

## The War of the Lamb

Jesus and Paul have been the foci of our exposition. They must represent the centers of any New Testament theological synthesis, due both to their originality and to the amount of the material that makes them knowable to us. But there are other figures, other minds at work. A thorough treatment would demand that we test there as well the reading we have taken already. There would be the thought of the author of Matthew or of the writer to the Hebrews; there would be the mind of Peter, of John, of Jude, or of the seer of the Apocalypse. There is reason to trust that the reading there would confirm the orientation already sketched. Here, however, I must renounce the further cross-referencing and leap ahead to a summary, rooted nonetheless especially in the last-named Apocalypse. I shall seek briefly to characterize the stance of that book, as it might by contrast throw some light on our contemporary agenda and at the same time draw together the argument of the entire book.

One way to characterize thinking about social ethics in our time is to say that Christians in our age are obsessed with the meaning and direction of history. Social ethical concern is moved by a deep desire to make things move in the right direction. Whether a given action is right or not seems to be inseparable from the question of what effects it will cause. Thus part if not all of social concern has to do with looking for the right "handle" by which one can "get a hold on" the course of history and move it in the right direction. For the movement called Moral Rearmament, ideology was this handle; "ideas have legs," so that if we can get a contagious new thought moving, it will make its own

way. For others, it is the process of education that ultimately determines the character and course of the civilization; whoever rules the teachers' colleges rules the world.

Rambunctious students believe that the office of the dean or the president is the center of the university and therefore they occupy that office. Che Guevara believed the peasant to be the backbone of the coming Latin American revolution, so he went to the hills of Bolivia. The Black Economic Development Conference directed its Manifesto to the administrators of denominations because it believed that the point of decision making for white racist American society was there. Conservative evangelicalism focuses its call for change upon the will of the individual because it believes that when the individual heart is turned in another direction the rest is sure to follow. For still others it is the proletariat or geopolitics that explains everything.

Whichever the favored "handle" may be, the structure of this approach is logically the same. One seeks to lift up one focal point in the midst of the course of human relations, one thread of meaning and causality which is more important than individual persons, their lives and well-being, because it in itself determines wherein their well-being consists. Therefore it is justified to sacrifice to this one "cause" other subordinate values, including the life and welfare of one's self, one's neighbor, and (of course!) of the enemy. We pull this one strategic thread in order to save the whole fabric. We can see this kind of reasoning with Constantine saving the Roman Empire, with Luther saving the Reformation by making an alliance with the princes, or with Khrushchev and his successors saving Marxism by making it somewhat more capitalistic, or with the United States saving democracy by alliances with military dictatorships and by the threatened use of the bomb.

If we look more analytically at this way of deriving social and political ethics from an overview of the course of history and the choice of the thread within history that is thought to be the most powerful, we find that it involves at least three distinguishable assumptions.

1. It is assumed that the relationship of cause and effect is visible, understandable, and manageable, so that if we make our choices on the basis of how we hope society will be moved, it will be moved in that direction.

2. It is assumed that we are adequately informed to be able to set

for ourselves and for all society the goal toward which we seek to move it.

3. Interlocked with these two assumptions and dependent upon them for its applicability is the further postulate that effectiveness in moving toward these goals which have been set is itself a moral yardstick.

If we look critically at these assumptions we discover that they are by no means as self-evident as they seem to be at first. There is for one thing the phenomenon Reinhold Niebuhr has called "irony": that when people try to manage history, it almost always turns out to have taken another direction than that in which they thought they were guiding it. This may mean that we are not morally qualified to set the goals toward which we would move history. At least it must mean that we are not capable of discerning and managing its course when there are in the same theater of operation a host of other free agents, each of them in their own way also acting under the same assumptions as to their capacity to move history in their direction. Thus even apart from other more spiritual considerations, the strategic calculus is subject to a very serious internal question. It has yet to be demonstrated that history can be moved in the direction in which one claims the duty to cause it to go.

