

Creation and Apocalypse

Larry L. Lichtenwalter

Revelation unfolds a vibrant and sustained confession of God as Creator. It presupposes the Genesis creation narrative and posits the overarching worldview that “the whole of finite reality exists by God the Creator’s gift of existence.”¹ The Apocalypse sets the creation of the universe at the heart of its vision of the throne (Rev 4–5). There the “Creation Song of the Elders”² poignantly expresses this central way of characterizing both God and finite reality:³

You are worthy, our Lord and God,
to receive glory and honor and power,
for you created all things,
and by your will they existed and were created (4:11)

The sovereign creative energy of God expressed in the profound phrase “for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created” concentrates all of Genesis 1 into a single thought.⁴ In Genesis, God’s explosive voice speaks the world and most things in it into existence (Gen 1:6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26, 29; Ps 33:6, 9), thus expressing His *will* through His creative word.⁵ God’s creative power includes both the original act of creation (*they were created*) and His ongoing preservation of the created order (*they existed*).⁶ It also points to the

¹ Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge UP, 1993), 50.

² Kendall H. Easley, *Revelation*, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1998), 78, 79.

³ Aune misses the import of this central theological theme and overarching worldview when he suggests that the emphasis on God as *creator* is not a central way of characterizing God in Revelation. See Davie E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, (Dallas: Word, 1997), 312.

⁴ Easley, 9.

⁵ Easley, 79.

⁶ Easley, 79. In another one of its “last-first” rhetorical inversions of events, Revelation’s apparently illogical order of the verbs “they were,” “they existed,” and “they were created” seems to suggest that the existence of everything seems to precede creation (Aune, 312). God’s continued preservation of “all things” in creation is mentioned before his act of first beginning to create them—the reverse would be more logical. It is done to emphasize preservation because the pastoral

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deeply personal nature of Creation (*by your will they were created*). God not only created “all that is,” but He willfully “intended” to bring the universe into existence.⁷ Thus, God on His heavenly throne is praised without end by his court of throne-room attendants who shout and sing about their holy Creator.

A Permeating Motif

This understanding of God as the personal transcendent source of all things permeates both the Apocalypse’s theology and moral vision. In the vision of the mighty angel with the little scroll that lay open in his hand, Revelation expands on God’s creation by explicitly mentioning the contents of the three divisions of the created reality—the heavens, the earth, and the sea (10:6). “*All that is in*” each part is likewise stated three times for emphasis (10:6). Creation is not simply a broad-stroked macrocosm, but inclusive of incredibly detailed content. This is an incredible eschatologically-oriented Creation statement as the mighty angel swears to God the Creator that there will no longer be any delay in the finishing of the mystery of God.⁸ The “Song from the Universe”⁹ likewise depicts “every created thing” (*pân ktísma*) which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and “all things in them” (*tà en autoîs pánta*) (5:13, 14).

intention (and moral purpose) throughout the book is to encourage God’s people both spiritually and morally. See G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 335.

⁷ M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation* (Louisville: John Knox, 1989), 106.

⁸ In his commentary on Gen 1:1, Eugene F. Roop writes, “The beginning cannot be ignored as if it is past. Beginnings do not disappear; they form the ground from which all subsequent moments arise” (*Genesis* [Scottsdale: Herald, 1987], 20). In other words, beginnings set the tone and live on in whatever takes place afterward. But the biblical Hebrew on Genesis 1:1 includes something more. The word “beginning” marks a starting point of a specific duration. It’s the first in a series, or the initiation of a series of historical events. It has an end or purpose in view. It’s a word often paired with its antonym “end.” By using this word to open the account of Creation, Moses has not only marked Creation as the starting point of the history of God and His people, but also prepares the way for the consummation of that history at “the end of time,” as per John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 83. See also, “*reshit*” in *Theological Word Book of the Old Testament*, ed. Laird Harris (Chicago: Moody, 1980), 2:826. My point is that the “end” is already anticipated in the “beginning” of Genesis 1:1. “The fundamental principle reflected in Genesis 1:1 and the prophetic vision of the end of times in the rest of Scripture is that the ‘last things will be like the first things.’” “Behold, I create a new heavens and a new earth’ (Isa 65:17); ‘Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth’ (Rev 21:1). The allusions to Genesis 1 and 2 in Revelation 22 illustrate the role that these early chapters of Genesis played in shaping the form and content of the scriptural vision of the future” (Sailhamer, 83, 84). But Genesis also provides a paradigm of the moral spiritual issues leading up to the end. See Warren Austin Gage, *The Gospel of Genesis: Studies in Protology and Eschatology* (Winona Lake: Carpenter, 1984). The careful reader can trace parallels between the book of Genesis and the issues and events of the last things on earth, including Creation and restoration of Creation as an eschatological reality.

