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The Earliest Latin Commentary on the Apocalypse

F.F. Bruce

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The Book of the Revelation was unanimously recognized by the churches of the West long before the eastern churches made up their minds to accept it as canonical. Various reasons might be suggested for this: at any rate there was something about the book which immediately appealed to the souls of the western Christians and convinced them of its divinity. It might have been thought that its peculiar Greek would not lend itself readily to translation into Latin but as a matter of fact; the Vulgate Apocalypse is a masterpiece of literature and comes home to the reader with a charm and a vigour all its own. It is quite in keeping with these facts that, the earliest complete commentary on the Apocalypse which has come down to us should be in Latin: Its author was Victorinus, bishop of Poetouio in Upper Pannonia, now Ptuj on the Drava in Yugoslavia (until recently Pettau in Austria). Victorinus suffered martyrdom, under Diocletian, probably about the year 303.

Before his day others had commented on the Apocalypse, but in Greek. Fragments of exposition appear in the works of Justin Martyr and Irenaeus; Melito of Sardis and Hippolytus of Rome wrote complete commentaries on it (both, unfortunately, lost); while Clement of Alexandria and Origen are also said to have commented on it. So, apart from Clement and Origen, even the earliest *Greek* commentators on the Apocalypse represent the western churches and the churches of the province of Asia. The latter churches, for obvious reasons, did not regard the Apocalypse with the indifference of most of the eastern churches. Justin lived at Ephesus before he went to Rome; Irenaeus, bishop of Dons, had as his master Polycarp, the martyr-bishop of Smyrna; while Melito represented yet another of the Seven Churches. Hippolytus was "the greatest, scholar of his church and age".¹

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The first commentators interpreted the Apocalypse more literally than their successors: in particular, they accepted the "chiliastic" view of the millennial reign of chapter xx. "These writers were acquainted with the original interpretation of this chapter. But this interpretation was soon displaced by the spiritualizing methods of Alexandria. Tyconius, adopting these methods, rejected the literal interpretation of chapter xx., treated the millennium as the period between the first and second advents of Christ. Jerome and Augustine followed, in the footsteps of Tyconius, and a realistic eschatology was crushed out of existence in the Church for full 800 years."² Justin, Irenaeus and Hippolytus all belonged to this school, and Victorinus followed in their steps. "Like them he was a Chiliast, and still preserved elements of the true and ancient interpretation. of the Apocalypse according to the Contemporary-Historical Method. Thus Nero *redivivus* is the first Beast, and the False Prophet is the second. But his most important contribution historically is his 'Theory of Recapitulation. This is, that the Apocalypse does not represent a strict succession of events following chronologically

¹ F. J. Foakes-Jackson, *History of the Christian Church to A.D. 461* (Cambridge, 1914), p. 255.

² R. H. Charles, *Commentary on the Revelation in I.C.C.* (Edinburgh, 1920), Vol. I, p. clxxxiv.

upon one another, but under each successive series of seven seals, seven trumpets, seven bowls, the same events are dealt with."³

Of the life of Victorinus we know scarcely anything. He seems to have come originally from a Greek-speaking part of the Empire. According to Jerome (*De Viris Illustrious*, 74), he "did not know Latin as well as he knew Greek. As a result, his works, while important in sense, appear less important because of his way of putting words together. They are as follows: commentaries on Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Habakkuk, Ecclesiastes, the Song of Songs, the Apocalypse of John; a work 'against all heresies' and many others. At the end he was crowned with martyrdom."

Jerome's witness to his imperfect knowledge of Latin is decidedly justified by his writings that remain. While his meaning is usually, quite plain, his grammatical constructions are the reverse. In many places they, conform to no known rule of Latin syntax, classical or post-classical. He makes frequent use of the infinitive in independent clauses, the subject being sometimes in the nominative; sometimes in the accusative. He inverts the

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normal usages of *in* with the accusative and *in* with the ablative. *An Index Verborum et Elocutionum* will be found in Haussleiter's edition of his extant works in the *Vienna Corpus*, pp. 167-94.