The other question we must raise at the outset about the logic of the "strategic" attitude toward ethical decisions is its acceptance of effectiveness itself as a goal. Even if we know how effectiveness is to be measured — that is, even if we could get a clear definition of the goal we are trying to reach and how to ascertain whether we had reached it — is there not in Christ's teaching on meekness, or in the attitude of Jesus toward power and servanthood, a deeper question being raised about whether it is our business at all to guide our action by the course we wish history to take?

It is, however, not the concern of our present study to deal logically or systematically with this kind of question within the traditional or contemporary idioms of theological debate. In recent centuries debate around the question of the meaning of history, and the place of Christian decision within that meaningfulness, has generally been a conversation of the deaf, with some so committed to pre-Enlightenment understandings of the stability of the proper social order that any sense

of movement is only a threat, and others committed with an equally unquestioning irrationality to the progressivist assumptions of post-Enlightenment Western thought, according to which the discernible movement of history is self-explicating and generally works for good, and therefore is the only terrain of significance from which ethics should self-evidently be derived. From neither direction has there been any expectation that light might be thrown upon the question from the New Testament. What medieval Christendom, with its vision of the divine stability of all the members of the *corpus christianum*, has in common with post-Enlightenment progressivism is precisely the assumption that history has moved us past the time of primitive Christianity and therefore out from under the relevance of the apostolic witness on this question.

The earlier portions of this book have sought to spell out in considerable detail the elements of a vision of the Christian's place in the world that can claim rootage in the thought of Jesus and Paul. It remains, we have seen, to test the concordance of this approach in the remaining sections of the canonical literature. This literature (the General Epistles and the Apocalypse) is less unified, less easy to understand, and there is also less of it; so we cannot ask for the fullness of delineation toward which we have pointed in the earlier sections of the study. We can, however, ask whether that which it is possible to discern in these writings is concordant with the other strands of apostolic witness we have been pursuing; and it is fitting to center this question upon the concern for history's meaning.

For a sense of the apostolic perception of the meaning and course of history and especially of the interplay of trust and coerciveness within history, we shall find that the most immediate resource comes from that segment of the biblical literature from which we are least accustomed to learn, namely from the liturgical literature which is embedded in the New Testament at certain scattered points, but which especially dominates in the book of the Revelation of John.

In his first vision (Rev. 4–5) the seer of Patmos is presented with the image of a sealed scroll in the hand of the "one that was seated upon the throne" (a circumlocution for God himself, who cannot be looked at directly, but whose presence is known as Light).

The question laid before John by his vision of the scroll sealed

with seven seals is precisely the question of the meaningfulness of history. This is a question that, the vision says dramatically, cannot be answered by the normal resources of human insight. Yet it is by no means a meaningless question or one unworthy of concern. It is worth weeping, as the seer does, if we do not know the meaning of human life and suffering.

Speaking more generally we can affirm, as numerous historians of philosophy are arguing, that to be concerned about history, to assume that history is meaningful, is itself a Judeo-Christian idea. The concern to know where history is going is not an idle philosophical curiosity. It is a necessary expression of the conviction that God has worked in past history and has promised to continue thus to be active among us. If God is the kind of God-active-in-history of whom the Bible speaks, then concern for the course of history is itself not an illegitimate or an irrelevant concern. No mystical or existentialistic or spiritualistic depreciation of preoccupation with the course of events is justified for the Christian.

But the answer given to the question by the series of visions and their hymns is not the standard answer. "The lamb that was slain is worthy to receive power!" John is here saying, not as an inscrutable paradox but as a meaningful affirmation, that the cross and not the sword, suffering and not brute power determines the meaning of history. The key to the obedience of God's people is not their effectiveness but their patience (13:10). The triumph of the right is assured not by the might that comes to the aid of the right, which is of course the justification of the use of violence and other kinds of power in every human conflict. The triumph of the right, although it is assured, is sure because of the power of the resurrection and not because of any calculation of causes and effects, nor because of the inherently greater strength of the good guys. The relationship between the obedience of God's people and the triumph of God's cause is not a relationship of cause and effect but one of cross and resurrection.