⁹ Easley, 96, 97.

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Three of the most important self-designations by God in Revelation appear in the introduction: I AM “the Alpha and the Omega” (1:8), “the one who is and who was and who is to come” (1:8, cf. 1:4), “the Almighty” (1:8). Later, God says of Himself, “I am . . . the beginning and the end” (21:6). These divine self-declarations by God correspond to the self-declarations by Jesus Christ in the epilogue: “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end” (22:13). Such self-designation likewise “encapsulates the understanding of God as the sole Creator of all things and sovereign Lord of history.”¹⁰ God precedes all things, and he will bring all things to eschatological fulfillment. He is the origin and goal of all history. He has the first word in creation. He has the last word in the new creation. Within Revelation’s literary structure God twice declares Himself Alpha and Omega. First, before the outset of John’s vision (1:8), and finally, when declaring the eschatological accomplishment of His purpose for his whole creation: “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, and the beginning and the end” (21:6).¹¹

Christ’s participation in God’s creation of all things becomes clear in his description at the beginning of message to the church at Laodicea, where he is called “the origin (*archē*) of God’s creation” (3:14). This does not mean that He is the first created being or that in his resurrection he was the beginning of God’s new creation or that he is merely the promise of a new creation by the faithful God.¹² It has the same sense as in the title “the beginning [*archē*] and the end” as used of both God (21:6) and Christ (22:13) and which expresses the eternity of God, who stands sovereign over history’s whole span.¹³ Christ preceded all things as their source. This belief in Christ’s role in creation is at one with the broader New Testament literature (1 Cor 8:6; Col 1:5–17; Heb 1:2; John 1:1–3). In particular, Paul’s teaching on Christ’s role in the creation also includes both aspects of the original act of creation and His ongoing preservation of the created order: “For by Him all things **were created**, *both* in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, . . . all things **have been created through Him** and for Him. He is before all things, and **in Him all things hold together**” (Col 1:16, 17).¹⁴ Revelation reveals Christ as the divine agent both in God’s creation of all things and in God’s eschatological fulfillment of all things. Thus Christ is “the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end” (22:13).

¹⁰ Baukham, 27.

¹¹ Bauckham, 27.

¹² See Beale’s discussion, 297–301.

¹³ Bauckham, 56; Aune, 256; Dennis E. Johnson, *Triumph of the Lamb: A Commentary on Revelation* (Phillipsburg: P & R., 2001), 91.

¹⁴ Paul’s letter to the Colossians was also intended indirectly for those at Laodicea (Col 4:16), thus making it likely that the Laodiceans were acquainted with the theological implications of John’s more abbreviated reference.

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God's eternity in relation to the created world is further expressed in His self-designation, which interprets God's First Testament divine name YHWH—"I AM WHO I AM" (Exod 3:14)¹⁵—with "the One who is and who was and who is to come" (1:4, 8).¹⁶ God cannot be captured by, or limited to, a theological definition. He is simply the God "who is" right here in our present.¹⁷ As such He is the God of the present, the past, and the future. The formula speaks not only of God's being but of his acts: "he comes."¹⁸ Here is the promise of the "eschatological 'visitation' of God."¹⁹ The future holds out much more than the past and the present: more than the God of memory, more than the God of existence, of spirituality, of comfort, and of communion. He is the God *who is to come* and who will act by saving and judging and fulfilling His final purpose for the world.²⁰

In those points in Revelation where the eschatological coming of God is portrayed as taking place and where hymns praise the fulfillment of His purposes, the formula is shortened to "the One who is and who was" (11:17; cf. 16:5). "We give you thanks, O Lord God, the Almighty, who is and who was, for you have taken your great power and begun to reign" (11:17). Thus human beings "may approach the future, but only to find God already there, coming to meet them."²¹ Wherever men are aware of His presence, they are confronted with the "ground and goal of being."²² They can be assured that the same God who did marvelous things for his people in the past, and who is doing the things of salvation in the present, is the God who gives them the certainty and assurance that He keeps his promises with regard to their future. The same powerful and faithful God will stand and act on behalf of his people in the end, as well.²³

Here God is likewise anticipated as the source of new possibilities for His creation and the future of humanity: "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away" (21:1). The first creation, because of the Fall, lapses back into nothing and requires a fresh creative act of God to give it a new form of existence,²⁴ one that encompasses both continuity

¹⁵ Bauckham, 28–30; Easley, 14.