To the list of his works given by Jerome in the above citation we must add a commentary on Matthew (referred to by Jerome himself in two or three other places, and by Cassiodorus), and a tractate, *De fabrica mundi*, mentioned by no ancient author, but extant in a Lambeth manuscript, from which it was first published in 1688. Apart from this tractate, the only one of his works which has come down to our day is his commentary on the Apocalypse. This commentary was edited and re-edited after its author was dead, and most of the manuscripts in which it has been preserved give us not the original edition of Victorinus, but one or other of these posthumous recensions. It was believed for long that the original work of Victorinus was quite lost. Thus H. A. Wilson, writing in 1887 in the *Dictionary of Christian Biography*, Vol. IV, p. 1129, says of the *De fabrica Mundi*: "It is possible that it may be a portion of the commentary on Genesis, but it is perhaps more probable that both this fragment and the *scholia* on the Apocalypse are the work of another Victorinus, and that all the works of the bishop of Pettau have been lost."

The credit for establishing and editing the text of the original commentary must go to Dr. J. Haussleiter, whose *Victorini episcopi Petauionensis opera* appeared in 1916 as the forty-ninth, volume of the *Vienna Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*. Haussleiter distinguishes three later recensions of the work. The first and most important of these was made by Jerome. A certain Anatolius sent Jerome a copy of Victorinus's exposition and asked him to say what he thought of it. Jerome returned it with a covering letter, in which he said that he had made what seemed to him necessary corrections and that in particular he had removed passages in which the author had expressed chiliastic views, substituting instead excerpts from other writers, who had interpreted the Millennium more in accordance with his own views.

³ R. H. Charles, *Studies in the Apocalypse* (Edinburgh 1913) pp, 10ff.

This Hieronymian recension is extant in seven MSS. of the tenth, eleventh, twelfth and fifteenth centuries, and Haussleiter prints it on the odd-numbered pages of his edition, from 17 to 153. By comparing this with the original edition, we can see how Jerome set about his work of emendation. He improved

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Victorinus's language, changed words and phrases here and there, revised the text of the Biblical quotations, omitted what he disagreed with, transposed sections of the commentary, and added excerpts from other writers, especially Tyconius, as well as comments of his own. This recension is referred to by Haussleiter as *Y*.

The second recension, to which Haussleiter assigns the symbol, Φ , augmented Jerome's by inserting a text of the Apocalypse (the same as Augustine used in his *De ciuitate Dei* and after him Primasius), and some further ex-positions This edition was used by Beatus (eighth century). The third recension, referred to as *S*, represents a mixture of the previous recessions, and adds citations from the Vulgate. It appears to have been made before the year 452.

The original edition of Victorinus was for long superseded by these recessions, particularly by Jerome's. References to "Victorinus" in most works on the Revelation refer to this recension. The original edition is known only to exist in three MSS. first mentioned in 1828 by Cardinal Mai, who found them in the Vatican library. They are the Ottobonian MS. 3288A (fifteenth century), Ottobonian 3288B (sixteenth century), a copy of the preceding, and the Vatican MS. 3546 (sixteenth century), a copy of one or other of the former two. There is hardly any difference between the three MSS. They contain, in addition to Victorinus on the Apocalypse and Jerome's covering letter to Anatolius, the commentaries on Galatians, Ephesians and Philippians by our author's more illustrious namesake, Victorinus Afer (who must have been born about the time when Victorinus of Pettau died), together with three short works sometimes, though erroneously, attributed to Victorinus Afer. (All the contents of these MSS., except our commentary on the Apocalypse, were published for the first time by Mai in his *Scriptorum Veterum Nova Collectio e haticanis codicibus edita*, Vol. III, part ii: Rome, 1828.) These three MSS. are referred to respectively by Haussleiter by the symbols *A*, *a* and α . He prints the true Victorinian text, obtained from these MSS., on the even-numbered pages of his edition; from 16 to 154. The letter to Anatolius is printed on pp. 14 ff.