We have observed this biblical "philosophy of history" first of all in the worship life of the late New Testament church, since it is here that we find the most desperate encounter of the church's weakness (John was probably in exile, Paul in prison) with the power of the evil rulers of the present age. But this position is nothing more than a logical

unfolding of the meaning of the work of Jesus Christ himself, whose choice of suffering servanthood rather than violent lordship, of love to the point of death rather than righteousness backed by power, was itself the fundamental direction of his life. Jesus was so faithful to the enemy-love of God that it cost him all his effectiveness; he gave up every handle on history.

Not only does the New Testament church claim knowledge about the meaning of history or the meaning of meekness in history; it relates this very specifically to the coming and the ministry of the man Jesus. If we had only the book of Revelation we would not necessarily know what is meant by this Lamb in whom all sovereignty is said to reside. What therefore matters ultimately is how this Lamb relates to the rest of the human history of the people who praise him. The answer lies of course in the person of Jesus himself, of whom this same early church said in another context that "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us."

Thus early Christian confession means two things for our present concern. Speaking negatively, it means that the business of ethical thinking has been taken away from the speculation of independent minds each meditating on the meaning of things and has been pegged to a particular set of answers given in a particular time and place. Ethics as well as "theology" (in the sense in which in the past they have been distinguished) must, if it is to be our business as Christians to think about them, be rooted in revelation, not alone in speculation, nor in a self-interpreting "situation."

But still more important is the other side, the positive side of this confession. This will of God is affirmatively, concretely knowable in the person and ministry of Jesus. Jesus is not to be looked at merely as the last and greatest in the long line of rabbis teaching pious people how to behave; he is to be looked at as a mover of history and as the standard by which Christians must learn how they are to look at the moving of history.

### The War of the Lamb

Thus the most appropriate example of the difficult choice between effectiveness and obedience, and the most illuminating example, is that

of Jesus himself. What it means for the Lamb to be slain, of whom then we sing that he is "worthy to receive power," is inseparable from what it meant for Jesus to be executed under the superscription "King of the Jews."

The name "Christ," that is, the one anointed to rule, will have to suffice for present purposes to express symbolically that his ministry among his contemporaries was inseparable from the political concerns then related most intimately to fulfilling the hopes of his people in their oppression. The possibility that he might have guaranteed political efficacy and what some call "relevance" by undertaking a political alliance with the forces of the Zealots or with some other power group in Palestinian society was according to the most careful Bible study a genuine option. The choice that he made in rejecting the crown and accepting the cross was the commitment to such a degree of faithfulness to the character of divine love that he was willing for its sake to sacrifice "effectiveness." Usually it can be argued that from some other perspective or in some long view this renunciation of effectiveness was in fact a very effective thing to do. "If a man will lose his . . . life he shall find it." But this paradoxical possibility does not change the initially solid fact that Jesus thereby excluded any normative concern for any capacity to make sure that things would turn out right.

This renunciation is most profoundly stated in the hymn of the early church, which we already noted: "He counted equality with God not a thing to be seized hold of" (Phil. 2:6)

In other ages, we observed, theology understood these words as having to do with the divine nature of the eternal Son of God and his condescending to take on human nature. This was the best way to say it when people could think most meaningfully in terms of "essences" and "substances." But it is equally relevant — and much closer to the substance of the text of this hymn, as we shall see in a moment — to see in "equality with God" also the element of providential control of events, the alternative being the acceptance of impotence. Christ renounced the claim to govern history.

The universal testimony of Scripture is that Christians are those who follow Christ at just this point. The text we were just reading, Philippians 2, was cited by the apostle as part of his plea to the Christians at Philippi to live together more unselfishly. The visions of

the book of Revelation go on from the heavenly throne room, where the Lamb is praised, to a vision of triumph (ch. 12) where the multitude of "our brethren" has defeated the dragon "by the blood of the lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death." Elsewhere, Paul can describe the entire apostolic ministry with its inner and outer sufferings as a matter of "carrying about in our bodies the putting to death of Jesus, so that in our bodies the life of Jesus also may be made manifest" (2 Cor. 4:10). This is what Jesus himself meant by recognizing as disciple only the one who is ready to take up a cross and follow him.

