

Tyconius, *Exposition of the Apocalypse*. Fathers of the Church: A New Translation. Translated by Francis X. Gumerlock. Introduction and Notes by David C. Robinson. Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2017. \$39.95.

The *Expositio Apocalypseos* by the fourth-century North African exegete Tyconius of Carthage was arguably the most important Apocalypse commentary for western exegetes throughout the Middle Ages. Its influence, aided by Augustine's endorsement of Tyconius's exegetical method in *De doctrina Christiana*, was mediated through influential medieval commentators, such as Primasius of Hadrumentum and Caesarius of Arles in the sixth century, and Bede the Venerable and Beatus of Liébana in the eighth. For those interested in Tyconius himself, the *Expositio Apocalypseos* represents a detailed, practical outworking of his seven mystic rules for scriptural interpretation as set out in his earlier *Liber regularum*.

The scholarly challenge has been to reconstruct this now lost commentary from the works of Tyconius's successors, along with two sets of fragments (in Turin and Budapest). Seminal work by Johannes Haussleiter, Traugott Hahn, Eugenio Romero-Pose, and especially Kenneth Steinhauser, laid the foundations for a plausible reconstruction. However, it was only in 2011 that Roger Gryson's critical edition was published, in *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina* (CCSL 107A), together with a French translation in *Corpus Christianorum in Translation*. This first English translation by Francis X. Gumerlock, with introduction and accompanying notes by David C. Robinson, now makes Gryson's reconstruction accessible to a much wider audience.

The volume follows the format of the Fathers of the Church series. A select bibliography presents editions of the primary sources, existing translations, and the important secondary literature (the latter covering both the *Expositio* and the *Liber regularum*, literature on Tyconius's important predecessor Victorinus as well as Tyconius's successors, and his relationship with Augustine). This is followed by an introduction to orientate the reader, the translation with accompanying notes, and both a general and a scriptural index.

The introduction locates Gryson's work in the broader context of Tyconian scholarship, before offering a summary, and explanation, of Tyconius's seven mystic rules from the *Liber regularum*. For readers new to Tyconius, Robinson helpfully describes each rule in turn, highlighting Tyconius's use of the Book of Revelation in the *Liber regularum* to illustrate specific rules. Thus, for example, his second rule (*de Domini corpore bipertito*) explains the combination of promise and threat in the so-called "letters to the seven churches" (Rev 2–3). Seven, ten, and twelve,

and multiples of these, function as “consecrated numbers,” each of them symbolizing perfection, according to the fifth rule *de temporibus*.

In his discussion of the commentary proper, Robinson gives prominence to two dimensions of Tyconius’s distinctive approach to the Apocalypse. The first is his strongly ecclesiological reading, which (with Augustine’s assistance) would set the trend for Latin exegesis of Revelation for much of the Middle Ages. The Apocalypse is not primarily a vision of the ultimate end, nor of the early communities in the Roman empire (though it contains elements of both). Rather, it offers a visionary description of Christ’s ecclesial body. Tyconius thereby offered a reading of Revelation able to sustain the church beyond its earlier situation of external Roman persecution and oppression. The conflict is now between the children of the devil and the holy ones, a conflict played out both externally and internally (Christ’s body itself being bipartite).

Second, Robinson highlights Tyconius’s frequent use of recapitulation (both literary recapitulation and the more complex mystical recapitulation of his sixth rule), building on and expanding the earlier Latin commentary of Victorinus of Pettau, which already presented the seven bowls as a replay of the trumpets septet. Central to Tyconius’s exposition, therefore, is how John “repeats the whole time of the church in different figures” (*Ex. Apoc.* 2.43). This will become an influential explanation of the often-confusing chronology of the book: “The different time is not the time of the events but of the visions” (*Ex. Apoc.* 2.1). Hence, after describing the works of the seven churches (Rev 2–3), Rev 4:1 recapitulates “from the nativity of Christ.” A similar recapitulation occurs after the seventh trumpet (heralding the last day) at 11:19, where the appearance of the ark of the covenant leads to the vision of the heavenly woman (the church) about to bear the male child (both Christ and his body), pursued by the dragon (whose role is played by Herod in the nativity story). Tyconius identifies twelve recapitulations in total, all presenting through different figures the ‘internal wars, and fires, which God deigned through his Christ to reveal to his church’ (*Ex. Apoc.* 1.5). Some of these recapitulations include the current persecutions experienced by Tyconius’s contemporaries in North Africa (e.g., at Rev 14:6).

Robinson’s introduction and extensive textual notes (providing biblical references, explanatory commentary, and cross-references to the *Liber regularum*) complement Gumerlock’s translation of Gryson’s Latin reconstruction. Gumerlock’s previous work on Latin Apocalypse commentaries and related works has shown him to be an expert translator, aided not least by his immense knowledge of patristic and medieval exegesis of Revelation. Again, Gumerlock does not disappoint, offering a smooth translation of often-complex Tyconian ideas. The opening

passage (Gryson's edition begins the reconstruction with Rev 1:12) sets down an early marker of the prominence of the first rule (*De Domino et corpore eius*) for Tyconius's interpretation. The one like a Son of Man, the seven lampstands, and, by synecdoche, John himself, falling down at the Son of Man's feet "as if dead," all symbolize the church. But this church is divided in the "in-between" time preceding the eschaton. Thus the seven stars (Rev 1:16, 20) are not only the seven angels but the 'spiritual church,' the right side of the bipartite body of Christ (so identified because they are in Christ's right hand). In line with more mainstream patristic exegesis, obscurities in the text are frequently illuminated by appeal to other parts of scripture. Thus the open door in heaven is a symbol of Christ, in light of John 10:9 ("I am the door").

Readers of Revelation, or of standard commentaries on the book, will find some surprises in Tyconius's commentary. The Son of Man's words to the Ephesian angel that "you are not able to tolerate evil people" are "not a compliment, but a testimony of their weakness" (*Ex. Apoc.* 2.2). The angel, as a symbol of the body, is bipartite. The one seated on the throne is Christ, and the descriptions of his appearance (like jasper and sardonyx; surrounded by an emerald-like rainbow) describe the church "with which the Lord is clothed" (*Ex. Apoc.* 4.3). The slain Lamb is both Christ the head and his body the church, the members in whom Christ continues to suffer. When it comes to the "number of the beast" (Rev 13:18), Tyconius's text has the reading 616 (DCXVI). What may surprise is not the number itself (this variant is attested in P¹¹⁵ and known to Irenaeus), but Tyconius's interpretation. He focuses on its appropriateness for the Antichrist, since in Greek letters (xis) it patterns the abbreviation form of Christ Jesus, and can be reconfigured to form the Chi-Rho.

There is little to critique in this volume. A minor quibble relates to Gryson's underlying Latin reconstruction. Gryson made the decision to begin with Rev 1:12, on the grounds that the opening of Tyconius's commentary was unrecoverable. Yet Kenneth Steinhauser previously made a strong case that at least the contents of Rev 1:9 ("I, John, . . . was on the island which is called Patmos") could be reconstructed from Bede and Beatus (and, one might add, Primasius). This would then represent an early witness to the tradition of Patmos, less as a place of exile, than a privileged terrestrial location allowing the seer to 'penetrate' heavenly mysteries.

Yet that is to pass no negative comment on the achievement of Gumerlock and Robinson. They are to be congratulated for a fine addition to the Fathers of the Church series. Not only does this volume make an important contribution to Augustinian studies. The growing importance of reception history for scholarship on the Book of Revelation will make also make this an indispensable addition to the

library of biblical exegetes, as they seek to plumb the depths of this most mysterious of biblical books.

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