¹⁶ This designation of God occurs five times with variations: "the One who is and who was and who is to come" (1:4, 8); "the One who was and is and who is to come" (4:8); "the One who is and who was" (11:17; 16:5).

¹⁷ Jacques B. Doukhan, *Secrets of Revelation: The Apocalypse Through Hebrew Eyes* (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 2002), 18.

¹⁸ Boring, 75.

¹⁹ Aune, *Revelation 17–22* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 939, 940.

²⁰ Doukhan, 18.

²¹ David L. Barr, *Tales of the End: A Narrative Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Polebridge, 1998), 30.

²² G. B. Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1987), 291.

²³ Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ: Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Berrien Springs: Andrews UP, 2002), 60, 62.

²⁴ Bauckham, 49.

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and discontinuity (2 Pet 3:13; Isa 65:17). There is eschatological renewal of creation, not its replacement by another.²⁵ For the first time since 1:8, the One who sits on the throne speaks directly, “Behold, I am making all things new” (21:5a). The key significance of the words echoing Isaiah is underlined by God’s own command to John to write them down (21:5b).²⁶

This connection between creation and new creation highlights the cosmic scope of Revelation’s theological and moral horizon, within which its primary concern with the human world is set.²⁷ The new beginning corresponds to the derivation of all things from God’s original creative act. God is the ground of ultimate hope for the future creation of the world. Creation is thus “not confined forever to its own immanent possibilities. It is open to the fresh creative possibilities of its Creator.”²⁸ This eschatological hope for the future of God’s whole creation includes the hope of bodily resurrection from the nothingness of death.²⁹ Trust in God the Creator, who can bring something out of nothing (*ex nihilo*), assumes that He can give eschatological new life back to the dead,³⁰ raised forever beyond the threat of death (21:4; 1:18; 2:8, 10; 20:4–6). “Faith in Creation makes faith in resurrection possible.”³¹

Nuancing the End

When an angel proclaims the “eternal gospel” to all people on earth, calling them to repentance in view of the judgment—which already “has come”—the substance of this gospel is a call to recognize their Creator by worshiping Him. “Fear God and give glory to him, because the hour of his judgment has come; worship him who made the heaven and the earth and sea and springs of water” (14:6). The pairing of judgment and Creation forms a tension that is rich in meaning and reflects the ethos of the Revelation’s tree of life and city thematic, i.e., choosing life “true to life,” as given from the Creator’s hand. On the one hand, the reference to Creation is the celebration of life that says yes to God, to nature, to joy, to love, and to life. On the other hand, pleasure, moral choice, and

²⁵ Revelation 21:4 makes it clear that it is the end of suffering and mortality that is in mind when Revelation speaks of the “passing away” of the “first heaven and the first earth.” This can be extended to the realm of the moral as well, given Revelation’s subsequent discourse on the ethos of the tree and the city (Rev 22:1–4, 14, 15; 21:7–8, 27).

²⁶ “For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; And the former things will not be remembered or come to mind” (Isa 65:17).

²⁷ Bauckham, 50.

²⁸ Bauckham, 48.

²⁹ Faith in Creation rejects belief in the immortality of the soul. Because we are created beings, we are not immortal by nature (Doukhan, 131).

³⁰ Robert Farrar Capon, *The Foolishness of Preaching: Proclaiming the Gospel Against the Wisdom of the World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 24–25.

³¹ Doukhan, 131.

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orientation are measured with law, discipline, and judgment.³² Thus there is both given life and moral accountability (Gen 2:16, 17; Eccl. 11:9).