The reason Paul drew upon the hymn to the servant Lord was that he sought to move the Christians in Philippi to a more unselfish attitude to one another, in the interests of more brotherly relationships within the congregation. It was in this connection that we referred to the hymn, since it is one more example of the call to the Christian to imitate his or her Master.

But the original meaning of the hymn was far more than we perceive if we note only the point at which a Christian can be invited to respect the example of Christ. The initial confession of the hymn to the servant Lord was the dramatic juxtaposition of his condescension to the point of death with his victory. The renunciation of equality with God (v. 6) has been understood in later Christian doctrinal development as referring to the metaphysical meaning of deity and incarnation, but probably the first meaning in the hymn was the more concrete Godlikeness promised by the serpent to Adam in the garden, which would have consisted in unchecked dominion over creation. Or perhaps it refers as well to the kind of Godlikeness claimed by Caesar. What Jesus renounced was thus not simply the metaphysical status of sonship but rather the untrammelled sovereign exercise of power in the affairs of that humanity amid which he came to dwell. His emptying of himself, his accepting the form of servanthood and obedience unto death, is precisely his renunciation of lordship, his apparent abandonment of any obligation to be effective in making history move down the right track.

But the judgment of God upon this renunciation and acceptance of defeat is the declaration that this is victory. "Therefore God has greatly exalted him and given him the title, which every creature will

have to confess, *the Lord*." "Lord" in the earliest Christian confessions was not (as it is in so much modern piety) a label to state a believer's humility or affection or devotion; it is an affirmation of his victorious relation to the powers of the cosmos. That ancient hymn, which since it could be incorporated as a block in the apostolic writings is one of the earliest extended snatches of Christian worship on record, is thus affirming that the dominion of God over history has made use of the apparent historical failure of Jesus as a mover of human events.

We said before that this text affirms a philosophy of history in which renunciation and suffering are meaningful. After the further ground our thoughts have covered we can affirm still more roundly that for the apostle this renunciation must have been seen as profoundly linked to the human career of Jesus, who did concretely renounce the power offered to him by the tempter and by the Zealots. This hymn is then not, as some would make it, simply a Hellenistic mystery-religion text about a mythical Christ figure, coming down from heaven and returning thither; it is at the same time the account of the human Jesus whose death was the very political death of the cross. The renunciation of the claim to govern history was not made only by the second person of the Trinity taking upon himself the demand of an eternal divine decree; it was also made by a poor, tired rabbi when he came from Galilee to Jerusalem to be rejected.

This Gospel concept of the cross of the Christian does not mean that suffering is thought of as in itself redemptive or that martyrdom is a value to be sought after. Nor does it refer uniquely to being persecuted for "religious" reasons by an outspokenly pagan government. What Jesus refers to in his call to cross-bearing is rather the seeming defeat of that strategy of obedience which is no strategy, the inevitable suffering of those whose only goal is to be faithful to that love which puts one at the mercy of one's neighbor, which abandons claims to justice for oneself and for one's own in an overriding concern for the reconciling of the adversary and the estranged. 1 Peter 2 thus draws direct social consequences from the fact that Christ "when he suffered did not threaten but trusted him who judges justly."

This is significantly different from that kind of "pacifism" which would say that it is wrong to kill but that with proper nonviolent techniques you can obtain without killing everything you really want

or have a right to ask for. In this context it seems that sometimes the rejection of violence is offered only because it is a cheaper or less dangerous or more shrewd way to impose one's will upon someone else, a kind of coercion which is harder to resist. Certainly any renunciation of violence is preferable to its acceptance; but what Jesus renounced is not first of all violence, but rather the compulsiveness of purpose that leads the strong to violate the dignity of others. The point is not that one can attain all of one's legitimate ends without using violent means. It is rather that our readiness to renounce our legitimate ends whenever they cannot be attained by legitimate means itself constitutes our participation in the triumphant suffering of the Lamb.

