

REFORMED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

A THEOLOGICAL EXPLORATION OF THE COVENANTAL DYNAMICS WITHIN THE ESCHATOLOGICAL

“FIRST”/“SECOND” PATTERN OF THE “FIRST RESURRECTION” IN REVELATION 20:4-6

A PAPER SUBMITTED TO DR. CHARLES HILL IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF REQUIREMENTS

FOR 2NT522, HEBREWS – REVELATION

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REVELATION 20:1-6 GREEK TEXT¹ AND TRANSLATION

Καὶ εἶδον² ἄγγελον
καταβαίνοντα ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ
ἔχοντα
τὴν κλεῖν τῆς ἀβύσσου
καὶ ἄλυσιν μεγάλην ἐπὶ τὴν χεῖρα αὐτοῦ.
καὶ ἐκράτησεν τὸν δράκοντα,
ὁ ὄφεις ὁ ἀρχαῖος,³
ὃς ἐστὶν Διάβολος καὶ ὁ Σατανᾶς,
καὶ ἔδησεν αὐτὸν χίλια ἔτη
καὶ ἔβαλεν αὐτὸν εἰς τὴν ἄβυσσον
καὶ ἔκλεισεν
καὶ ἐσφράγισεν ἐπάνω αὐτοῦ,
ἵνα μὴ πλαγήσῃ ἔτι τὰ ἔθνη ἄχρι τελεσθῆ τὰ χίλια ἔτη.
μετὰ ταῦτα δεῖ λυθῆναι αὐτὸν μικρὸν χρόνον.

Καὶ εἶδον θρόνους⁴

1 The text is an electronic copy of the UBS Fourth Edition, as contained in the *BibleWorks* software program, version 7. The citation provided by *BibleWorks* is as follows: “The Greek New Testament, edited by Kurt Aland, Matthew Black, Carlo M. Martini, Bruce M. Metzger, and Allen Wikgren, in cooperation with the Institute for New Testament Textual Research, Münster/Westphalia, Fourth Edition (with the same text as the Nestle-Aland 27th Edition of the Greek New Testament). Copyright © 1966, 1968, 1975 by the United Bible Societies (UBS) and 1993, 1994 by Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft (German Bible Society), Stuttgart.”

I have attempted to arrange the Greek text into a semantical outline by indenting and subordinating qualifiers underneath their antecedents. Parallel or related thoughts share the same baseline of indentation.

2 John uses the phrase *Καὶ εἶδον* (as in Rev. 5:1, 2, 6, 11; 6:1, 2, 5, 8, 12; 7:2; 8:2, 13; 9:1; 10:1; 13:1, 11; 14:1, 6, 14; 15:1, 2; 16:13; 17:3, 6; 19:11, 17, 19; 20:1, 4, 11, 12; 21:1) as a “vision formula” or literary device to organize new scenes in his “single vision” which occurs between 1:10 and 22:6. (For the function of *Καὶ εἶδον* as a “vision formula,” see Ekkehardt Müller, “Microstructural Analysis of Revelation 20,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, 37, no. 2 (Autumn 1999): 228-30, especially note 4. On the bulk of Revelation being a “single vision,” see Richard Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), 10, 57.) I take *Καὶ εἶδον* used in 20:1 and 20:4 to be introducing new scenes in the overall vision rather than progressive scenes between chs. 19 and 20. Accordingly I use the rendering “And I saw” instead of “Then I saw” in order to suggest literary/visionary progression instead of chronological progression. (The major English translations vary: “Then I saw” as in the ESV, NLT, and NET translations; “And I saw” as in the KJV and NAS. The NIV renders simply “I saw.”)

