

1

Introduction

Prelude

NODAL EXPERIENCES OCCUR IN THE MOST UNEXPECTED OF PLACES. Earning a credit toward a master's degree, I spent an early spring weekend at Westminster Abbey, a Benedictine monastery, resting on a hill over Mission, British Columbia. That retreat constituted a fundamental shift. Time took a 180 degree turn; God's future turned me upside down. The future ceased to be the empty space I sought to populate with my own dreams and became a gift from God, his homeland that beckons us to journey toward it and let our lives be shaped by it. Those early spring days of 1999 are the roots of this book, giving me the basic question I brought to my doctoral research: how does a Christian notion of the future as divine gift beckon people to live? I wanted to explore how eschatology shapes a Christian understanding of the world. If the future is the gift of God to his creatures, what difference does it make? How does the hope for the coming of God shape Christian existence, and how is this God who will come already present among us?

Considering this dual concern, and since I desired to probe the question from both a systematic and a biblical angle, the choice fell quite naturally on Jürgen Moltmann and the Book of Revelation. Moltmann emerged as a significant twentieth-century theological voice with his groundbreaking work in *The Theology of Hope*.¹ Ever since, eschatology

1. Works on Moltmann are legion. For an extensive bibliography up to and including 2001, see Wakefield, *Moltmann*. Of the many portraits of Moltmann's thought, pride of place goes to Richard J. Bauckham's two studies (*Messianic Theology* and *Theology of Jürgen Moltmann*); of Bauckham's work Moltmann says: "It is not easy for me to reply to Richard Bauckham . . . he knows too much! He knows my theology, with its

has been a shaping force in his theology.² But, while his early work was singularly focused on hope, Moltmann, as his theology has developed, has become increasingly interested in how the God expected is now at work in the world, orienting it toward its future in him. A similar dialectic between the expected future and how it is to shape present existence is also found in Revelation.³ A contrapuntal tension between heavenly reality and earthly actuality drives the book forward: Although God is the rightful sovereign over his whole creation, the earth is at present occupied by forces antithetical to God. The whole book is oriented toward the resolution of this tension. The finale of the visionary complex is the descension of the heavenly city and its divine ordering center to the earthly realm, the latter finding its Edenic fulfilment in the arrival of the former. This eschatological climax shapes the book's judgments on what is real, true, good, and so on.

It was relatively easy to settle on these two literary contexts as the textual sites for my explorations in how faith in the coming God should shape Christian existence. It proved to be far more difficult to find a conceptual hook that could bind such disparate texts into conversa-

strengths and weaknesses better than I do myself. His books . . . are far and away the best accounts of my theology" ("The World in God," 35).

2. Meeks rightly observes that Moltmann constantly attempts "to make the eschatological revelation of God concrete in relationship to the present" (*Origins*, 88).

3. Academic interest in Revelation has grown exponentially in recent years. In addition to a multitude of articles and monographs, two monumental commentaries were published in the late 1990s (David E. Aune's three-volume WBC and G. K. Beale's NIGTC volume); since then, substantial commentaries have also been published by Ian Boxall, Grant R. Osborne, Stephen S. Smalley, and Ben Witherington. In 2004 Judith Kovacs and Christopher Rowland published a commentary focusing on the history of the interpretation of the book (*Revelation*). In addition to the extensive bibliographic information in Aune and Beale, see Witherington, *Revelation*, 51–64, for a helpful overview of critical works on Revelation. Of specific interest to the present study is Michael Gilbertson's *God and History*. Not only is he concerned with the relationship between the Bible and theology but he conducts a very similar dialogue to the one I construct, comparing Moltmann's and Pannenberg's understanding of history with Revelation. I will interact with Gilbertson throughout this study, and have especially benefited from his excellent analysis of Revelation's temporal and spatial categories (81–142). His study is complementary to my own as both are concerned with how eschatology and transcendence shape our understanding of the world. However, while Gilbertson is primarily concerned with how Moltmann and Pannenberg appropriate apocalyptic in their respective views of history and as such is focused on "the debate about the significance of history per se" (1), I am concerned with the concrete function of the kingdom of God in Moltmann and Revelation.