Victorinus did not give a verse-by-verse exposition of the Revelation: in the words of Cassiodorus (*inst. diu. litt.*, 9), *difficillima quaedam loca breuiter tractauit*. Some authors refer to

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his comments as *scholia*. He quotes a longer or shorter passage which seems deserving of comment, frequently in the accusative and infinitive construction of an indirect statement, and then adds his interpretation. This is usually highly allegorical, though Jerome found it at times excessively literal. He is not diffuse; he says what he has to say and passes on to the next question without more ado. He quotes freely from other parts of Scripture: Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Joel, Micah, Zechariah, Malachi, the four Gospels (especially Matthew), Acts, Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 2 Timothy, Hebrews, 1 Peter and Jude are all laid under

contribution. In his quotations he uses the, parenthetic *ait* or *inquit* with unnecessary frequency.

Charles, as we have seen, finds the chief importance of Victorinus in the history of the interpretation of the Apocalypse in his initiation of the Theory of Recapitulation. While some forms of this theory suppose, as Charles says, that "under each successive series of seven seals, seven trumpets, seven bowls, the same events are dealt with", Victorinus does not seem, to, have, developed the theory so far as this, but to have regarded only the trumpets and the bowls as portraying the same events. He states the theory in the course of his comments on chapter viii, as follows:

Now 'trumpet' is a word of power, and though he repeats it by means of 'bowls', it is not as though he said that it had already happened that it is told twice, but because it has once been decreed that what is to take place among them shall indeed happen to them. Therefore whatever he said less plainly in the 'trumpets', he said more emphatically in the 'bowls'. Nor is the order of the sayings to be regarded, since the sevenfold Holy Spirit, after going right through to the last time and to the end, returns again to the same times and supplies what He has said less fully. It is not order but meaning that should be looked for in the Apocalypse; for there is also a false prophecy. The things then which are written in the 'trumpets' and in the 'bowls' are either disastrous plagues sent on the earth, or the fury of Antichrist himself, or the diminution of peoples; or different plagues, or hope in the kingdom of the saints, or the fall of cities, or the fall of Babylon, that is, the Roman city."

The seven alternatives in the last sentence correspond one by one to what the seer saw when the seven trumpets were sounded and the seven bowls emptied. A comparison of the two series persuades me that Victorinus was on the right lines here. Both the seventh trumpet and, after the parenthesis of chapters xviii and xix, the seventh bowl are followed by the

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advent of Christ to judge and reign. And a consideration of the scene which follows the opening of the sixth seal• the advent of the *Dies Irae*• may justify one in extending Victorinus's recapitulatory theory to include the seals as well. (The seventh seal serves mainly to introduce the seven trumpets.)

Victorinus's exegesis, as we have said, is for the most part allegorical. But what we do find of the contemporary-historical method of interpretation is very interesting. We find it chiefly in his combined notes on chapters xiii and xvii.

*"The seven heads are seven hills, on which the woman sits (that is, the Roman city); and they are seven kings: five have fallen, one is, and another has not yet come; and when he comes, he will be for a short time. And the beast which you saw is of the seven, and is the eighth. Therefore we must understand that time at which the Apocalypse was written, for Domitian was then Emperor. Now before him had been his brother Titus and their father Vespasian; Otho, Vitellius and Galba. These are the 'five' who 'have fallen'; 'one is', he says, under whom the Apocalypse is said to have been written, namely Domitian. 'Another has not yet come' he means Nerva; 'and when he comes, he will be for a short time'• for he did not complete two years. 'And the beast which you saw', says he, 'is of the seven': for before these kings Nero reigned; 'and is the eighth': when that one arrives, he will be counted in the eighth place. And since the end will take place in his reign, he added: *and he goes into destruction. For, ten kings have received royal authority: when he moves from**

the east, they will be sent from the Roman city with their armies. These he calls *ten-horns and ten diadems*. Daniel shows this too: three of the former will be rooted up; that is, three of the, foremost leaders are killed by Antichrist. The other seven give him *glory and honour and a throne and authority*. Of them he says: *these will hate the harlot* (he means the city) and *will burn her flesh with fire*.