The use of the “vision formula” touches on an underlying hermeneutical question for how chs. 19 and 20 relate. Charles Powell summarizes: “the interpretive discussion centers on progression versus recapitulation, that is, whether 20:1-10 recapitulates 19:11-21 or follows it in a chronologically progressive order” (Charles E. Powell, “Progression versus Recapitulation in Revelation 20:1-6,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 163 (Jan.–Mar. 2006): 94-109, at 95). I find the progression view unsatisfactory in that even if one grants Powell’s three arguments in support of that view, one still must relate the visions in chs. 19-20 to the rest of the visions within the one grand vision, a relation suggested by the many occurrences of the *καὶ εἶδον* formula throughout Revelation. In other words, if chronological progression is the chief organizing principle between chs. 19 and 20, must it then also be the chief organizing principle of the bulk of Revelation? Certainly other literary factors must be taken into account, especially apocalyptic genre.

3 Though not listed as a textual variant in the apparatus, Metzger notes that the shift from accusative to nominative case “is in accord with the linguistic usage of the book of Revelation, which employs the nominative case for a title or proper name that stands in apposition to a noun in an oblique case.” Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary On The Greek New Testament: A Companion Volume to the UNITED BIBLE SOCIETIES’ GREEK NEW TESTAMENT (Fourth Revised Edition)*, (2nd ed., Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft/German Bible Society, 2002) 687.

4 The key exegetical question in verse 4 is whether one group (martyrs) or two (martyrs plus other faithful Christians) are in view. This choice is difficult due to the “syntactical irregularities within a string of eight phrases, each introduced by *καὶ*”

And I saw thrones. And they sat on them. And judgment was given to them. And [I saw] the souls of those who had been beheaded on account of the testimony of Jesus and the Word of God. And whoever did not worship the Beast nor his image and did not take the seal on their forehead and hand. The rest of the dead did not come to life until the 1,000 years was completed.

This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection: Over these ones the second death does not have authority; Rather, they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with Him for 1,000 years.

INTRODUCTION

What hope does a Reformed pastor have to offer a parishioner who is on the brink of death? A powerful paradox: In Meredith Kline's words, "For the Christian, to die is resurrection."⁶ That death for Christians is a backward blessing is a truth woven throughout⁷ what is perhaps the most misunderstood book of the Bible: Revelation. And John carefully arranges one particular thread in this weave—Revelation 20:4-6—to encourage Christians that dying in the Lord is actually the Christian's "first resurrection" (v. 5). The encouragement is that, for believers, "The first resurrection involves entrance into spiritual life simultaneous with bodily death, just as the second death involves entrance into spiritual death simultaneous with bodily resurrection. Both are paradoxical or tensive in character."⁸ The Christian's holy hope in the face of death, then, is the paradoxical blessing of gaining a spiritual resurrection by a physical death, lasting "until the thousand years were ended" at which time the believer

6 This is a one sentence summary of Meredith G. Kline's penetrating article, "The First Resurrection," *WTJ* 37 (1974-75): 366-375, http://www.covopc.org/Kline/First_Resurrection.html (accessed 4 December 2007).

7 *Ibid.* In the section titled, "The Beatitude of the Christian Dead," Kline states, "the blessedness of Christian death is a recurring theme in the Apocalypse, as was to be expected in a book of its origin and purpose." He draws the connection between 14:13 and 20:4-6 as analogous beatitudes in addition to noticing the contextual connections between 2:9-11 and 20:4-6.

8 Vern S. Poythress, "Genre and Hermeneutics in Rev 20:1-6," *JETS* 36, no. 1, (March 1993): 41-55, at 53. This is Poythress' summary of Kline's main argument in "The First Resurrection."

receives the full eschatological reward: physical resurrection and eternal life in the new heavens and new earth, a blessing against which “the second death has no power” (vv. 5, 6).⁹

Kline’s thesis is based on his observation that in Revelation 20 John uses the adjectives “first” and “second” not to refer merely to chronological sequence, but to the eschatological shifting of the ages. “That which is ‘first’ belongs to the order of the present passing world.”¹⁰ And insofar as the bodily resurrection of believers is proper only to the consummate state, “‘The first resurrection’ must then be something this side of bodily resurrection, some experience that does not bring the subject of it into his consummated condition and final state.”¹¹ Upon this eschatological basis of the first resurrection belonging to the “present passing world,” Kline aligns himself in the long line of amillennial interpreters¹² who hold to an intermediate state (“first resurrection”) before the final state (“second resurrection”). On this amillennial-based view, death is a paradoxical tool of blessing.