tion. It needed to be a theme or notion that was prominent both in Moltmann and Revelation, and it had to be a conceptual framework into which both texts were easily translatable. Initially I planned to work with broad conceptualities as transcendence and imminence. As the work progressed, however, the abstract character of this approach moved the conversation too far from the concrete ways in which both Moltmann and Revelation deal with God, the future and existence. Probing both “texts” further, a theological motif emerged which both have in common, the Kingdom of God. The kingdom is an operative symbol in Moltmann’s thought, which, as we will discuss later, runs throughout his entire corpus. Although **basileia tou theou** (“the kingdom of God”) is not frequently found in Revelation, the book is rife with political language, and the reign of God is of central concern. God as creator is sovereign over both heaven and earth, and he will come as such to the latter, the realm that now languishes under the occupation of his enemies.

Grounding the Conversation

This conversation between Moltmann and Revelation on the kingdom is a theological construction that lies within the recent surge of interest in the role of the Bible in theology and in theological interpretation of Scripture. However, there is far from a consensus on how these questions should be approached, or whether bridging the modern divide between Biblical Studies and Systematic Theology is a good thing.⁴

4. Central to the advent of modern biblical studies was the liberation of the Bible from the heavy yoke of dogmatic tradition. The biblical books should be allowed to speak with their own voice from within their own historical context. If this was the urgency 200 years ago, many find the opposite to be the case today, the need to free the Bible from the objectivist constraints of modern biblical studies (on calls for a theological interpretation of Scripture, see e.g., Fowl, *Engaging Scripture*; and Watson, *Open Text*). The present study is one attempt, and one among many, to let contemporary theological concerns and Scripture exist in enriching dialogue. However, several scholars, while acknowledging the impossibility of a purely objective stance vis-à-vis the biblical text are nevertheless committed to the historical and descriptive task of biblical studies (e.g., Barr, *Concept*; Räisänen, *Beyond New Testament Theology*). In defence against the charge of objectivism or positivism, several scholars claim they seek to counter their own bias through the application of a certain ‘neutral’ methodology. This does not hold. Positivism is precisely the belief that through method one can achieve the ideal of approaching the first century “without,” in Stendahl’s words, “borrowing categories from later times” (“Biblical Theology,” 425). Barr reflects this sentiment (*Concept*, 205),

Therefore, some words on what I aim to do in this conversation is in order, including what I hope to accomplish and why I believe my particular approach is methodologically justified.

First, what I do not claim. I make no claim of *normativity*. I do not try to exemplify *what* the constructive relationship between biblical studies and theology *should be*, but only seek to develop one way it *can be* constructed. And although I privilege my analysis of Revelation over my discussion of Moltmann, I am not proposing a baton-passing approach to the relationship between biblical studies and theology, in which the biblical scholar *must* first determine what the text meant in its original context before the theologian can articulate what it means for Christians today.⁵ While there is some wisdom in the division of labour between the Bible scholar and the theologian in the modern academy, it is detrimental to both, when the one attempts to dictate how the other should work. The reason why I believe the voice of a biblical book should be privileged is not because the NT scholar should determine how a theologian should work, but because I believe that the

when he says the biblical scholar must hold his own commitment in suspense if it is to be questioned by the text itself. Precisely because of this, theology is inadmissible in the academic life of the Biblical scholar (222). Such an attitude wrongly assumes both that one can suspend one's faith commitment in favor of a methodological stance that provides objectivity, and that one's commitment cannot be challenged if one brings it to the text. Watson also notes (*Text*, 2) how strategies for reading that are over-determined by a particular methodological stance falsely assume that all texts are alike and therefore can be submitted to a "single-reading-perspective." This is not to deny that certain methods may uncover what otherwise would be missed nor to dismiss they may help us gain a certain critical distance from our own commitments, only that our own subjectivity is not to be dismissed in our reading and that methods are not value neutral.