"Now one of the heads was wounded to death, and its wound of death was healed. He refers to Nero. For it is established that when the horsemen sent by the Senate were coming upon him, he cut his own throat. He then is raised from the dead and sent by God to the Jews and persecutors of Christ, a worthy king to worthy subjects, and a Messiah such as persecutors and Jews deserved. And as he is to bear another name, he will also enter upon another life, that so they may receive him as their Messiah. Daniel says: he will not recognize the desire of women• since he himself is most filthy• and will recognize no god of his fathers. For he will not be able to seduce the people to circumcision unless he is a defender of the law. He will lay no compulsion upon the saints except to receive circumcision, if he can seduce any. Thus at length he makes them believe in him, so that they call him Christ. Now that he rises from hell we have also said above in the words of Isaiah: the water nourished him and the abyss gave him increase. However, though he comes with changed name, the Holy Spirit says: His number is six hundred and sixty-six. He will fulfil this number according to the 'Greek lettering.'"

Victorinus did not attempt to explain the number 666. But the authors of the later recensions were not so cautious. We find the suggestions TEITAN, GENSERIROS, ANTEMOS (these to be numerically assessed according to the values; of the Greek letters); and, most curious of all, recension Φ gives us

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a word DICLVX, supposed to be the Latin for TEITAN. DICLVX is, of course, DCLXVI (666) with the order of the letters changed. But why should it refer to Antichrist? "Because he changes himself into an angel of light, *audens se DICere LVcem*" (from LVX)! An excellent example of ancient classical etymology!

There are two other historical notes on Revelation x. 11 and xi. 1:

"You must preach again (that is, prophesy) *among peoples, tongues and nations*: that is, because when John saw this he was on the island of Pathmos, condemned to the mine by the Emperor-Domitian. So we see that John composed the Apocalypse there; and when he thought that now, being an old man, he might be received (*sc.* into heaven) after suffering, on the death of Domitian all his judgments were declared null and void, and John was released from the mine and thus afterwards passed on this same Apocalypse which he had received from the Lord. This is the meaning of the words, *You must prophesy again*.

"Moreover he received a reed like a rod, in order to measure the temple of God and the altar and those who worship at it. This signifies the authority which he subsequently exhibited to the churches on his release. For afterwards he also wrote the Gospel. For when Valentinus and Cerinthus and Ebion and the rest of Satan's school were dispersed throughout the earth, the bishops of the neighbouring cities came together to him and compelled him to write his testimony to the Lord. Now the measure of faith is the commandment of our Lord, to confess the Father Almighty, as we have been taught, and His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, begotten spiritually by the Father before the creation of the world, who became man and after, vanquishing death was received bodily into the heavens

by the Father, the holy Lord and pledge of immortality; who was foretold by the prophets and written of in the law, the hand of God and Word of the Almighty Father, and founder of the whole sphere of the world. This is the *reed* and *measure* of faith, that none should worship at the holy altar, save he who makes this confession the *Lord and His Christ*."

Apart from the historical comment, the credal statement is also interesting. There is no reference to the Holy Spirit. Jerome omits the final phrase, the Lord and His Christ, no doubt as being too explicitly "binitarian". The Latin of part of this creed is very obscure: it seems to say that our Lord is by, the hand of God and by the Word of the Almighty Father (*hunc per manum dei et per uerbum patris omnipotentis*). Jerome changes it to: *hunc esse manum dei et, uerbum patris*.

The Nicolaitans are also explained historically. In his comments on the letter to Ephesus Victorinus says:

"Before that time factious and-pestilential men had made themselves a heresy in the name of the deacon Nicolaus, teaching that meat offered to idols (*delibatam*) could be exorcised, so that it might be eaten, and that one who had committed fornication might receive peace (*pacem acciperet*) on the eighth day."

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Pax here seems to have the sense of "absolution". We come across this usage again in his exposition of the letter to Thyatira.

"He shows that there too there are men prone, to grant unlawful absolutions (*faciles homines ad illicitas paces dandas*) and to listen to new prophecies."

He does not mention the woman Jezebel byname, but one gathers that he considers those who tolerate her to be much the same as those who hold the doctrine of Balaam and of the Nicolaitans, i.e. those who are guilty of undue laxity in church discipline and who disregard the instructions of Acts xv. 29.