This conception of participation in the character of God's struggle with a rebellious world, which early Quakerism referred to as "the war of the lamb," has the peculiar disadvantage — or advantage, depending upon one's point of view — of being meaningful only if Christ be he who Christians claim him to be, the Master. Almost every other kind of ethical approach espoused by Christians, pacifist or otherwise, will continue to make sense to the non-Christian as well. Whether Jesus be the Christ or not, whether Jesus the Christ be Lord or not, whether this kind of religious language be meaningful or not, most types of ethical approach will keep on functioning just the same. For their true foundation is in some reading of the human situation or some ethical insight which is claimed to be generally accessible to all people of goodwill. The same is not true for this vision of "completing in our bodies that which was lacking in the suffering of Christ" (Col. 1:24). If Jesus Christ was not who historic Christianity confesses he was, the revelation in the life of a real man of the very character of God, then this one argument for pacifism collapses.

### Accepting Powerlessness

We thus do not adequately understand what the church was praising in the work of Christ, and what Paul was asking his readers to be guided by, if we think of the cross as a peculiarly efficacious technique (probably effective only in certain circumstances) for getting one's way. The key to the ultimate relevance and to the triumph of the good is not any

calculation at all, paradoxical or otherwise, of efficacy, but rather simple obedience. Obedience means not keeping verbally enshrined rules but reflecting the character of the love of God. The cross is not a recipe for resurrection. Suffering is not a tool to make people come around, nor a good in itself. But the kind of faithfulness that is willing to accept evident defeat rather than complicity with evil is, by virtue of its conformity with what happens to God when he works among us, aligned with the ultimate triumph of the Lamb.

This vision of ultimate good being determined by faithfulness and not by results is the point where we moderns get off. We confuse the kind of "triumph of the good," whose sole guarantee is the resurrection and the promise of the eternal glory of the Lamb, with an immediately accessible triumph which can be manipulated, just past the next social action campaign, by getting hold of society as a whole at the top. What in the Middle Ages was done by Roman Christianity or Islam is now being attempted by Marxism and by democratic nationalism. In spite of all the difference in language, and in the detailed vision of just what a good society would look like (and as a matter of fact even the visions are not that different), the real uniqueness of each of these positions is only that it identifies differently the particular moral elite which it holds to be worthy of guiding its society from the top. We may well prefer a democratically controlled oligarchy to some other kind. We may well have a choice between Marxist and Islamic and other statements of the vision of the good society. But what our contemporaries find themselves practically incapable of challenging is that the social problem can be solved by determining which aristocrats are morally justified, by virtue of their better ideology, to use the power of society from the top so as to lead the whole system in their direction.

Once a desirable course of history has been labeled, once we know what the right cause is, then it is further assumed that we should be willing to sacrifice for it; sacrifice not only our own values but also those of the neighbor and especially the enemy. In other words, the achievement of the good cause, the implementation in history of the changes we have determined to be desirable, creates a new autonomous ethical value, "relevance," itself a good in the name of which evil may be done.

In the past, Christians and especially pacifists have debated the

theoretical issue of whether evil may ever be done for the sake of good. But really the deeper question is the axiom that underlies the question, namely that it is a high good to make history move in the right direction. For only if that assumption is made does the further "opportunistic" justification of evil follow.

If what we have said about the honor due the Lamb makes any sense, then what is usually called "Christian pacifism" is most adequately understood not on the level of means alone, as if the pacifist were making the claim that he can achieve what war promises to achieve, but do it just as well or even better without violence. This is one kind of pacifism, which in some contexts may be clearly able to prove its point, but not necessarily always. That Christian pacifism which has a theological basis in the character of God and the work of Jesus Christ is one in which the calculating link between our obedience and ultimate efficacy has been broken, since the triumph of God comes through resurrection and not through effective sovereignty or assured survival.