5. The baton-passing approach of the biblical theology movement is perhaps best encapsulated in Krister Stendahl's influential essay, "Biblical Theology." On the history of biblical theology, see Reventlow, "Theology (Biblical)." For a particularly insightful critique of Stendahl's distinction between the supposedly descriptive task of biblical studies and normative task of theology as well as his distinction between what the text meant and what it means, see Ollenburger, "Krister Stendahl." The critics of biblical theology usually point to one of two alternative roads. There are those who are sympathetic and committed to the descriptive task of biblical theology but restrict it to the historical task of determining the various and even contradictory theologies of the biblical texts (e.g. Barr, *Concept*; Räisänen, *Beyond New Testament Theology*). Others want to abandon it in favor of an intentionally theological interpretation of Scripture (e.g., Fowl, *Engaging Scripture*; see also several of the essays in Watson, *Open Text*, and the essays in *Theological Interpretation*, edited by Fowl).

Bible is normative for all Christian theologians, whatever the academic guild they labour in.⁶

Nor do I claim to be *comprehensive*. This is but a small but hopefully valuable contribution to much larger discussions. This is not an analysis of the significance of the Kingdom of God in contemporary theology, but a close reading of how it functions in one significant modern theologian. Likewise, I am not proposing a comprehensive biblical theology of the kingdom, but present an attentive reading of how Revelation deals with the kind of questions and concerns Moltmann's view of the kingdom raises. I am also keenly aware that my interpretation of Revelation is shaped by the particularity and contingencies of the socio-historical place I occupy. Therefore, my reading must be seen within the long history of the interpretation of the book. However, I am sufficiently confident that my reading lies within the semantic field of the book, and therefore can make a valuable contribution to larger concerns.⁷

Then what do I claim? I believe the present work paints worthwhile portraits of how the Kingdom of God functions in a major contemporary theological voice and in an important, though often overlooked, biblical text. While these portraits must be seen within the limitations outlined above, they show the crucial role the kingdom must have in Christian theological reflection, and can hopefully make some contributions to this task. The aim of the study is also to show the importance of an engaged conversation between the interested parties that have been bifurcated in the modern academy, between the biblical scholar and the theologian, not by proposing another theoretical framework for how this should be done, but by exemplifying one way in which it can be accomplished.

Considering the particular approach of this study, the way in which it allows contemporary theological concerns set the questions an ancient text is to answer, and the way in which Revelation is read, two quite different objections might be raised. The first objection emerges within the guild of biblical studies. Since I allow my appraisal of a particular theological concept in a modern theologian to set the agenda for the questions I set a biblical book, is my project not a step backwards,

6. My view on Scripture will be further elaborated in the next chapter.

7. On the history of the interpretation of the book, see Wainwright, *Mysterious Apocalypse*; and Kovacs and Rowland, *Revelation*.

giving back territory which the modern academic study of the Bible fought hard to gain? Is the point of biblical studies not to read texts within their first context? And is a fundamental fallacy not to read later concerns into earlier texts? If this is the case, then is this study not an exercise in futile anachronism?

The other question, which arises from the particular way in which I analyze Revelation, results in the opposite concern. Although I set the agenda through my appraisal of Moltmann's view of the Kingdom (and thus for some, commit fallacious anachronism), I still claim that my interpretation of Revelation on this matter lies within the field of possible meanings that are consonant to what was encoded in the text in the first place. Considering how the objectivist ideals of biblical studies have been decisively undermined within the last few decades, do I not commit the arrogant modern mistake, claiming to unearth the original meaning of the text that has been obfuscated by tradition? I will attempt to answer both of these concerns by appealing to what I believe are two fundamental aspects of texts, their communicability and their referentiality, i.e. texts are constructed to *communicate something*. In doing so, I also hope to further clarify, elucidate, what this study aims to accomplish.

