valued philosophical speculation and intellectual inquiry, values embraced by the mainstream church from Clement, Origen, and Aquinas to Rudolph Bultmann, Paul Tillich, and Wolfhart Pannenberg.

On the other hand, some of John’s Christian opponents in the churches of Ephesus or Smyrna might be labeled “Pauline” rather than “proto-gnostic.” These cities of the Apocalypse were Pauline mission territories. The most salient moral issue in the messages, the eating of meat purchased from temples, was one treated fully in 1 Cor 8–10 and then abstracted and reworked by Paul in Rom 14. In Rev 2–3, John, through whom “Christ” speaks prophetically, opposes Paul’s Corinthian compromise by “Jezebel” and “the teaching of Balaam” on this divisive issue. It is hard to imagine more diametrically opposed politics than Paul’s inclusive approaches to differences within his churches and Revelation’s sharp rhetoric and threats to expel opponents to eternal torture and damnation. The emphasis on tradition, moreover, in Pauline passages such as Col 1:23 would clash, theologically

¹⁴I have argued this position in *Streets of Heaven*; see also Greg Carey, *Elusive Apocalypse: Reading Authority in the Revelation to John* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1999); and Paul Brooks Duff, *Who Rides the Beast? Prophetic Rivalry and the Rhetoric of Crisis in the Churches of the Apocalypse* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

and ideologically, with John's insistence on fresh revelations via direct visions of heaven. I have argued elsewhere that passages such as Col 2:16–19 or 1 Tim 1:3–7 could be read as responses to the prophetic apocalyptic theology of Revelation.¹⁵ So, too, the political perspective *against* Rome in Rev 17–18 stands in stark opposition to the pro-Roman positions implied by Rom 13 and the book of Acts, political positions that are more fully developed in the call to honor and pray for the emperor in 1 Tim 2:1–4 and 1 Pet 2:17.

“John plays fast and loose with the Bible, but his book ends with a warning against tampering, editing, or changing the Apocalypse itself”

Use of Scripture

Another area in which John seems to argue with other Christians in Asia is about the Bible itself. Steeped in both the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures, this literary Apocalypse contains over five hundred allusions, almost one in every verse of Revelation. The authority of the Jewish Scriptures for moral and theological guidance was disputed in the Christian churches in Asia. John's reading, and *rewriting*, of the Bible was in opposition to other Christian teachers and the communities he labels “so-called Jews.”¹⁶ John plays fast and loose with the Bible, but his book ends with a warning against tampering, editing, or changing the Apocalypse itself:

I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to that person the plagues described in this book; if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away that person's share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.

These warnings are powerful. Again, they should be read within a Christian context. After opposing other Christian teachers and prophets in Asia, John warns their communities to take his message whole. He has produced the final scripture for the Christian communities. Take it or leave it.

The mainstream church has decided, by and large, to leave it. What the church lectionary does, in essence, is rebel against Rev 22:18–19 and read against the text. In the mainstream churches that use the lectionary, the text is edited and contextualized within the Bible as a whole. We do *not* pay heed to this warning, but we actively, spiritually, allegorically, and historically-critically read the text in wider contexts. We hear Revelation along with an Old Testament reading and a Gospel. We read, listen, mark, and inwardly digest—and fight against John's totali-

¹⁵See Robert M. Royalty, Jr., “‘Dwelling on Visions’: The Nature of the so-called ‘Colossians Heresy,’” *Biblica* 83 (2002) 329–357.

¹⁶See Robert M. Royalty, “Don't Touch This Book: Rev 22:18–19 and the Rhetoric of Reading (in) the Apocalypse of John,” *Biblical Interpretation* 12 (2004) 282–299.

tarian apocalyptic vision. Of all the dangers of the Apocalypse, unquestioning biblical literalism is the most dangerous, because then the text becomes not the medium but the message itself. The mainstream church—Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox—must continue to read Revelation in *context* to fight against the dangers of apocalyptic rhetoric. ⊕

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