There are many ways in which Kline’s thesis might be helpful to the church. In terms of

9 “Recently Meredith Kline has made a particularly impressive case for this interpretation. He perceptively suggests that the relationship between the first and second resurrections is not simply one of temporal sequence but rather of continuity in redemptive history. He takes the position that the adjective ‘first’ in the expression ‘first resurrection’ is used as an antonym of ‘new,’ as in the contrast between the first and new heaven and earth in Revelation 21, the first and new covenant administrations in Hebrews, and the first and last Adams in 1 Corinthians 15. If this is correct, the first resurrection is the counterpart in the present age of the resurrection that will take place at Christ’s return.” Sidney H. T. Page, “Revelation 20 and Pauline Eschatology,” *JETS* 23, no. 1, (March 1980): 31-43, at 36-37. This is Page’s summary of Kline’s thesis in “The First Resurrection.”

10 M. G. Kline, “The First Resurrection.”

11 M. G. Kline, “The First Resurrection.”

12 Just how long this historical line stretches back into history may come as a surprise. Some historians, such as David Wright, have claimed that amillennialism originates with Augustine: “There, in book 22, Augustine sets out his mature understanding of the ‘thousand years’ of Revelation 20:3-6. His new position—which is often called amillennial—became the view of most Christians in the West, including the Reformers, for almost a millennium and a half” (David Wright, “Millennium Today,” *Christian History* 18, no. 1 (1999): 13). But, as Paul Rainbow notes, referencing the historical work of Charles E. Hill, *Regnum Caelorum: Patterns of Future Hope in Early Christianity* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), “non-chilastic readings of Revelation 20:1-6 were probably widespread from the very earliest patristic period” (Paul A. Rainbow, “Millennium as Metaphor in John’s Apocalypse,” *WTJ* 58 (1996): 209-21, at 221). Accordingly, Hill writes, “It is now plain that this [amillennial view of the first resurrection] cannot be seen as an innovation on Augustine’s part; it had had by now a long tradition” (Hill, *Regnum*, 267).

the three main hermeneutical lenses¹³ through which interpreters read the 1,000 years in Revelation 20, a pastor may trace the eschatological implications of Kline's view in order to argue a strong case for an amillennial interpretation.¹⁴ In terms of our opening question regarding hope in death, a broader covenantal question may also provide insight into further pastoral issues related to resurrection. Specifically, how does our present covenantal union with the resurrected Christ relate to our "first resurrection" upon our death? In other words, is there a sense in which believers experience two "first resurrections," one when they are united to Christ by faith and one when they die?¹⁵ With this question in mind, the eschatology of John's Gospel provides an intriguing comparison to that of his apocalypse, perhaps revealing the same paradoxical pattern in both.

JOHN 11 COMPARED TO REVELATION 20

In his book *Kingdom Prologue* Kline hints at, but does not directly address the question about how our covenantal union with Christ relates to the "first resurrection" of Revelation 20:¹⁶

13 "There are *premillenarian* ideas, held by exegetes who think that the parousia will take place before the messianic reign on earth (often linked with cataclysmic eschatology that envisages a divine interruption into history), and *post-millennial* ideas, held by those who think that Christ's reappearance will take place at the end of the millennium (often linked with gradualist, evolutionary views of history, inexorably moving toward an eschatological goal). In addition there are *amillennialists*, who reject the idea of the messianic reign on earth, either because they believe that this event has already happened in the cross and resurrection or in the emergence of the Christian church (Augustine's interpretation in *The City of God* is a good example of amillennialism)." Christopher C. Rowland, "The Book of Revelation: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections" in *The New Interpreter's Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998) XII: 708-9.