The contemporary-historical interpretation is not incompatible with the eschatological. The former passes over into the latter. We see this particularly in his references to Nero. He treats him at first historically, but then uses the current belief that Nero was still alive and would return from the East to take vengeance on Rome as a basis for his eschatological exposition, in which the Antichrist is identified with Nero *resuscitatus*.

Victorinus's literal interpretation of the first resurrection and the millennial reign plainly appears in his comments on chapters xix, xx and xxi. Our Lord arrives with His heavenly host, the nations gather to oppose Him, and fall by the sword. Some of them survive, to act as servants to the reigning saints during the millennium; these in turn are to be slain when the devil is let loose at the end of the thousand years and they allow themselves to be deceived by him. This, much we learn from the commentary on chapter xix, and "on all these things", he says, "the prophets similarly agree". The holy city of the millennial age, depicted in chapter xxi, is more than a city in the strict sense: it embraces all the territory promised to Abraham, *from the great river Euphrates to the river of Egypt*; and to the Messianic kin of Psalms. lxxii, *from sea to sea* ("that is from the Red Sea to the sea of Arabia, and from the sea of the north-

east to the sea of Phoenicia") *and to the ends of the earth* ("they are the parts of greater Syria").

By way of illustrating the two resurrections he quotes 1 Thessalonians iv. 15-17 and 1 Corinthians xv. 52. The trump of God of the former passage the signal for the first resurrection• is contrasted with the *last trump* of the, other this, he says, is sounded after the Millennium and heralds the

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second resurrection. But his exposition of Revelation xx is worth quoting in full.

"Now let no one be ignorant that the scarlet devil is shut up with all his apostate angels in Tartarus of Gehenna at the advent of the Lord, and let loose after a thousand years on account of the nations which have served Antichrist, that they alone may perish, because they have deserved this: then comes judgment generally. Therefore he says: *And the dead* ('those written in the book of life') lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. *This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection: against him the second death has not power.* Concerning this resurrection he says: *And I saw the Lamb standing and with Him a hundred and forty four thousand*, that is, standing with Christ, namely those who are to believe at the last time from among the Jews through the preaching of Elijah, to whom the Spirit bears witness not only for their virgin body but also for their tongue. Therefore he mentions previously that the twenty-four elders said: We give Thee thanks, Lord God, who hash reigned; and the nations were angry.

"In this same first resurrection also a beautiful city to come is described by this scripture. Of this first resurrection Paul also spoke to the Macedonian church, as follows: *For this we tell you thus, by the word of God, that the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with the trump of God to raise (sc. the dead); and the dead in Christ will stand up first: then we who live shall be caught away with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord.*

We have heard a 'trump' mentioned; this is to be observed: in another place the Apostle mentions another trump. He says to the Corinthians: *At the last trump the dead will rise• they will become immortal• and we shall be changed.* He said that the dead for their part would rise immortal for the punishments which they must bear, but it is manifest that we shall be changed and clothed with glory. When therefore we have heard that there is a *last trump*, we must understand that there is a first one also. Now these are the two resurrections. As many therefore as have not risen beforehand in the first resurrection and reigned with Christ over the earth• over all nations• will rise *at the last trump* after a thousand years, that is, in the last resurrection, among the impious and sinners and evildoers of various kinds. Rightly did he go on to say: *Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection: against him the second death has not power.* Now the *second death* is punishment in hell."

All this passage disappears in later recensions, which explain the first resurrection in the sense of Colossians iii. 1, as "the present resurrection of souls by faith, which does not allow men to pass over to the second death", and allegorize the millennial reign. Jerome, for example, substitutes a spiritualizing exegesis, according to which the reign is to be understood as heavenly, not earthly. The thousand years are not to be taken literally, for "if we must understand thus, they cease to reign when the thousand years are completed". The number 1,000 is, of course, the product of 10 and 100; and "the number 10 signifies the decalogue,

and the number, 100 indicates the crown of virginity". So, he argues, those who keep the ten commandments and guard themselves from impurity are priests of Christ and reign with Him, for in there the devil is bound,

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whereas he is let loose in those who are guilty of evil behaviour and false doctrine. The end of the thousand. years signifies the completion of the number of the saints, when the devil. and his followers will be consigned to the lake of fire. Then takes place the resurrection of the bodies of all sleeping saints. Jerome's own account of this alteration of the original commentary is given in his letter to Anatolus: *sed ne spernerem precantem, maiorum statim libros reuolui et quod in eorum commentariis de mille annorum regno repperi Victorini opusculis sociavi, ablatis, inde quae ipse secundum litteram senserita.*⁴ Apparently Anatolius, finding in his copy doctrines which were beginning to be regarded as heretical, thought his safest plan was to get the great Doctor to remove the dangerous passages and substitute whatever was considered the, orthodox view.

