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During autumn 2018, long before coronavirus was thought of, I saw an article supposedly describing how developments in world history, politics, climate change, floods, droughts, wild fires, the locust plague in Africa and so on, all fulfilled specific 'prophecies' in the Book of Revelation. I also saw a TV programme about a sect, somewhere in USA, that was ruling their common life by reference to the seven 'seals' in the vision of John. Both the article and the sect struck me as completely bonkers, but I decided that I needed to do some study myself. Armed, therefore, with a number of commentaries (some contradicted others), and some other reflections, I set about trying to understand the Book of Revelation - at least to my own satisfaction. I found the greatest help from some writers whose experiences of trying to live faithfully as Christians under 'oppressive' regimes, had given fresh insights into some of the motivations behind Revelation. When I was then invited to lead some Lent Talks for Churches Together in Sanderstead in Lent 2019, I decided to try to turn my work into five Lenten meditations. My new book 'The Apocalypse of Jesus Christ' (to quote the first verse of Revelation), is the result of those Talks and the feedback I received. My book is by no means a commentary, and does not try to be scholarly. I have minimised footnotes. It is meditations on some themes from the Book of Revelation, guided by the sense that much of it is actually about worship.

The strange Book of Revelation, written in about AD 95, opens up a world in which Christian people, under threat from the Roman Empire were suffering for their faith. Was it easier to fall in with the ways of the empire in all its wealth and prosperity, in spite of its cruelty, than to hold fast to the faith? The prophet John records some visions of the Risen Jesus, which show him what we may call 'God's perspectives' on the Christian assemblies of John's time, and on the idolatrous empire in which they found themselves. Written in the sort of literature sometimes called 'apocalyptic' and drawing heavily on the Hebrew Bible, John conveys his message encouraging the Christians to stay strong in their witness, while at the same time disclosing the demonic realities behind the workings of totalitarian Empire. He looks towards God's ultimate victory over all that is evil, in the establishment of God's kingdom. The book is essentially a series of revelations about Jesus Christ: He is the Lord of the Church; the King of all creation; the Faithful Witness to God's Truth; the Righteous Judge. He is the Beginning and End of all things.

Today we are subject to the allurements of many sorts of godless 'empires', tempting us to put other gods in the place of Jesus Christ. These may be political or financial, local or global; they may be institutions or ideologies. Behind many of these 'empires' we may discern the demonic powers of what Walter Wink called 'Domination Systems' - and St Paul called 'principalities and powers' - the evil powers in society when organised without reference to God, which too often lead to destructiveness and death. One emphasis in John's visions is calling Christian people to hold fast to the one true Lord despite the idolatrous temptations around, to repent of waywardness, and to turn back to Jesus Christ, the King and Hope and Judge of all creation, the Victor over all that is evil, the Lord and giver of Life.

The question we asked ourselves in Sanderstead was: Can the Book of Revelation written out of the experiences of godless 'empire' so long ago encourage us in our struggles today, and our Christian witness in our very different world?

As I write this, our world is now, of course, dominate by coronavirus, and people are asking: what are we to learn from all this? I think it would be a huge mistake to try to use any specific parts of the Bible, least of all the Book of Revelation, to 'explain' what is going on. We can, though, and must try to link our thinking, our praying, our action to the Christian story which comes to its climax in the death and resurrection of Jesus, and to its ultimate fulfilment in the Kingdom of Christ's glory. That could well take us through some of the biblical themes we thought about in Sanderstead in Lent 2019. There is lament and the cry of grief at all the suffering, and the huge human tragedy: "How long, O Lord?" The failure to live in God's will and God's ways, which reminds John of the Plagues of Egypt, can lead to disruption of our relationships within the created order. We are learning that human stupidity and sin (in our failure to care for God's creation) contribute to loss of biodiversity, which sometimes means that some creatures, such as viruses, could escape from their usual biological niche. The concentration on economic consumption (especially for the traders in what John calls the evil city of 'Babylon') contributes to injustices and to the powerlessness of poverty. Today we can recognise what Pope Francis called the 'deified Market' which becomes an oppressive power unrelated to human values and the common good. The Book of Revelation shows us that we are not autonomous, but are interdependent with all other of God's creatures, and dependent on the goodness and faithfulness of God.

Every theme points to Jesus Christ: who dries our tears, feeds the hungry, offers the water of life, establishes justice, overcomes all evil, creates a new community of inclusive love in which all things find their fulfilment. His mission is to become ours. He is Lord of life in the face of death. He is the Crucified Lamb at the centre of creation's worship.

My book (124 pp.) is called *The Apocalypse of Jesus Christ*. It is published by Wipf and Stock in the USA; ISBN 978-1-7252-6178-5, and is available from UK online booksellers.

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