This clarification, however, places before us a new question, one that would not have to be looked at if we were content to consider pacifism simply as rejection of violent means. Does it make sense to ask the public authorities in civil society to enforce standards of fraternity and equity which Christians can seek after in the church on the basis of the free assent of those who claim to be committed to Christian obedience? Does it make sense, first of all as an expression of moral consistency, since any appeal to public enforcement involves a clear calculation of efficacy and use of pressure toward that end? Does it make sense, secondly, as radical appropriateness? Assuming that we have some factual and perhaps prophetic insight into the nature of the abuses under which our society suffers and some vision of possible solutions, is it more appropriate to appeal, in order that these solutions might have some chance of being accepted and implemented, to the convincing power of truth? Or may we honestly and more fervently appeal to lesser motives, to public opinion, resentment, isolationism, fear of the bomb, or to the unrealistic hope that the enemy may be a good guy after all?

What does it mean to raise this question? Does it mean that pessimism about the appropriateness or the possibility of a Christian witness to the social order should lead us to return to the self-centered-

ness and lack of social concern that have characterized so many churches so much of the time? I suggest that it would rather lead us to see judgment beginning at the house of God. We should then recognize that the distortions and the misunderstandings of truth and goodness which lead to war have their origins within the Christian camp. The roots of the crusading mentality are not "secular" in the modern sense, nor are they rooted in the mores of pagan religions. They constitute a deformation of biblical faith. Because the church bears this responsibility for having contributed to the mentality in which nations make war, the polemic of a valid Christian pacifist witness must be theological and first of all be directed to the church.

Even if the roots of this witness against the crusade and in favor of the cross were not characteristically christological as I have been claiming, this would still be the context to which we should first speak. Whatever help we may receive from a growing modern understanding of social techniques, what really needs to be debated is a Christian view of human nature and the direction of history. The audience to whom it needs to be directed is the circle of those who have affirmed knowledge of and commitment to an overarching divine purposefulness active in history.

Perhaps Christians in our age are being made ready for a new awareness of the continuing relevance of the message of the Apocalypse. There is a widespread recognition that Western society is moving toward the collapse of the mentality that has been identified with Christendom. Christians must recognize that they are not only a minority on the globe but also at home in the midst of the followers of non-Christian and post-Christian faiths. Perhaps this will prepare us to see how inappropriate and preposterous was the prevailing assumption, from the time of Constantine until yesterday, that the fundamental responsibility of the church for society is to manage it.

And might it be, if we could be freed from the compulsiveness of the vision of ourselves as the guardians of history, that we could receive again the gift of being able to see ourselves as participants in the loving nature of God as revealed in Christ? Perhaps the songs of the earliest church might restore this to us if the apostolic argument cannot. A church once freed from compulsiveness and from the urge to manage the world might then find ways and words to suggest as

well to those outside its bounds the invitation to a servant stance in society.

### In Sum

The secularistic and the Marxist criticism of the vision of marching to Zion claims that the promise of "pie in the sky bye and bye" cuts the nerve of action today. The expectation of "fairer worlds on high" is supposed to detach the present from that which is promised.

This may well have been the case when in recent centuries the beneficiaries of the social system appealed to a future world to encourage their subjects to remain docile. But our interest is not in asking whether eighteenth-century religion could be the opiate of the people, but rather understanding the function of the apocalyptic vision in the first-century church, whose seers were not on any drug.

In the worldview of that time the gap between the present and the promise was not fundamental. What we are now doing is what leads to where we are going. Since the "this-worldly" and the "other-worldly" were not perceived in radical dichotomy, to be "marching through Emmanuel's ground" today is to be on the way to Zion. Terms like "hereafter" are in that kind of context affirmations, not negations. They do not say that that to which we look forward is in a radically different kind of world from the world in which we now live, but rather that it lies farther in the same direction in which we are being led. The unforeseeable future is farther along in the same direction as the foreseeable future for which we are responsible.