14 To a certain extent, Kline has done this himself insofar as his article, "The First Resurrection," contains small critiques of premillennialism and postmillennialism. Furthermore, Kline responded to a premillennial critic by writing a follow up article, "The First Resurrection: A Reaffirmation," *WTJ* 39 (1976-1977): 110-119.

15 I am using "first" here in the specific sense argued by Meredith Kline for its eschatological age use in Rev. 20:5, 6—"first" meaning "related to the present, passing age."

16 Speaking of the blessings sanctioned in our covenantal union with Christ as symbolized in the tree of life, Kline writes, "Piety and total prosperity were united in the creational order. More than that, the fullness of life, the true *summum bonum*, consisted in the religious life, the union and communion of man with God, the Source of life. This truth appears in redemptive history in Jesus' identification of himself as the resurrection and life of his people. Those united to him never die (John 11:26). That which is called death, and for others is death, is "the first resurrection" for believers, whom dying unites more closely to Jesus so that they live and reign with and in him (Rev 20:5,6)." Meredith G. Kline, *Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundations for a Covenantal Worldview* (Overland Park, KS: Two Age Press, 2000) 95, <http://www.god-centered.com/resources/kingdomprologue.pdf> (accessed 4 December 2007).

In the context of covenantal union and communion with the Source of life as being man's highest good, Kline refers to the scene in John 11 with Martha just after Lazarus had died in which "Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this' (John 11:25-26 ESV)?" Kline's immediate point is that even in death, believers experience union and communion with God. Though Kline himself does not suggest a similar "first"/"second" resurrection pattern here analogous to Rev. 20, such a pattern does seem latent in John's text.

The eschatological pattern in John 11:25-26 as related to the "first"/"second" pattern in Revelation 20: 4-6 can be summarized as follows: Jesus' opening statement introduces the two eschatological ages: "I am the resurrection" relates to "first resurrection,"¹⁷ and "the life" relates to "second resurrection." The next two phrases relate in turn to the two eschatological ages: "Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live" relates to the "first resurrection," and "everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die" relates to the "second resurrection." If this parallel pattern between the Gospel and the apocalypse is valid,¹⁸ Martha's problem in John

17 Because death is no more in the consummate age (Rev. 21:4), resurrection must relate exclusively to the present age (i.e. "first resurrection").

18 Lending credibility to our thesis about two age eschatology being present in John 11, Geerhardus Vos references John 11:26 in speaking of the immortality which the regenerate experience presently "in principle," implying a substantive experience of immortality in the future glorified state (Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2004) 39). Similarly, George Ladd finds a strong inaugurated eschatology in John 11:25-26. "The teaching of the resurrection in the Fourth Gospel involves both a future objective eschatological event and a present spiritual reality. We find a reiterated emphasis upon the bodily resurrection at the last day when the dead shall be raised in the fullness of eternal life; but we also find that the life that pertains to the resurrection has reached back into the present age and has become available to people in the spiritual realm. This present anticipatory enjoyment of the resurrection is due to the fact of Christ in whom is resurrection and life. . . . Resurrection life both future and present resides in Christ; whoever believes in him, though she or he shall die physically, shall live again; and whoever enjoys the blessings of present spiritual life through faith in him shall one day enter upon an immortal existence." George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993) 341.