We may now go through the commentary, noting briefly some interesting points other than those we have already mentioned. He emphasizes the word like *in like unto a son of man* (i. 13), because while the title "Son of Man" was appropriate for our Lord when He was on earth, in His present glory He is more suitably called "Son of God". The *two-edged sword* (i. 16) is the Word of God, the two edges being the Old and New Testaments respectively. The two Testaments, he says, are also indicated by the *things new and old of Matthew xiii. 52* and by the *stater* (two denarii) which Peter found in the fish's mouth (Matt, xvii. 26). The *feet* of Christ (i. 15) are the Apostles; "for those by whom the preaching proceeds are rightly called feet".

The seven Spirits (i. 4, etc.) are gifts of the one Holy Spirit he compares Isaiah xi. 2 (his Old Latin text follows the LXX): *the spirit of wisdom and understanding, of counsel and might, of knowledge and piety, the spirit of the fear of God.* As for the seven churches, all the churches are embraced in the perfect number. The seven letters apply to seven types of churches. Paul, he remarks, also addressed letters to seven churches and no more, so as not to outstep the perfect number (whatever, else he had to say he said to individuals); and. similarly the seven women of Isaiah iv. 1 who take hold of one man are seven churches (i.e. the complete church) taking hold of Christ!

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The morning star (ii. 28) is the first resurrection. The *jasper* and *sardius* (iv. 3), being the colour of water and fire respectively, represent the watery judgment of the Old Testament and the fiery judgment foretold in the New. The rainbow round about the throne reminds us that the former judgment is past, never to return, and that we "should no longer fear water, but fire". The four living creatures represent the four Gospels, and. here follows an excursus on the Gospels based on the well-known passage of Irenaeus (*Adu. Haer.* iii. II. 8). As each creature has six wings, there are twenty-four wings in all: these are the books of the Old Testament according to the Hebrew enumeration, which bear up the Gospels. This refers to

⁴ "So as not to spurn your request, I immediately opened the books of former writers, and what I found in their commentaries concerning the millennial reign I added to the work of Victorinus, removing from it what he understood literally."

the importance of O.T. prophecy for the attestation of the Gospel. The *twenty-four elders seated on thrones* also represent the Law and the Prophets, "bearing the testimonies of judgment"; but Victorinus more usually regards them as the twelve patriarchs and the twelve apostles.

In v. 1, his text represents the book as being written within only: *an manu sedentis super tribunal librum scriptum deintus signatum sigillis VII*. The evidence for retaining καὶ ὄπισθεν is overwhelming, but this reading supports those who punctuate after ἔσωθεν, and take καὶ ὄπισθεν with κατεσφραγισμένον. (see Zahn: *Introduction to N. T.*, pp. 405 ff.) The book is the Old Testament: Christ had authority to open it because the Father had committed all judgment to Him. "To open the testament is to suffer and vanquish death on man's behalf." He had to die ere His testament could be opened: He could open it Himself because He had *prevailed*, i.e. "crushed death like a lion". The *harps* (v. 8) with their strings stretched on wood speak of the body of Christ on the Cross.

Although the seals are opened one after another, they portray contemporaneous events. The four horsemen (vi. 2ff.) represent the Gospel, famine, wars, pestilence. The *altar* (vi. 9) is the earth: the brazen altar of burnt-offering and the golden altar of incense in the Tabernacle correspond to earth and heaven respectively. The *souls under the altar*, therefore, are in Hades, in that department of it which is "remote from pains and fires, the rest of the saints". The *white robes* (vi. 11) he describes as "the gift of the Holy Spirit".