The modern critic who has no lively sense either of heaven or of Zion begins listening to a hymn like the classic gospel processional "Marching to Zion" under the shadow of the negative assumption that there is no connection between the here and the hereafter. Therefore the critic must attribute to those who speak of "a world beyond" spiritualizing intentions dominated by the chasm between this world and the other world. This interpretation can go so far (as, e.g., in Rudolf Bultmann) as to claim that mythical language (i.e., language according to which *here* and *hereafter* are in the same universe) is intentionally used with the purpose of affirming the division between the two; so

that if the meaning of the myth is demythologized, what it really wants to affirm is only that religion is not of this world.

But if, on the other hand, one does not begin by assuming the unbridgeable gap between here and there, then this proclamation of a meaningful future cannot possibly have the sense of turning away from the present. They are statements of the same promising future, throwing light back upon the present imperative, for which precisely recent "secular theology" has been looking.

The future that the seer of Patmos sees ahead is a universe — that is, a single system — in which God acts and we act, with our respective actions relating to each other. The spiritual and providential laws which we expect to see at work in this system are as solid for the believer as are the laws of dialectical materialism for the Marxist.

The beginning assumption of the irrelevance of apocalyptic, which has so often made it hard to see social meaning in the book of the Apocalypse, even though its entire message has to do with kingdoms and empires, is in its ultimate impact another aspect of the relativizing of present obedience with which we have been debating through the entire book. "Whatever the early Christians meant by a fulfillment of history, it must not have been within history that they thought of it," runs the argument. Yet the closer we look at this "demythologizing" line of thought the clearer it is that the conclusion was dictated by the beginning definitions.

We are left with no choice but to affirm that the General Epistles in which the popular thought pattern of the earliest church has undergone least reflective analysis, and the liturgical elements embedded in apostolic writings which testify to the coming age, are restatements in another key of the same kind of attitude toward history that we found first in the more organized writings of the Gospels and of Paul. A social style characterized by the creation of a new community and the rejection of violence of any kind is the theme of New Testament proclamation from beginning to end, from right to left. The cross of Christ is the model of Christian social efficacy, the power of God for those who believe.

*Vicit agnus noster, eum sequamur.*

Our Lamb has conquered; him let us follow.

## EPILOGUE

Already in its original form, this last chapter of *The Politics of Jesus* was different from the others. It offered no footnoted support from scholarship in the field. It paid more attention to the challenges of reading a different kind of literature and to the clash of worldviews represented by apocalyptic literature in general, and particularly by the apocalypse of John within the Christian canon. That was partly the case because the original lecture from which the chapter grew had been directed to an audience whose interest was in a spirituality and worldview more than in exegesis.

The peculiarity of this chapter in this respect will not be left behind after a quarter-century. Apocalyptic literature in general still poses a special challenge to the reader in at least two ways: as to how it should be read as a particular kind of literature, and as to how the worldview it expresses should be received as theology.

As a particular kind of literature, apocalyptic has come into its own in the world of scholarship in recent decades. The awareness that each kind of literature should be read in its own terms, and that apocalyptic is a *genre* which scholars of ancient literature should respect accordingly, has produced its own subdiscipline within historical and literary studies.<sup>1</sup>

That formal progress still leaves undecided the substantial question: namely by what rules, through what grid, shall we read this bizarre

1. As landmarks for the widespread acknowledgment of this awareness one may cite from a much wider literature Adela Yarbro Collins (ed.), *Semeia*, 36 (1986), and J. Lambrecht (ed.), *L'Apocalypse johannique et l'Apocalyptique dans le Nouveau Testament* (Gembloux: Duculot, 1980). By the nature of things, a burgeoning subdiscipline is also a subculture with its ingroup language, its "correctness" of manners, its elite. Making no claim to crash those parties, all I can do, and all I need to do for now, is to note their existence. The effort of previous scholarly generations to ignore this entire swath of the tradition, out of distaste for what fundamentalists and crazies were doing with it, has been abandoned in favor of a readiness to own this part of the canon as well, and to begin to work out modes of interpretation which befit the intent of the texts. Cf. the symposium volume "Prophetic and/or Apocalyptic Eschatology," in *Ex Auditu*, 6 (1990).