Though Ladd observes the two age eschatology, he does not specifically mention a "first resurrection" or intermediate state for dead Christians. I would argue that for Ladd to be consistent with his own eschatological principles, he would have to at least allow for this interpretation *in principle*. For, if "[r]esurrection life both future and present resides in Christ," then it

11 was that she believed in Jesus' power for the "second resurrection," but not for the "first resurrection." Jesus corrected Martha's eschatological hyperopia by showing her that He Himself is the resurrection and life *not only in the future, but also in the present*.¹⁹

The covenantal logic for seeing this latent parallel flows out of Jesus' correction of Martha's eschatology: If Christ is Lord of both the present age (resurrection) and the age to come ([eternal] life), then the benefits bound up in covenantal union with Him also span both ages. Furthermore, these benefits continue as long as the covenantal union continues. The covenantal union between Christ and believers begun in the present is secure forever.²⁰

Therefore, believers who die in the present age will, by virtue of their present covenantal union with Christ and the benefits proper to it, continue to experience Jesus' sovereignty over death in the present age. Martha's hyperopia caused her to overlook the present reality that Christ is the resurrection even in the present age. Believers who die partake in present spiritual resurrection in heaven while they await the future physical resurrection at the consummation (the benefit to which Martha's eye was fixed).²¹ In Jesus' words—"he who believes in Me shall live even if he

follows logically that the believer (one who is united to Christ and thus spiritually resurrected in the present) who dies remains united to Christ and thus continues to participate in the present benefits of spiritual resurrection (the intermediate state/resurrection to heaven) even while awaiting the eschatological resurrection. If this connection is denied, then one must explain how a dead Christian loses his spiritual resurrection until the future eschatological resurrection. In other words, how could a dead Christian remain united to Christ without experiencing the spiritual resurrection benefits that he experienced while physically alive? To deny the intermediate state one must deny union with Christ or deny spiritual resurrection as a benefit of union with Christ.

19 "The Prince of life is *ever* the conqueror of death. Not only is he this by and by in the resurrection on the last day; he is this *always*. That is exactly the truth which Martha failed to grasp. Hence, Jesus placed emphasis upon it here, in order that the spark of hope might be kindled once more in Martha's breast, and that it might be fanned into a briskly burning, open flame. ...for he, who was the Prince of life *also at this moment*, was victor over death, over death in every form." William Hendriksen, *The Gospel According to John: Commentary on Chapters 7-21 in John*, New Testament Commentary (reprint 2004; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1953) 150.

20 See John 6:37 and the Westminster Confession of Faith 17.

21 O'Day lends exegetical support to this covenantal logic: "By announcing that he is both the resurrection and the life, Jesus affirms his sovereignty over the present and future lives of believers. . . . The focus of v. 25b is the effect that believing in Jesus has on the believer's death; the focus of v. 26a, the effect it has on the believer's life. The two phrases spell out what it means for Jesus to be the resurrection (v. 25b) and the life (v. 26a) and are not synonymous" (Gail R. O'Day "The Gospel of John: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections" in *The New Interpreter's Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes*

dies"—Kline's "first resurrection" paradox of Revelation 20 thus appears: "For the Christian, to die is resurrection."

COVENANTAL UNION WITH CHRIST AND RESURRECTION

One more factor of these possible parallel passages requires us to look deeper into the covenantal dynamics of union with Christ: In both passages *death* is the event that triggers spiritual resurrection. Therefore, (assuming a valid parallel) both passages do not focus on the spiritual resurrection proper to regeneration (which happens prior to physical death),²² but rather the spiritual resurrection proper to physical death.²³ Admitting that death is the scope of these two texts does not in any way deny the regeneration-resurrection Jesus speaks of in John 5:24;²⁴ rather, regeneration-resurrection prior to physical death is presupposed by both John 11 and Revelation 20. But upon what covenantal basis is this prior regeneration-resurrection presupposed? Both the spiritual resurrection proper to regeneration and the spiritual resurrection proper to a Christian's physical death are grounded in the same eschatological root: He who is "the resurrection and the life." Thus, believers' covenantal union with Christ