The Communicability of Texts

First, although the critique of the objectivist claims and aims of modern biblical studies is to be applauded,⁸ the task to understand what an author desired to communicate through his or her texts remains—texts are produced to *communicate*.⁹ Authors write in the hope that the meaning their readers will decode corresponds to what they sought to encode in their texts, what they purposed to communicate through them.¹⁰ Therefore, if texts as communicative acts are to be successful,

8. For an insightful discussion on the modern misconception of hermeneutics as going beyond interpretation to apprehend what is as it is, see Smith, *Who's Afraid*, 34–53. Smith, drawing on Derrida, rightly notes that reality is essentially interpreted; says Smith, 39: “when Derrida claims that there is nothing outside the text, he means there is no reality that is not always already interpreted through the mediation lens of language.”

9. This discussion on textual communicability is primarily drawn from Vanhoozer, *Meaning*, especially chs. 5–6.

10. My appropriation of terms used within Speech-Act theory, is drawn from Vanhoozer, *Meaning*. In doing so I only aim to describe how I understand communica-

there has to be a sufficient level of correspondence between what an author sought to encode and that which a reader decodes. Despite both often misreading and at times being misread, the astounding success of textual communication is seen in that people continue to read and write in order to understand and be understood.¹¹

A consideration of the kind of literature read as well as the purpose for which it is read must be kept in mind when reading an elusive, liminal and complex text as Revelation. Such texts have usually a fairly wide field of meaning; how it is read is highly dependent on the purpose an interpreter brings to it.¹² Some of these readings are likely closer to

tion and make no claim regarding how others, such as Wolterstorff, employ the theory in their understanding of divine discourse.

11. This is not to deny that there are other motivations for both reading and writing, but to understand and to be understood remain two primary purposes for textual communication. If this is the case, the attempt to recover the meaning an author sought to encode in a text is not only valid but honorable, it respects the communicative purpose of most texts. However, this claim must be qualified. The attempt to decode what an author sought to encode does not make one's own reading less situated, it only means that one seeks to hear the text as well as one can precisely where one finds oneself. Even the most painstaking attempt to elucidate the "there" where the text was produced is still undertaken in the "here" in which the interpreter stands. He or she can neither enter an author's mind to see his intention nor travel back to a text's first hearers. But although an interpreter cannot move back into the world of the text, the text, with some of its world, has journeyed to him or her. As such, all reading is always anachronistic, always read in another spatial and temporal coordinate than the one in which it was written. It is always an "I" that reads *here* what another wrote *there*. Shall I seek what the author sought to make present? Of course, but this does not mean teleporting from where I am and who I am to another place. It means paying attention to the voice that speaks from elsewhere and is heard where I am.

12. The attempt to hear the text within its broader historical context does not limit its meaning to *one particular interpretation*, only to *a field of meaning* within which any good reading must stand. What constitutes a good reading, and the width of its semantic field, depends naturally on the type of text one reads, and for what purpose one reads it. If a poem is read in the same way as an instruction manual, it most likely will be read badly. And a marketing student and a child will likely read a children's magazine differently because of their purpose in reading it. Although some texts have a strictly limited field of meaning, like a construction manual, others have a wide field, especially texts that venture into the liminal field of the meaning of existence. In *Metaphor and Reality* Philip Wheelwright helpfully distinguishes between the one-to-one correspondence of symbol and referent in stenosymbolism (as in an IKEA instruction sheet) and the shifting patterns of association in pensive symbolism (as in a poem or rich novel). It is this latter type of texts that have the capacity to live beyond their first contexts (see Gilbertson [*God and History*, 68] for a brief overview of Wheelwright's discussion). And it is these kinds of texts that tend to survive, they are not forgotten. Unlike an

