

# POLITICAL THEOLOGY AND APOCALYPTIC

Guest Editors: P. Travis Kroeker and Kyle Gingerich Hiebert

## Introduction

Philip G. Ziegler

As part of its program during the 2018 annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion/Society of Biblical Literature (AAR/SBL) in Denver, Colorado, the Explorations in Theology and Apocalyptic working group hosted two book discussion panels. The three independent responses to Travis Kroeker's *Messianic Political Theology and Diaspora Ethics* and Kyle Gingerich Hiebert's *The Architectonics of Hope*—as well as the authors' replies—arose from one of these sessions.<sup>1</sup> It is delightful to see them published here for the benefit of the wider readership of *The Conrad Grebel Review*.

For almost a decade now, the Explorations in Theology and Apocalyptic group has facilitated conversation among a group of scholars on the theological and ethical significance of the phenomena of biblical apocalyptic in general, and of recent accounts of “Pauline apocalyptic” in particular. The work of J. Louis Martyn has provided a specific and continuing impulse to our work, as have essays on the theme by Walter Lowe.<sup>2</sup> At the heart of the conversation is a running exchange between theologians and New Testament scholars. One of the chief joys and benefits

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<sup>1</sup> P. Travis Kroeker, *Messianic Political Theology and Diaspora Ethics: Essays in Exile* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2017); Kyle Gingerich Hiebert, *The Architectonics of Hope: Violence, Apocalyptic, and the Transformation of Political Theology* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2017).

<sup>2</sup> See J. Louis Martyn, *Theological Issues in the Letters of Paul* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997) and his magisterial commentary *Galatians* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), and for concise comment, Beverly Gaventa, “The Legacy of J. Louis Martyn: The Interpreter and His Legacy,” *Journal for the Study of Paul and His Letters* 7, nos.1-2 (2017): 94-100. Cf. also Walter Lowe, “Prospects for a Postmodern Christian Theology: Apocalyptic without Reserve,” *Modern Theology* 15, no. 1 (1999): 17-24, and “Prospects for a Postmodern Christian Theology: Apocalyptic without Reserve,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 63, no. 1 (2010): 41-53.

of our work is to facilitate close collaboration between scripturally-minded theologians and theologically-minded exegetes. While our ambition has chiefly been to stimulate the diverse range of scholarship undertaken by individual members, nevertheless several collaborative publications related to our program have emerged over the years.<sup>3</sup>

Critical discussion of new books is a regular feature of our activity. Previous book panels have considered a diverse array of works, including: James H. Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*; Theodore W. Jennings Jr., *Outlaw Justice: The Messianic Politics of Paul*; Stanislas Breton, *A Radical Philosophy of Saint Paul*; Samuel V. Adams, *The Reality of God and Historical Method: Apocalyptic Theology in Conversation with N.T. Wright*; and Philip G. Ziegler, *Militant Grace: The Apocalyptic Turn and the Future of Christian Theology*. The panel discussion of the new volumes by Kroeker and Gingrich Hiebert published below maintains this tradition of wide-ranging, searching, and constructive conversation. The material questions of theological ethics and theopolitics at the core of these two fine books have been integral to the group's program from its inception; so too has engagement with contemporary philosophy, especially as it concerns the rediscovery of Paul as a provocation to thought. Such engagement is an important feature of both these new works as well.<sup>4</sup>

For reasons that remain obscure, at least to me, Canadian theologians have played an outsized role in our group and its discussions, not least Douglas Harink, whose book *Paul among the Postliberals: Pauline Theology beyond Christendom and Modernity* has provided many young theologians with their entrée into J. Louis Martyn's interpretation of the apostle Paul and its significance. It is very good to see this trend continued here: Kroeker has been involved in the conversations of the working group since the beginning, and this first book by Gingerich Hiebert happily presses into the terrain of our ongoing discussions.

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<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Joshua B. Davis and Douglas Harink, eds., *Apocalyptic and the Future of Theology: With and Beyond J. Louis Martyn* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2012), and Beverly Roberts Gaventa, ed., *Apocalyptic Paul: Cosmos and Anthropos in Romans 5-8* (Waco, TX: Baylor Univ. Press, 2013).

<sup>4</sup> For this sort of engagement, see Douglas Harink, ed., *Paul, Philosophy, and the Theopolitical Vision: Critical Engagements with Agamben, Badiou, Zizek, and Others* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2010).

On behalf of the convenors of the Explorations in Theology and Apocalyptic working group, allow me to express my gratitude once more for the contributions of Nancy Bedford, Elizabeth Phillips, and Paul Martens to this rich session, as well as my thanks to Travis Kroeker and Kyle Gingerich Hiebert for their willingness to engage with, and offer replies to, the three reviewers' important comments and questions.

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