(Nashville: Abingdon, 1998) IX: 688). A strong support for our logic is in noticing that the two explanatory phrases (25b and 26a) "are not synonymous." The reason they are not synonymous is that the former refers to Jesus' sovereignty over death in the present age, while the latter refers to His sovereignty over death in the consummate age. Thus, John's pattern here is similar to his "first"/"second" pattern in Rev. 20. If the phrases are taken as synonymous, then one is forced to understand resurrection life as exclusively consummation life. What would follow, then, is that one must face the exegetical difficulty of explaining why Jesus raised Lazarus and why He corrected Martha, actions which pertain to *pre-consummation* life. Furthermore, O'Day draws out the logical implications for Jesus being the resurrection and life in both this age and the age to come in saying, "The two parts of vv. 25B and 26a invite the believer to a vision of life in which one remains in the full presence of God during life and after death. The physical reality of death is denied power over one's life with God, as is the metaphysical reality of death" (*Ibid.*, 694).

22 Such is the argument of Sidney H. T. Page, "Revelation 20 and Pauline Eschatology," 38-40.

23 Kline wards off Page's argument (a surprising omission by Page?) by saying such views do "not handle satisfactorily the paradoxical schema we have been examining; in particular, it misses the clear correlation of first death and 'first resurrection' in this pattern. [...] However significant the theological observation that triumphant Christian death belongs to a spiritual process whose source is regeneration, spiritual resurrection from death in sin simply is not what is meant by 'the first resurrection' in Revelation 20:5f" (M. G. Kline, "The First Resurrection").

24 I am indebted to Dr. Hill for pointing me to John 5:24 for the Apostle's reference to regeneration-resurrection.

encompasses both a regeneration-resurrection and a death-resurrection.²⁵

In covenantal terms, regeneration-resurrection necessitates death-resurrection; for, to hold to the former while rejecting the latter denies that the believer's union with Christ and the benefits of the covenant of grace extend consistently throughout the period of the believer's physical death. Accordingly, failure to see how both regeneration-resurrection and death-resurrection are related to the same covenantal root can cause one to unnecessarily read Paul's regeneration-resurrection language into John's death-resurrection contexts. For example, pointing to Pauline passages that use resurrection language to describe regeneration, such as Ephesians 2:5, Colossians 2:12, 13, Romans 8:10, 11, Page concludes:

If the original readers of Revelation 20 were familiar with the sort of resurrection theology that we find in Paul, they might well have interpreted 'they came to life' in v 4, and 'the first resurrection' in v 5, as referring to regeneration. The 'second' or 'new' resurrection, in which 'the rest of the dead' (v 5) would also participate, would then have been seen as the general resurrection at the parousia.²⁶

Page here assumes an either/or without first proving how a both/and will not fit. Instead of reading Paul's regeneration-resurrection words into John's death-resurrection context, as if when reading Revelation 20 one must choose between Paul's regeneration-resurrection or John's death-resurrection as the hermeneutical key, it is more appropriate to let both passages speak in their own contexts. This path then leads to a harmonization question: How does Paul's regeneration-resurrection relate to John's death-resurrection? To answer this question, a cue

25 In grading this paper Dr. Hill pointed out to me that my thoughts here could be expanded to include the third type of resurrection within the New Testament's eschatological continuum of resurrection: the "second death" resurrection, which Kline speaks of in both his articles on Revelation 20. Thus, a fully-orbed covenantal theology of resurrection includes regeneration-, death-, and consummation-resurrection. The scope of my paper focuses on the first two types, though the covenantal implications here can be easily applied to the third due to the believer's covenantal union with Christ being the root of all three.