the purpose the author had in writing the text, but even readings that lie far from this purpose can nevertheless be consonant with the semantic field the text signifies. While the semantic elasticity is fairly limited in a car manual or a trigonometry textbook, the Book of Revelation, with its expressionist style, visionary content, complex intertextuality and textured religious tradition (both the traditions it builds on and the ones which it has spawned), contains a multitude of interpretive strands. Kovacs and Rowland have provided a helpful taxonomy of the ways in which the book has been interpreted.¹³ They plot interpretations of Revelation on two axes. On a chronological axis interpretations can be classified by whether they deal with the past, present or future. The other axis plots whether interpretations try to decode the text's imagery in order to unearth the message encoded in it, or whether they perform a "repeat actualization" of the text, conveying "the spirit of the text" in a new context. The former has tended to discover the one meaning of the text while the latter sees it as multivalent.¹⁴ Within Kovacs' and Rowland's taxonomy, my interpretation primarily focuses on how the text might have been decoded in the late first century.¹⁵ I try to cipher how John was employing his visionary symbolism in order to empower his first-century readers with an alternative imagination, one that could

IKEA instruction sheet, they delve into those regions of life that transcend the passing of time. They can move on because what is imbedded in them goes beyond their author and first readers, they delve deep into matters that are not limited to particular peoples and times. Revelation is a good example of such pensive literature; e.g. Rome is not identified as Rome but in the textured symbol Babylon. But precisely in clothing Rome in the textual garments of Babylon, the symbol and its associations live on after Rome has fallen, waiting for news ways it can uncover the evil cities of the world.

13. Kovacs and Rowland, *Revelation*, 7–11.

14. Although Kovacs and Rowland seem to prefer the latter, there seem to be enough direct and indirect matters in the text that call for it to be decoded. However, this does not preclude new actualizations.

15. By this I do not claim to return to the first century, but rather seek to discern how the text can be heard when we consider how it might have been received in the late first century. Nor do I claim that there is a one to one correspondence between the meaning the author sought to encode and the meaning I seek to decode. What I claim is only that important to this project is the *aim* to decode the meaning that is consonant with the *field of meaning* the author likely sought to encode, not an exact representation but a reading that lies within trajectories of interpretation of which the author likely would approve.

withstand the symbolic web with which the Roman empire encoded its populations.¹⁶

In focusing on this aspect, I do not preclude other ways of reading it. However, differing from some recent interpreters, I do not believe legitimate readings of the text can be contradictory; rather, they must complement and be consonant with one another. Therefore, although Revelation can be approached from many angles, in different ways and with various purposes, they all must strain toward occupying a place within the legitimate field of the text's meanings. To the extent they are at odds with one another, we are reminded of the eschatological nature of interpretation, that every reading is partial and faulty, and must await the fulfilment it strives toward.

Critiques of attempts to regain what the author sought to encode in a text are usually levelled against certain ways of approaching ancient texts. However, while the attendant difficulties of this task might be most evident in reading ancient texts, they are not limited to such texts but are equally applicable to contemporary texts. The difference is not in kind but of degree. While readers of this book may be more likely to question how I read Revelation, they ought not do so unless they level the same critique of my analysis of Moltmann. Therefore, when I write "Moltmann claims" or "Revelation shows," I naturally mean that I think that this or that stands within the field of meaning which Moltmann or the author of Revelation would see as adequate readings of their texts, to paint portraits that are sufficiently consonant with what they hoped to lay into the text.

16. By this I do not deny the validity of how others seek to actualize the book's imagery. After all, the power of the book lies precisely in how John was able to actualize his own symbolic heritage within the challenges facing him and his community. Similarly, although I focus on how the text might have been received by its first readers, I do so in order to gain insight into how they might speak to contemporary Christians in light of the future the book expects. Therefore, although I do not do it in this book, enacting the symbolism of the book anew in a new context is faithfulness to the tradition in which it stands. This, though, is not to be mistaken for arbitrary use of the imagery—a new actualisation, if it is to be a Christian one, must be performed within the rules of the semantic game in which the history of the text stands. And if it is to be considered Christian, it must be an actualisation of the imagery within how Christian communities configure the world.