Again, the divine title, “him who made the heaven and the earth and sea and springs of water,” defines God as the One who brought all things into existence. As Creator, He alone has ultimate power over everything. As Creator, to whom all creatures owe their very being, He alone is to be worshiped (5:13). As Creator, who has given the “gift of existence” to reflective moral beings, He alone is the ultimate arbiter of what is moral and “true to life” as He has created it and will recreate (2 Pet 3:13).³³ The Apocalypse’s Creation theme thus situates the creature relative to its Creator. It provides a basis for worship and the foundation for moral life.³⁴ God is thus identified as the Creator of all things as a motivation for people to worship Him instead of creation.³⁵ Such motivation also reflects a moral impulse in that they “fear God and give glory to him,” for “the fear of God” is the beginning of moral life (Deut 6:2; Eccl 12:13; Ps 19:19; 34:11–14; 36:1; Prov 3:7; 8:13; 10:16).³⁶

Revelation’s Creation motif is further evidenced in its pregnant allusions to the “tree of life” (2:7; 22:2, 14, 19), “sea” (4:6; 15:2; 21:1),³⁷ “abyss” (9:1, 2, 11; 11:7; 17:8; 20:1, 3),³⁸ “breath of life” (11:11; cf. Gen 2:7; 13:15), and “four living creatures” (4:6, 8, 9; 5:6, 8, 11, 14; 6:1, 3, 5, 6, 7; 7:11; 14:3; 15:7; 19:4).³⁹ The Apocalypse also sets the creation of the universe at the heart of the vision of the throne (chap. 4), along with its unfolding narrative of the sealed scroll (chapter 5), the breaking of the scroll’s seven seals, and the seven trumpets (6:1–11:19; see esp. 5:13; 10:5–7).⁴⁰ Thus the subject of Creation plays a

³² Doukhan, 132.

³³ Revelation 5:13 refers to “every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them” as worshipping God.

³⁴ Doukhan, 126.

³⁵ Beale, 753.

³⁶ Doukhan, 124.

³⁷ “The image of the throne of God suspended above water proclaims the power of God over the elements. The Apocalypse here represents God as the Creator. The book of Genesis describes the creation of the world in terms of a victory over the element of water, a symbol of emptiness and darkness” (Doukhan, 53). See also Ezek 26:19–21; Jon 2:6; Hab 3:10.

³⁸ The Septuagint uses the Greek term *abussos* to translate the Hebrew word *tehom*, a word employed to describe the earth before Creation (Gen. 1:2), thus alluding to the pre-Creation state of the earth (see Doukhan, 84, 85, 178, 179).

³⁹ A single Greek noun (*zōa*) carries the notion of “the thing which is living.” The imagery of the lion, a calf, a face like a man, and an eagle is drawn from Ezekiel’s vision (Ezek 1:6–10; 10:14). They are angelic beings possibly representing the entire animate creation (Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977], 138). “The chief function of the four living creatures is to worship him who sits upon the throne. Thus do they acknowledge God as the creator and sustainer of life. In this worship of the four living creatures, the whole of created order of beings joins, for they represent all things that breathe before him who is the author and sustainer of life” (Edward A. Mc.Dowell, *The Meaning and Message of the Book of Revelation* [Nashville: Broadman, 1951], 78.).

⁴⁰ Doukhan, 54.

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significant part in the Apocalypse's end-time message and has some special links to the end-time.

In Revelation 10 one finds a heightened eschatologically-oriented Creation statement. In the surprise interlude between the sixth and seventh trumpet, a mighty angel comes down to earth from heaven and places one foot on the sea and the other on the land. He raises his right hand and swears a solemn oath as to the truthfulness of the message that he brings from the little book that lay open in his hand.⁴¹ He swears to God, "who lives forever and ever, WHO CREATED HEAVEN AND THE THINGS IN IT, AND THE EARTH AND THE THINGS IN IT, AND THE SEA AND THE THINGS IN IT,"⁴² that there will be delay no longer, but in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, then the mystery of God is finished, as He preached to His servants the prophets" (10:6, 7). As the angel's posture (one foot on the sea, another on the land, right hand lifted toward heaven) encompasses all the spheres of creation, ascending from the sea's depths to the dry land to the height of heaven, so also the Creator who secures His oath controls all spheres, descending from heaven's heights to dry land and to the deeps.⁴³ Accompanying the proclamation of this prophetic message about the end-time is an apparent renewed emphasis on God, who was and is Creator. The same point is brought out by the first angel's message of Revelation 14, the first of three end-time messages that lead up to the Second Coming of Christ and produce the final harvest of the earth (14:6–14).⁴⁴ This suggests that the question of Creation is viewed as one of the moral/spiritual issues human beings are confronted with not only throughout history, but particularly in the end-time leading up to the eschaton.