26 Sidney H. T. Page, "Revelation 20 and Pauline Eschatology," 38-39.

from Page on the *overarching continuity* between old-age resurrection and new-age resurrection in Paul's eschatology helps to highlight the underlying covenantal dynamics between union with Christ and resurrection:

Apparently Paul held that there was a continuity between the believer's experience of new life now and his bodily resurrection in the future. It might even be said that in Paul's view the present experience of resurrection is an anticipation of the future resurrection, and the future resurrection is the consummation of the present resurrection.²⁷

This continuity is brought further to light by Richard Gaffin's two summary remarks on how union with Christ is permeated by resurrection life:

First, it does not overstate to say, as Paul sees things, that at the core of their being, in the deepest recesses of who they are, in other words, in 'the inner man,' *believers will never be more resurrected than they already are*. God has done a work in each believer, *a work of resurrection that will not be undone*. [...] By now, secondly, it should be apparent that in Paul there is no more important conclusion about the Christian life, nothing about its structure that is more basic than this: *the Christian life in its entirety is to be subsumed under the category of resurrection*. Pointedly, the Christian life is resurrection-life.²⁸

The answer to relating Paul's eschatology to Revelation 20 (and perhaps John 11 as well) is thus located within the overarching covenantal continuity between regeneration-resurrection and consummation-resurrection. If the whole of Christian life (pre-consummation and post-consummation) *is* resurrection life, then by necessity the death of Christians must be located *within this context*. Unless one argues that a believer's union with Christ is somehow stopped or paused at death, then the very nature of the union as resurrection life demands that even a Christian in death participates in resurrection life.²⁹ Therefore, recognizing that both

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 38.

²⁸ Richard B. Gaffin Jr., *By Faith, Not By Sight* (Bucks: Paternoster, 2006) 67-68. Emphases mine.

²⁹ Speaking of his two summary points on resurrection and union with Christ, Gaffin leaves room for making conclusions such as

regeneration-resurrection and death-resurrection share the same root—covenantal union with “the resurrection and the life”—allows the “first resurrection” of Revelation 20 (and John 11) to come into its own as referring to the intermediate state just as much as Paul’s eschatology allows resurrection as proper to regeneration come into its own.

CONCLUSION

Revelation 20 is admittedly an extremely difficult text, continually stretching one’s exegetical skills, hermeneutical commitments, and theological acumen. Following Poythress’ advice on avoiding unnecessary dogmatism in interpreting this text,³⁰ the questions raised and conclusions provided about the parallel text in John 11 and the underlying covenantal dynamics relating to Christian death are admittedly preliminary in nature, though not unimportant. Further exegesis and theological reflection is needed, especially to prove the “first”/“second” pattern in John 11. With these qualification in mind, the following summary of the main theological point involved in exploring Revelation 20 is aimed at helping pastors apply a biblical answer to the question raised at the beginning: What is a Christian’s hope in death?

The Christian’s hope in death is that he is already resurrected by means of his covenantal union with Christ. This is the wide-angle vantage point from which the whole of the Christian life (including Christian death) is to be seen. This foundational truth is the key theological presupposition from which the amillennial interpretation proceeds. From this

the one I am proposing here—that the nature of the Christian life as resurrection life demands that Christian death also participates in resurrection life—by admitting that many implications can be drawn from these covenantal truths: “This sweeping conclusion about the Christian life obviously has wide-ranging implications and is capable of being amplified and developed along a number of lines” (*ibid.*, 68).

30 “The intrinsic flexibility and relative indirectness of the correspondence between vision and referent in Revelation as a whole should make all interpreters hold their views on Rev 20:1-10 with less dogmatism. Vern S. Poythress, “Genre and Hermeneutics in Rev 20:1-6,” 54.

covenantal vantage point follows the paradoxical blessing of death which leads Christians into another state of resurrection life before the bodily resurrection at the consummation. Therefore, pastors who are fully aware of the robust resurrection life which flows from our covenantal union with Christ will be able to fully encourage their sheep in the blessedness of dying in the Lord. Accordingly, reading Revelation 20 should be a reminder of the same truth given in chapter 14: "And I heard a voice from heaven saying, 'Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.' 'Blessed indeed,' says the Spirit, 'that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!'" (Revelation 14:13 ESV).³¹

31 Though I am not attempting to copycat him, I should point out that Kline closes his article with this same verse (M. G. Kline, "The First Resurrection").

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