The Referentiality of Texts

If the way I approach Revelation—as well as Moltmann—is justified in the desire to communicate that produces texts, what about my attempt to make the concerns of these two speak to one another? Again, a potential objection to this is most clearly seen when we consider Revelation. If a good reading is one consonant with the semantic field encoded in the text, how can a twenty-first-century question of which it knows nothing be brought to bear on it? How can an ancient text span the ages and speak today?

In addition to experiences of life that transcend time and space and the human capacity for the new, the different,¹⁷ the possibility of texts to span vastly different contexts owes much to their referentiality. While authors and first readers pass away, what they speak about remains. Texts do not survive by drawing attention to themselves but by their capacity to make *something*, a referent, present that otherwise would be absent. Texts are icons that *in-form* the reader's imagination.¹⁸ Texts make present something that cannot be equated with themselves, with the “set of black marks on white paper.” When writers encode a text, they do so in the hope that readers will be able to rightly decipher this set of marks, “make sense of it, to read it, to interpret it,” and so see what the author seeks to bring to present in the light the author sheds on it.¹⁹ If the text points beyond itself, it always contains more than the communicative desire that shaped it.

If texts are about something other than themselves, they always draw the reader beyond themselves. In order to read well it is not sufficient to only know the text well; one must be opened to and engage

17. Anyone who has found themselves in a cross-cultural and cross-lingual context cannot help but be amazed by the human capability to enter a radically new context, despite the initial and often excruciating difficulties of doing so.

18. A possible referent should not be limited to a material object or a historical sequence of events but may just as well be a fictive world, an idea, or a mood. For an excellent essay on this iconic purpose not just of text but of language generally, see Pieper, *Abuse of Language*. He cogently argues that the proper use of language is for the purpose “to name and identify something that is real, to identify it for *someone*” (15). Language is abused when it is primarily used for some other and usually self-serving end than the attempt to convey reality. “The dignity of the word, to be sure, consists in this: through the word is accomplished what no other means can accomplish, namely, communication based on reality” (33).

19. Lash, *Way to Emmaus*, 38.

oneself with that which the text brings into the open. A reading that does not result in engagement with a text's subject matter is a failed reading.²⁰ If this is the case, a successful reading always engages more than the text, it always goes beyond simply the text's perspective on a subject, in order to make sense of the subject as a whole. If this is the case, a theological engagement with a text is not only possible but also desirable. And, although engagement can be made with the Bible from a variety of contexts, an important interpretive situation must be from within a Christian community that sees itself as predicated upon that which it believes the Scriptures seek to bring to presence.²¹

Since texts speak about *something*, give a perspective on a subject from a particular situatedness, reading a text is not only related to the text but also to its subject matter. The polyvalence of a rich text is not simply due to the multi-layered and complex nature of writing and reading texts, but is also grounded in the rich irreducibility of the referent, that which we speak and write about always contains more than we can convey and see. As texts lead us through themselves to their referent, they also bring us to something that is always only partially grasped. But as such, the referent can also be an important semantic anchor; it gives any reading both elasticity and boundedness, since the meaning of a thing is always a relational matter but never arbitrary.²² Although

20. Although many scholars question Barth's exegetical practices, one of his great contributions is his insistence on the subject matter. He says of Calvin's reading of Romans, "having first established what stands in the text, [he] sets himself to re-think the whole material and to wrestle with it, till the walls which separate the sixteenth century from the first become transparent, i.e., till Paul *speaks* there and the man of the sixteenth century *hears* here, till the conversation between the document and the reader is totally concentrated on the subject-matter, which *cannot* be a different one in the first and sixteenth century" (Barth, as quoted in Stendahl, "Biblical Theology," 420).

21. Says Fowl *Engaging Scripture*, 6: "Christians' convictions about God's providence must include the view that God has providentially provided in their scriptures what Christians require in order to live and worship faithfully before God" (cf. 8–9, 20–21, 30; Watson, *Text*, vii). As such, "Christian doctrine is . . . concerned with the unfolding and uncovering of the history of Jesus of Nazareth, in the belief that this gives insight into the nature of reality" (McGrath, *Genesis*, 74–5, as quoted in Gilbertson, *God and History*, 44).