An Act of Morality

The "Creation Song of the Elders" provides a clue to the central meaning of God's act of creation and the response it engenders in reflective moral beings.⁴⁵ It is moral. "You are worthy [*áxios*] . . . to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things" (4:11). God's act of Creation is itself viewed as an act

⁴¹ The description of the angel and his address to God is a direct allusion to Dan 12:7 (Beale, 537): "I heard the man dressed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, as he raised his right hand and his left toward heaven, and swore by Him who lives forever that it would be for a time, times, and half a time; and as soon as they finish shattering the power of the holy people, all these events will be completed."

⁴² This verse reproduces a variant of the fourth commandment of the decalogue, Exod 20:11: "For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them." See also Neh 9:6; Ps 146:6; Acts 4:24; 14:15; Aune, *Revelation 6–16* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 565; Beale, 538.

⁴³ Johnson, 161, 162.

⁴⁴ Bauckham, 94–98; Hans K. LaRondelle, *How to Understand the End-Time Prophecies of the Bible: The Biblical-Contextual Approach* (Sarasota: First Impressions, 1997), 362–369; Stefanovic, 436, 456–464; Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 848, 849.

⁴⁵ Boring, 107.

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of morality, expressing both His moral nature and being. It also expresses something about created reality itself. As Creator of “all that is” God has moral worth.⁴⁶ The moral worth (*áxios*) to receive glory and honor and power corresponds to both the moral nature and the moral value of His creative action and its intended results. God not only created “all that is,” but He willfully “intended” to bring the universe into existence (“by your will they were created”).⁴⁷ This indicates a moral plan for the creation of “all things” (including moral beings, both human and heavenly).⁴⁸ This plan would undoubtedly respect the nature of things and express truths/laws (both natural and moral) that would need to be protected.⁴⁹ The Genesis narrative highlights these moral implications with the simple statement “God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good” (Gen 1:31). The “good” which Genesis has in view has a very specific range of meaning—“that which is beneficial for humankind.”⁵⁰ As Revelation’s celestial elders survey created reality and God’s purpose therein, they affirm such “goodness” by extolling both His moral attributes and acts.

The deeply personal nature of Creation is powerfully highlighted in these expressions as well. God is revealed in the Apocalypse as a Person rather than an impersonal object or a mere influence. For God to do all He does in Revelation requires that He be a person, possessing unity of thought, will, character, emotion, and activity. It is thus that the Creator of all reality is adored as a person who willfully creates (4:11). And since the Creator of all reality is a person, all of that reality that God voluntarily produces exists in relationship.⁵¹ While no mere mutuality between God and creation is envisioned, the relationship is nevertheless real, personal, and covenantal. There is a covenant Lord and there are covenant servants, along with their shared environment of created reality (5:1–11:19; 21:1–8; 1:5–6).⁵² This is significant, as the social location for ethics in Revelation is the covenant. God’s covenant with His Creation through history is the stage on which the divine drama is performed in the Apocalypse. It is also

⁴⁶ As composite representatives of all created beings that have life, the four living creatures acknowledge God as the creator and sustainer of life by speaking of His attributes rather than His deeds. God is to be thanked just for being who He is: the all-Holy, Almighty, ever-Living One (4:8). See, McDowell, 78; Johnson, 102; Mounce, 140.

⁴⁷ Boring, 106.

⁴⁸ *Thelema* connotes *will, design, purpose, what is willed*, and is used predominantly of what God has willed: i.e., creation (4:11); redemption (Eph 1.5); callings (Col 1.9), etc.. It points to what a person intends to bring about by his own action *purpose*.

⁴⁹ Thus Revelation is in keeping with the wider biblical understanding of the universe as having an inherent moral factor that cannot be divorced from the proper order of things and which has no thought for material being evil in itself (Kenneth A. Matthews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, New American Commentary [Broadman & Holman, 1996], 1A:146, 147).

⁵⁰ Sailhamer, 88.

⁵¹ Michael S. Horton, *Covenant and Eschatology: The Divine Drama* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 16.