The *angel descending from the sun-rising* (vii. 2; N.B. how he reads *descending* for *ascending*: Jerome corrects him) is Elijah

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as is also the angel proclaiming *an eternal gospel* in xiv. 6. Under his preaching a number of Jews will believe, and *a great multitude from all nations*. The seven angels who pour forth the bowls of wrath fulfil our Saviour's words in Matthew xiii. 41, xxiv. 31, as well as such O.T. prophecies as Micah v. 6, which he reads: *they will chase Assur in (or into) the ditch of Nebroth. Assur is the Antichrist and the ditch of Nebroth* "the damnation of the devil". The *eagle flying in the mid heaven* (viii. 13) is the Holy Spirit; the strong angel with the rainbow upon his head (x. 1) is our Lord. The book in the angel's hand is the Apocalypse. By taking and eating it John commits it to memory.

The *two witnesses* (xi. 3) are not, as many have said, Elijah and Enoch or Elijah and Moses, but Elijah and Jeremiah. These two are also represented by the *two wings of the great eagle* which carry the woman into the wilderness (xii. 14), and by the two angels of xiv. 6 and xiv. 8. Of these two angels the former, as we have seen, announces the *eternal gospel*; while the latter proclaims the imminent fall of Babylon, in words reminiscent of Jeremiah li. 8. After these two have prophesied for three and a half years, they are killed by *the beast which comes up from the abyss*, and rise again *after three days and a half*, i.e. "on the fourth day", not on the third, "that none might be found equal to God". The beast or Antichrist, who then proceeds to reign for a further period of three and a half years, Victorinus finds foretold by Isaiah (viii. 7) and Ezekiel (xxxi. 3) as *the king of Assyria or the Assyrian*, and by Paul (2 Thess. ii. 3ff.) as the *man of lawlessness or the lawless one*. He supposes that Paul meant his readers to understand that the Antichrist was one of the Caesars, i.e. Nero (*resuscitatus*). If this were so, it would account for the obscurity of the Apostle's language; but this

interpretation can only with difficulty be maintained. The meaning of 2 Thessalonians ii. 7 is not plain, but if ὁ κατέχων, as usually interpreted, is the Emperor, he can hardly be identified with ὁ ἄνομος of verse 8.

The opening of the temple (x. 19) is the manifestation of Christ (did He not speak of *the temple of His body?*) and *the ark of His testament* is the Gospel. The woman (xii. i) "is the ancient church of the fathers and prophets and holy, apostles": her twelve stars are the patriarchs. The dragon's *seven heads* (xii. 3) are "seven Roman kings, of whom also is Antichrist: the ten

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horns are ten kings at the last time". The third part of the stars of heaven are the apostate angels. Victorinus disagrees with other expositors, who refer to them as the third part of believing men, who are seduced by the devil. The *scarlet* colour is appropriate to him who *was a murderer from the beginning*. The woman's flight (xii, 14) is made in accordance with the instructions of Christ in Matthew xxiv. 16: *then let those who are in Judaea flee into the mountains*.

The *image of the beast* is a golden image of Antichrist, set up by the false prophet in the temple at Jerusalem and indwelt by a fallen angel, who speaks from, within it. This is the βδέλυγμα τῆς ἐπημώσεως, *spoken of by Daniel the prophet*, which Victorinus renders *aspernationem euersionis*, "the contempt of subversion", because it "contemns" God and "subverts" men. (Our rendering, the *abomination of desolation*, is derived from the Vulgate *abominationem desolationis*.)

He has some interesting remarks to make about the *great harlot*:

"And, says he, *I saw the woman drunk with the blood of the saints and the blood of the witnesses of Jesus Christ*. For all the sufferings of the saints were always carried out by the decree of her Senate, and she herself made every decree among all the nations against the preaching of the faith, when pardon had already been granted.

"Now the woman sits upon a *rose-coloured beast*, murderess that she is, and thus has the image of the devil. There also are these heads, which we have already mentioned and expounded. In the Apocalypse and in Isaiah she is called *Babylon* on account of the dispersion of the peoples, but Ezekiel called her *Sor*. And indeed, if you compare what is said of *Sor* with what Isaiah and the Apocalypse have said of *Babylon*, you will find that they are all one."