22. The modern distinction between perception and the "thing in itself" is misguided since the significance, and thus the meaning, of a thing lies always in the relation between perceiver and that which is perceived. This is not to deny the existence of things apart from our perception of them, but it is denying meaning to instances apart from the relationships in which they stand. The animals did exist before Adam saw them, but

its essence provides it with a substantial continuity, its significance, and thus its “signification” is known only in a dynamic and enriching flow of various relations.²³ Any reading of a text will be different than another, for each is done within a particular, non-repeatable context—even when one is exposed to the subject matter from a particular angle within the text, one always makes sense of it from one’s own.²⁴ Gregory of Nyssa was right when he said: “Scripture grows with its readers.”²⁵ Part of this enriching engagement with and through texts is bringing our own conceptual framework, our own ideas, concerns and ways of thinking, to the text in order to see what answers the text may throw at us from its own situatedness.²⁶ Therefore, if our engagement with the text is to gain insight into that of which the text speaks, it is appropriate to bring our own concerns and perspectives on the subject matter to the text, hoping the text will both enrich and correct our own perspective. The theologian’s habit of bringing his or her own concerns to the text is not an inexcusable anachronistic fallacy, but the way everyone comes to texts—we cannot understand the past without grasping our present.²⁷

they had no meaning in his cosmos before he named them, before he made sense of his perception of them, before he encoded their place in the cosmos he occupied.

23. Gilbertson says, “The rhetorical power of a text like Revelation comes from the interplay of the text and the reality to which it relates: to postulate either the absorption of the world by the text or the text by the world is therefore to assume a false antithesis” (*God and History*, 39). Drawing on Thiselton, Gilbertson goes on to see how this rich and complex relationship between text and referent is seen in how a *promise* seeks to conform the world to the word and how an *assertion* depends on matching the word to the world; “if a promise can have no effect in reality, it has no meaning. If the assertion does not match reality, it has no meaning” (40).

24. Because of this, the language of horizons, as e.g. employed by Thiselton, *Two Horizons* and *New Horizons*, seems a better way to distinguish the primary loci of interests usually associated with biblical studies and theology than Stendahl’s categories.

25. As quoted in LaCocque and Ricoeur, *Thinking Biblically*, xi.

26. Although a text should not be reduced to propositional statements, most texts nevertheless make certain judgments on the character and nature of that of which they speak. Thus, part of reading well is trying to discern these judgments, a task that necessarily means a ‘translation’ of the text’s judgments from its own conceptual framework to our own, to say the same thing differently (Yeago, “Nicene Dogma,” 159, 60). See Yeago’s “Nicene Dogma” for an excellent exposition on the continuity between texts like Phil 2 and later trinitarian formulations. Although the conceptual framework and concerns the Fathers worked with were very different from those of the NT writers, the judgments of the former were not inconsistent with those of the latter.

27. Commenting on the irreducible dialectic of existing as historical beings, that our present consciousness is shaped by the history that precedes us, N. Lash says, “If it

If the communicability of texts lies behind the way I read both Revelation and Moltmann, it is the referentiality of texts that holds the dialogue between the two together. I construct a conversation between the two because there is a sufficient overlap in that which they speak about. Although Moltmann assumes a world Revelation could not even imagine, and although Revelation's concerns are far from the context in which Moltmann writes, the reign of God and how it relates to humanity in its social existence as it moves through time and space is central to both. The Kingdom of God binds the conversation together. And, in the final analysis, the texts are windows, iconic venues to grapple with the same concerns with which they grapple. In the end, the fundamental concern of this book is not what Moltmann and Revelation believe, but *that in which* they believe. The goal is not interpretation itself, it is nurturing the symphonies, "the sounding together," with the subject matter, growing in interpretation, so the textured relationship with the referent grows in potentiality and possibility, in truth.