⁵² Horton, 16.

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the context in which both moral choice and accountability is envisioned.⁵³ This relational dimension of Creation means that God is neither distant nor disinterested in either the material universe or human beings. Reflective moral beings thus acknowledge such relationship with a personal response of worship and obedience—that He is *our* Creator (4:11; 14:7). God’s creative purpose to “dwell among human beings”—when, in the eschaton, He “makes all things new” (3:3) and “they will see his face” (22:4)—anticipates the restoration of the original relationship and intimacy of God with human beings in the first Creation (Eden). The full meaning of the Revelation’s understanding of Creation precludes any drift away from the biblical theme of Creation that would result in even a partial exclusion of a personal Creator God.⁵⁴

Such permeating Creation imagery mirrors the Apocalypse’s “highly reflective consciousness of God.”⁵⁵ Every description or designation or action of God in Revelation touches on, presupposes, or expresses this underlying reality of Creation in one way or another. The term *pantokrátōr* (‘almighty,’ from the terms *pan*, “all,” and *kratein*, “to rule”) sums up this permeating consciousness of the Creator God’s supremacy over all creation.⁵⁶ An expression that occurs nine times in Revelation (1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7, 14; 19:6, 15; 21:22), *pantokrátōr* indicates not so much God’s abstract omnipotence as His actual control

⁵³ See Rev 21:1–8; 1:5–6; 5:1–11:19; Lev 26:11–12; Exod 29:45, 19:5; Jer 30:22; Ezek 37:27; 1 Pet 2:9–10); Horton, 15; See also, Stefanovic’s discussion of Revelation’s pervading covenant motif, 167–179; 195–211.

⁵⁴ Eight views that attempt to combine portions of both creation and evolution interpret the geological column differently: (1) Creation (most direct reading of Scripture—God creates in six literal days, each described with its own evening and morning); (2) Gap Theory (God created life on earth in the distant past. Later, following a judgment upon Satan, He destroyed that life, and the creation described in Genesis 1 and 2 then followed); (3) Progressive Creation (God performed multiple creation events spread over long periods of time); (4) Theistic Evolution (God uses the process of evolution to create the world and bridges some of the difficult barriers evolution faces); (5) Deistic Evolution (denies scriptural record of creation but admits some kind of God who was active mainly at the beginning; a usually impersonal God, not now active in human affairs, serves as a first cause); (6) Pantheistic Evolution (God is all and all is God; God progresses with evolution itself); (7) Space Ancestry or Cosmic Creation (extraterrestrial life forms either originate or modify terrestrial life); (8) Mechanistic Evolution (reality is limited to mechanistic causes. The various forms of life have developed as a result of the operation of natural law; there is no intelligent design). See Ariel A. Roth, *Origins: Linking Science and Scripture* (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 1998), 339–346. “None of the eight interpretations of origins discussed above, except the creation model (Model 1), have a good biblical support. Model 2 through 8 suggest progress, while the Bible speaks of degeneration of nature since creation. For several models (Models 4–6), the concept of God is their only serious link to Scripture” (Roth, 346). “The eight models of interpretation of the fossil record given above . . . illustrate how one can easily and imperceptibly drift away from a belief in a recent creation by God to a naturalistic evolution where there is no God” (Roth, 351). The drift away from the biblical theme of creation can result in a gradual exclusion of God.

⁵⁵ Bauckham, 24.

⁵⁶ Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, 57, 58.

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over “all things.”⁵⁷ Thus Revelation’s moral vision is highly theocentric, as is its theology.⁵⁸ Our study of the theology and ethics of the Apocalypse must begin with God and both constantly and finally return to God. His Creation, sovereignty, life and self-existence, holiness, throne, righteous acts, justice, transcendence, and coming—and the distinctive ways of speaking of God for each one as well as the other forms of God-language in the Apocalypse—inform the moral quest. God is the ultimate reality behind all earthly appearances and existence. This understanding of God as transcendent Creator, and the distinctive moral vision it cast, was characteristic of what Judaism and early Christianity shared without question.⁵⁹ One must read the Apocalypse through the same eyes if one is to grasp its moral vision.