Sor is, of course, Tyre (Heb. צֹר, LXX Σόρ Vg. *Tyrus*). It is highly probable that Victorinus did not use an Old Latin text already existing, but made his own translation from the Greek. *Sor* has been corrupted in many of the MSS.; in the MSS. in which the original commentary is preserved we find *sorech* (cf. Judges xvi. 4): *Sor* was a name unknown to readers of the Latin Bible.

The commentary closes with several quotations describing the millennial kingdom from the Psalms, Prophets, Gospels and Epistles. Among many interesting points raised here, we may mention one, in the first sentence of the last paragraph.

"The Lord made mention of this kingdom before He suffered, saying to the Apostles: *I will no longer drink of the fruit of this vine, except when I drink it new with you in the coming kingdom, which is a hundred times as much, ten thousand times greater and*" better (*quod est centum partibus multiplicatum, decies millies ad maiora et meliora*)."

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The first quotation, of course, is from Matthew xxvi. 29, from the narrative of the Last Supper; *a hundred times as much* may be a reminiscence of Matthew xix. 29 or xiii. 8, 23; the concluding phrase alludes to one of our Lord's ἄγροφα, or Sayings unrecorded in the Bible, preserved for us by Irenaeus in a quotation from Papias. Irenaeus in the last book of *Adversus Haereses* contends for a temporal and earthly kingdom of the saints and cites Matthew xxvi. 29 as a prophecy thereof (V. 33. 1). Then, enlarging on the topic of the vine, he goes on:

"The elders who saw John, the disciple of the Lord, related that they had heard from him how the Lord used to teach in regard to these times, and say: The days will come, in which vines shall grow, each having ten thousand branches, and in each branch ten thousand twigs, and in each true twig ten thousand shoots, and in each one of the shoots ten thousand clusters, and on every one of the clusters ten thousand grapes, and every grape when pressed will give twenty-five metretres of wine.... In like manner a grain of wheat would produce ten thousand ears, and every ear would have ten thousand grains, and every grain would yield ten pounds of clear, pure, fine flour... (V. 33-3)

"And these things are borne witness to in, writing by Papias, the hearer. of John, and a companion of Polycarp, in his fourth book (V.33.4)."

Papias seems to have connected this ἄγροφον with Matthew xxvi. 29. Victorinus probably owed his knowledge of the ἄγροφον to Papias, on whose writings he also drew else where. Jerome, in his letter to Anatolius, mentions Papias, bishop of Hierapolis (in Asia Minor), and an Egyptian bishop Nepos as early exponents of millenarian views.

According to our foremost authority on the writings of the Latin Fathers, "it can never cease to be of moment to the real lover of Scripture what was thought of its meaning by any patient investigator in any country or in any age".⁵ This is doubly true when the expositor is specially qualified to appreciate with sympathetic insight the words which he seeks to interpret. Such an expositor was our Victorinus. Himself a sufferer in the last and fiercest persecution of the Church by the Roman Empire, he was able to enter with the Seer of Patmos into the fellowship of Christ's sufferings: though separated by two centuries, each was to the other a *companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ*. In more comfortable times, the Revelation may be degraded to the unworthy status of a book of puzzles, a battleground for conflicting

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schools of interpretation. But *when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word*, the book becomes once more what it really is, a living word from God, full of encouragement and strength to those who are proving the truth of the Apostle's words: *All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution*. Christians at, the present day who have to suffer *for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus* under a régime which, on its own admission, sets

⁵ A. Souter, *The Earliest Latin Commentaries on the Epistles of St. Paul* (Oxford, 1927), p. 7.

itself *against the Lord and against His Christ*, find no difficulty in identifying, Antichrist and in seeing themselves in the company of those who *come out of the great tribulation*. Nor should we think that they are wrong, remembering Lord Bacon's dictum that divine prophecies are not fulfilled punctually at once, but have springing and germinant accomplishment throughout many ages, though the height or fulness of them may refer to some one age".

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