These thoughts on the communicability and referentiality of texts are but a brief endeavour into that incomprehensible sea of modern hermeneutics. It is anything but comprehensive but hopefully it conveys the desire and rationale behind this book: with the help of two loci of textual icons to move further into interpreting the world that assumes there is a kingdom ahead of us which in hidden ways is making itself known among us.

In summary, the purpose of this book is to make one contribution to the larger theological conversation on the Kingdom of God through an appraisal of the function of the kingdom in the work of Jürgen Moltmann, and by exploring how this appraisal may both enrich and be corrected by an interpretation of how Revelation deals with similar

is true for us, as creatures of history, that some understanding of our past is a necessary condition of an accurate grasp of our present predicament and of our responsibilities for the future, it is also true that a measure of critical self-understanding of our present predicament is a necessary condition of an accurate 'reading' of our past. We do not *first* understand the past and *then* proceed to understand the present. The relationship between these two dimensions of our quest for meaning and truth is dialectical: they mutually inform, enable, correct and enlighten each other" (Lash, *Way to Emmaus*, 79–80). This does not mean that we are helplessly bound to our present but historically conditioned consciousness, but as Jeanrond, "After Hermeneutics," 96, rightly points out: while one's commitment and purpose of course conditions one's reading, it does not necessarily determine it.

concerns. The particular way I construct this conversation is grounded in the two fundamental assumptions discussed above, that text are written to *communicate*, and to communicate *something*. How, then, will this conversation, be developed?

Approach of the Study

The central discussion of this book commences with an appraisal of Moltmann's view of the kingdom in chaps. 3 and 4. Chapter 3 looks at how the kingdom functions as a symbol of hope for humanity, how this hope is grounded in the way the promise of the kingdom has appeared in the person and history of Jesus, and how this gives shape to a messianic understanding of history and a corresponding historical praxis. Chapter 4 considers what has become increasingly important for Moltmann, the presence of the kingdom in history—how God's "rule" is present to creation, orienting the world toward the future opened up to it in the promise of the kingdom.

Chapter 5 sets the stage for the second part of the book, outlining first the issues in Moltmann's view of the kingdom that will be brought to my study of Revelation, and second, introducing the urgencies that Revelation responds to in its own depiction of God's rule and kingdom. Following the structure established in the appraisal of Moltmann, chapters 6 considers how the future hoped for in Revelation is a "regime change," the time when the powers that now occupy the central geopolitical authority on earth will be replaced by God and his Christ. Chapter 7 turns to how the book depicts God as the sovereign over both heaven and earth, and how he is now orienting the world toward this future, not only in acts of judgment but also through the Spirit-enabled kerygmatic witness of the ecclesial communities that have been constituted by the slain Lamb as a kingdom to God. The latter part of these chapters place my interpretation of Revelation into a dialogue with Moltmann, considering how Moltmann may open up ways of reading Revelation today, and how Revelation may suggest correctives to potential weaknesses in Moltmann.

In a brief concluding chapter I will suggest how I think the dialogue I have proposed here has fared in the body of the work, as well as make a few remark on the importance of the authorial "I" as not outside the dialogue but as an interested and situated partner in it. Anticipating

that discussion, I point out that while the dialogue on paper is between Moltmann and Revelation, it is more accurate to describe this book as a three-way conversation, since it is I who construct the dialogue, decide what the two textual voices will speak on, interpret what they say and evaluate my portraits. It is my hope, that the portraits I paint in these pages are trustworthy, but they are still painted with my palette.

By the time astute readers come to the later chapters, they will notice how I consistently privilege the voice of Revelation over Moltmann when the two seem to be in conflict. This pattern is primarily due to the different ways in which Moltmann and I see the place and function the Bible has in the church. Therefore, before we delve into our primary concern, we turn first, in the next chapter, to Moltmann's view on Scripture and how it differs from my own. And since Moltmann's view of Scripture cannot be separated from its place within his theological framework, this chapter will commence with an overview of the basic strokes of his theological approach, including the important role the Kingdom of God plays in it.