Touching Human Reality

Revelation’s Creation motif inevitably bears on the nature of human reality. Human living is not meaningless. Human beings are here by design, by plan. They have a certain future because God is the One who created them (4:11; 21:1–7). Nor is human life as God envisioned it “open” as per existentialist, humanist, naturalistic, or pantheistic views of human nature. There is an ordered quality of life consistent with human life, a moral right and wrong (21:8; 27; 22:11, 15; 9:21; cf. 2 Pet 3:13, 14). Immoral behavior is against the kind of behavior God envisioned for human beings (18:4, 5; 9:21). Human equality is assumed and an essential part of human creation. There is no fundamental difference in the essential nature of races (and genders). Every nation, all tribes, peoples, and tongues, the small and the great, rich and poor, free men and slave are equally within the Apocalypse’s field of vision for both redemption and moral accountability (7:9; 11:18; 13:16; 14:6; 19:5, 18; 20:12). Slavery and trafficking in human lives is a reason for divine judgment (18:13).

Creation shows what God thinks about human beings. They are worth creating. They are worth changing in the present and giving a new heavens and a new earth. They are worth dwelling among. They are worth comforting (4:11; 21:1–7; 22:4). A personal God dwelling among human beings shows their true value. Revelation’s Creation is about a Person acting for mankind. Man as a reflective moral being has the capacity to personally respond to God with either worship and obedience or irreverence and disobedience (Rev 14:6–12; 9:20, 21; 22:11, 17; 16:15; 3:19–21). God created human beings as moral beings, making them morally accountable to Himself. He gave them responsibility as stewards to care for Creation, thus holding accountable those who would destroy His Creation (11:18). All that God created is God’s private property—the life of another is sacred—thus their blood will be avenged (6:10; 16:5–7; 18:24; 19:2).

⁵⁷ Bauckham, 30.

⁵⁸ Bauckham, 23.

⁵⁹ Bauckham, 47, 48.

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While the Apocalypse does not develop the notion of the *imago dei* per se, its portrayal of human beings includes several reflections of the divine nature which compose the essential dimensions of human beings. Like God, human beings are relational beings. Worldwide human life is organized into societies—tribes, languages, people, nations (5:9; 7:9; 10:11; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6; 17:15).⁶⁰ These words describe the distribution, characteristics, and relationships of human beings,⁶¹ as well as imply the reality of integrating culture. Relationships are grounded in and are the expression of the ontological being of the human person.⁶² They can be *God-related* (3:20) or *other-person-related* (11:10). Revelation's themes of covenant, faithfulness, and truthfulness likewise express man's essential relational nature (2:10, 13; 17:14; 5:1–11:19; 21:8, 27; 22:15).

Like God, human beings have self-conscious rationality. They are able to know themselves and examine and evaluate their own thoughts and assess their own condition (i.e., the ability to experience shame or fear or remember or sense the need to repent; 2:5, 10, 21; 3:3, 18; 16:15; 18:10; 9:20, 21). Human beings are also able to perceive distance between themselves and other moral beings (or powers) and to plan the nature of their relationships with them (2:23; 3:20; 17:13, 17). It is such self-conscious rationality that makes personal relationship possible, for genuine relationships require that the persons view themselves as distinct in the relationship.⁶³

Like God, human beings possess self-determination or freedom. They can choose. They can do what they want. They have the ability to create thoughts and actions that have no determinative cause outside of the self (22:17; 18:4; 2:21, 23; 3:3; 9:20, 21). Such capacity to choose is at the core of the human person and is foundational for mankind as a moral being.⁶⁴ Without freedom, human beings could not make choices or be responsible for them (Deut 30:19).⁶⁵ The ethos of the tree of life and the holy city underscore this reality. Revelation is a book about choice. It is about how we understand the results of our choice, who we are as a result of what we have chosen, and how our choices impact both history and eternity (Rev 22:10–15; 1:3; 2:7, 11, 17, 26–29; 3:5, 6, 12, 13, 21, 22; 13:9).

Like God, human beings have an essential moral nature. The Apocalypse presents human beings as a unity in thought, will, emotion, character, conscience, and activity (2:23; 22:11). It affirms the moral nature of mankind and

⁶⁰ Revelation consistently summarizes humanity with a fourfold pattern. None of the seven lists agree precisely with the other (see Easley's chart, 101).

⁶¹ Mal Couch, ed., *A Bible Handbook to Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2001), 134.

