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Daly, Robert J., editor

*Apocalyptic Thought in Early Christianity*

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Fifteen scholars of early Christianity and art history contributed essays for this rich compilation of new research in patristic eschatology. The studies mainly focus upon communities and texts from Eastern Christianity. Theodore Stylianopoulos shows that the Book of Revelation teaches not only fearful judgment but divine grace as well. Bogdan Bucar examines Jewish apocalyptic ideas that appear in early Christology and pneumatology, while Brian Daley demonstrates that in the church of the second through sixth centuries apocalyptic themes became increasingly Christocentric. Heiromonk Alexander Golitzin discloses eschatological themes in the Macarian homilies; and Ute Possekkel investigates last things in the Syrian community around Bardaisan (d. 222). J. A. Cerrato presents a unique study of the relationship of the Antichrist to baptismal catechesis in texts by Hippolytus and Cyril of Jerusalem; and Dragos-Andrei Giulea discusses the apocalyptic dimensions of the paschal mystery in the pseudo-Hippolytan *In sanctum Pascha*.

John McGuckin adds an elucidating perspective on the eschatology of the Cappadocian fathers. Georgia Frank informs readers about vivid images in the hymns of Romanos the Melodist, namely Death and Hades vomiting up the dead when Christ descended into the underworld. Elijah Nicholas Mueller explains how John of Damascus envisioned human

destiny as angelic communion with God. Lorenzo DiTommaso, looking at early Christian Daniel apocalypses, shows that the various forms of them reflect concerns of particular communities at various times.

A most helpful essay is “Turning Points in Early Christian Apocalyptic Exegesis” by Bernard McGinn. First, it shows the transition from materialistic and chiliastic readings of the Apocalypse to more spiritualized interpretations. While other writers documenting this usually use Origen and Tyconius as representatives, McGinn displays the shift also using Hippolytus, Methodius, and Victorinus, some of whom did not totally escape chiliasm, but illustrate a trend away from it. Secondly, “Turning Points” confirms one of the main arguments of Charles Hill’s *Regnum Caelorum*, i.e. that Christians of the second and third centuries were not entirely chiliast, as is sometimes asserted. Literature of those centuries is replete with non-chiliast eschatology. Thirdly, McGinn’s essay contains a very useful update on scholarship related to the fragments attributed to Hippolytus that allegedly stem from a lost Apocalypse commentary of his. New fragments are being discovered, and those isolated by Prigent and Stehly in the 1970s are attributed to Hippolytus only with considerable caution. This confirmed my doubt over the authenticity of the fragment on Rev 7:4-8 found in an Arabic commentary and attributed to Hippolytus that interprets the 144,000 as Jews who escaped the first-century siege of Jerusalem.

Two chapters on apocalyptic themes in early Christian art, the first by John Herrmann and Annewies van den Hoek, the second by Nancy Patterson Sevcenko, contain over seventy photographs of coins, mosaics, earthenware, sarcophagi, and illustrated manuscripts. Whether displaying the enthroned Lamb, the New Jerusalem, or “the sign

of the Son of Man in heaven” (Matt 24:30) which has been interpreted by many patristic writers as a cross, the photos give breadth to our knowledge of early Christian beliefs related to the eschaton. In some cases they portray how the ancients envisioned the future very differently from us. For example, in many Byzantine illustrations of the Last Judgment in Sevcenko’s chapter, a stream of fire flows from the returning Christ. Inspired by Ps 96:3—“A fire shall go before him”— and Dan 7:10, this ubiquitous feature in the drawings of the Byzantines indicates the prominent place that eschatological fire held in their perceptions regarding that glorious but fateful Day.

Early Christian eschatology is still a very fertile field of study. This decade saw in English alone the publication of Lorenzo DiTommaso’s work on apocryphal Daniel literature, a volume by William Weinrich and another by Judith Kovacs and Christopher Rowland on early exegesis of Revelation, W. Brian Shelton’s study of Hippolytus’ Daniel commentary, Panayiotis Tzamalikos’ treatise on Origen’s eschatology, Daniel Van Slyke’s book on the apocalyptic theology of Quodvultdeus, and Kevin Hester’s work on the eschatology of Gregory the Great, to name a few. The field has also been enriched this decade by first English translations of Ecumenius’ Apocalypse commentary by John Suggit, of patristic commentaries on Isaiah by Mark W. Elliott and Robert Louis Wilkin, and of early Christian commentaries on Daniel, Isaiah, and the Minor Prophets by Robert C. Hill. *Apocalyptic Thought in Early Christianity* provides fifteen more investigations of previously unexplored topics related to last things that will be pivotal for future work in patristic eschatology.

*Francis X. Gumerlock, Providence Theological Seminary, Colorado Springs*