⁶² Robert L. Saucy, "Theology of Human Nature," in *Christian Perspectives on Being Human: A Multidisciplinary Approach to Integration*, ed. J. P. Moreland and David M. Ciochi (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 25.

⁶³ Saucy, 27.

⁶⁴ Saucy, 28.

⁶⁵ Miroslav M. Kiš, "Christian Lifestyle and Behavior," *Handbook of Seventh-Day Adventist Theology* (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 2000), 677.

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holds the human being morally responsible. This includes self-awareness as well as self-determination in relation to morality. Ultimately, there is no ethics without human beings.

These dimensions of the image of God—relational being, identity and personhood, self-determination, and essential moral nature—“stand as evidence against existential dismissal of any essential nature, thus favoring total freedom of all individuals to mold themselves.”⁶⁶ These same reflections of the divine nature are what all the coercion, oppression, deception, and violence in the Apocalypse override. Such realities dehumanize and tear at the essential well-being of human beings.

Creation and the revelation of Creation in the Apocalypse (together with its heightened consciousness of the person and being of God) not only help us identify who we are but enable us to grasp the basic moral structure and reality of our existence as well. It gives us a sense of being, identity, value, potential, and hope. As Kiš notes: “When we reject our origin in the divine will, act, and purpose, we are at the mercy of the human will, act, and purpose.”⁶⁷ Because the Apocalypse’s Creation motif has such a high conception of human origin, nature, and destiny, it provides us with profound criterion by which to measure both the depravity and the potential of man’s individual and corporate life.⁶⁸

Conclusion

Revelation’s vibrant and sustained confession of God as Creator reveals a highly reflective consciousness of God that elicits both worship and moral response. His Creation, sovereignty, life and self-existence, holiness, throne, righteous acts, justice, and transcendence presuppose the Genesis narrative. They posit the overarching worldview that the whole of finite reality (macro, meso, and micro) exists by God the Creator’s gift of existence. This understanding of God as transcendent Creator and the distinctive moral vision it cast was characteristic of what Judaism and early Christianity shared without question.⁶⁹ One must read the Apocalypse through the same eyes if one is to grasp its theological and moral vision. God as Creator and the Creator’s faithfulness to His creation are alike in view.⁷⁰ Understanding of God, man, sin, redemption, and judgment are profoundly nuanced. The Apocalypse asserts that the question of Creation is to be viewed as one of the moral/spiritual issues human beings are confronted with not only throughout history, but particularly in the end-time leading up to the *eschaton*. The careful reader can trace parallels between the book of Genesis and the issues and events of the last things on earth, including

⁶⁶ Kiš, 678.

⁶⁷ Kiš, 677.

⁶⁸ Caird, 293.

⁶⁹ Bauckham, 47, 48.

⁷⁰ Bauckham, 51–53.

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Creation and restoration of Creation as an eschatological reality.⁷¹ Revelation's Creation motif affirms the trustworthiness of God's Word, requiring a unity of divine revelatory purpose and a consistency of interpretation of that purpose.⁷² The allusions to Genesis 1 and 2 throughout Revelation (especially chap. 22) illustrate the role that these early chapters of Genesis played in shaping the form and content of its vision of the future and of human moral accountability.⁷³ Creation and Apocalypse are more than a mere linking of protology and eschatology. They point with new conviction to the fingerprint of God in history and His signature in the Bible—Creator.

Larry L. Lichtenwalter is President-elect of the Adventist Theological Society. He pastors the Village Seventh-day Adventist Church in Berrien Springs, Michigan, and holds a Ph.D. in Christian Ethics from the SDA Theological Seminary at Andrews University, where he also serves as adjunct professor and/or guest lecturer in leadership, Christian Ethics, worship, preaching, and church and society. He brings expertise in ministerial ethics and leadership issues when invited to conference workers meetings, as well as inspirational biblical studies on practical Christian themes during his camp meeting appointments. He has written books on Ecclesiastes, Joseph, Jacob, and Esther and a three volume series on David. He is currently working on a scholarly monograph on the ethics of the Apocalypse. Larry has a passion for bringing the Word of God to life and helping lay people meaningfully connect with deeper theological and ethical themes discussed in the scholarly world. lichtenwalter@compuserve.com

⁷¹ See Gage.

⁷² Gage, 3.

⁷³ Sailhamer, 83, 84.