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Reforming Priesthood in Reformation Zurich

Heinrich Bullinger's End-Times Agenda

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1 Situating Reformation Zurich within the End-Times Idiom of Christendom

1.1 Preface

What era ever lacks for heralds of upheaval? Even beyond the conspicuous cultural legacy of Abrahamic prophets, examples abound. Demosthenes, an Athenian, denounced the fatal undertow of nascent Hellenism; Romans such as Cicero decried the decline of public morals and, more particularly, of the Senate; late ancient aristocrats fretted over the menacing advance of Christianity and of barbarians more generally, these being signs of awful times of cosmic significance. A later observer may cluck that the sky did not end up falling, for all the volume of prognisticators. Still, there is some grain of truth in dire prophecies; any end to the way things are involves transformative drama. Ends and reconfigured beginnings constitute all historical narrative. Even now, the state of things has once again endowed an End-Times idiom with currency. Media outlets are replete with warnings that remark upon any combination of subjects from climate change to the upheavals of race relations, gender politics, and international diplomacy. Even the outlook of religion altogether can raise alarms in the demographic wake of 'nones' who are increasingly detached from the establishments of prior generations. Of course, just because the sky has never yet fallen, this does not logically eliminate the possibility of some utmost calamity still to come. That is not the historian's business. It is, however, germane to observe the fact that there is in any age a tendency to highlight cataclysmic possibilities, which seems to constitute a typically human way of expressing the experience of historical change. This lends itself in turn to caricature. An End-Times way of speaking would seem to exclude sober thoughtfulness and complex engagement with the here and now. This phenomenon can leave an imbalanced legacy among readers/hearers, even where the heralds themselves operated with surprising nuance.

The career of the sixteenth-century Swiss theologian Heinrich Bullinger illustrates again this fact that historical drama features rhetoric oriented around a sense of an end fraught with cosmic significance. His legacy also illustrates the

degree to which such a discourse can linger afterwards in caricatures that fail to convey the nuance of its native context. Bullinger worked as a Christian leader in an almost unimaginably unsettling era. Deeply held assumptions, attitudes, and the institutions that had constituted a more or less stable and meaningful world underwent dramatic reconfigurations – even among those purporting to preserve some erstwhile consensus. It must have been a bewildering time in which to live. Historians today know not to be too severe in assessing the apocalyptic re-criminations and other exuberant images of doom lobbed by individuals and groups in the sixteenth century. End-Times urgency was never the private pro-clivity of any one party vis-à-vis others. Still, Bullinger has a reputation for some special measure of intensity in this kind of rhetoric. It is not an altogether unfair assessment. Even in his sixteenth-century context, Bullinger did utter notably frequent, stark dichotomies along with condemnations of an apocalyptic 'Anti-christ' in the form of the Roman Papacy.

There are, however, some facts that artificially skew, even caricature, Bul-linger's reputation. The peculiar confluence of printing presses and market forces have something to do with it. It may be fair to observe that Luther managed those phenomena somewhat more successfully than did Bullinger (cf. Pettegree: 2015). In any case, the market for Zurich theology in sixteenth-century England illustrates the disproportionate emphasis in the reception of Bullinger's literary output. Of all the Zurich-based material that could have been translated for sixteenth-century English readers, the End-Times theme looms quite prominently.[1] Bullinger's vast exegetical oeuvre is reduced to a commentary on 2 Thessalonians. Sixteenth-century English book-buyers were advised that in this work they would see an account of "the rise and fall of the Kingdom of Antichrist, that is, of Mohammed and the Bishop of Rome" (Bullinger: 1538, title page; cf. HBBibl 1.82). At the culmination of Bullinger's career, English readers would also have encountered his *Hundred Sermons upon the Apocalypse* (1573; HBBibl 1.355–356). With the exception of the important English translations of his *Decades* and a handful of other moral and political statements, Bullinger's works in English implied an author almost obsessively concerned with the terrifying edge of history. It seems reasonable to consider that English printers and book-buyers sampled from Bullinger's works in order to meet demand for widespread interest in something promising to disclose the titanic significance and eternal ramifications of their own tumultuous days, along with some prospect of mar-ketably salacious details of a demonic regime. This is just the sort of selective bias

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1 It would take another study altogether to present the development of a commercialized ap-petite for eschatology in British print throughout the Reformation; for now, it is instructive merely to note the much more apocalyptic tone of John Knox when compared to his Swiss or Genevan colleagues.

in the Bullingerian tradition that requires special vigilance among subsequent generations of historians.

Bullinger did notably communicate in an End-Times idiom, but it is also entirely possible to overstate that case in some ways that undermine the historical importance of such an idiom for Bullinger and for the Reformation more broadly. The idiom is no mere rhetorical excess of the age – the kind of stark discourse that might have met with commercial success, but which played little fundamental role in the actual work of building stable institutions of a nuanced worldview. A closer analysis of some key components of Bullinger's printed œuvre and his private memoranda reveal ways in which his End-Times idiom permeated a surprisingly complex agenda in shaping lasting institutions. It is not the case that Bullinger 'nevertheless' achieved careful conceptual balance that helped to (re-)shape institutional leadership – as if he accomplished such things despite, or over against, his concerns for the decisive turning point of history. On the contrary, Bullinger's broader eschatological thinking positively, crucially, and practically influenced institutional development. My hope is that this study can prove something of a test case that may in turn illuminate some undervalued features of Zurich Reformation and of Reformation as it unfolded in many varieties across all of Europe – and perhaps even across Christian tradition more broadly. I focus my analysis upon that telling institution of Protestant polity, the ordained ministry.

1.2   Preliminary Remarks on Christian Tradition as an End-Times Narrative

Reformers in many settings have derived much from the perennial Christian concern for transformation of the ages. Renaissance humanists certainly did so. The humanist narrative assumes that a supposedly barbarous 'middle age' is yielding at last to a miraculous resurgence in humane cultivation. Even the famous humanist dictum about returning to the sources – that is, revitalizing the best of an otherwise forgotten past – can be amenable to the Christian myth of final restoration of paradise. Erasmus shared the humanists' typical disdain for febrile excesses of apocalypticism. He considered it retrograde to the civilizing agenda. But even Erasmus referred to the inquisitorial suppression of books as an apocalyptic manifestation of a world at once demonic and passé. This suppression was, he said, an act of "bow[ing] down to that beast" in contrast to "the glory of Christ, which is just beginning to blossom again at the present time as superstition and the futile but deadly old rites of mankind lose their force"

(Erasmus: 1993, 101).[2] Incidentally, the eschatological influence on humanism continues even today – and even among avowedly non-religious groups, which commonly use a lexicon of aspirational utopia.[3]

Sixteenth-century humanists were not novel in imagining their cause as an epochal transformation. Christianity became a religion in its own right by elaborating on the theme of a divine plan for the *end* of the ages, involving Jesus as a history-fulfilling Messiah. Bernard McGinn has observed that "Christianity was born as an apocalyptic religion, whether or not New Testament scholars will ever be able to agree on how far Jesus himself was actually a preacher of the last times. This seems to be reason enough for historians of Christian thought to be concerned with the history of apocalyptic eschatology, both in terms of its definition…and its subsequent history" (1994, viii). Christian writings typically assert that Jesus' death and resurrection already accomplished some sort of decisive change and that Jesus' eventual Second Coming will consummate this transformation for the whole cosmos. Ancient Christians, for all their differences, defined the movement's overall profile with the conviction that conduct in the present must reflect the light of an eschatological revelation – in other words, an apocalypse (cf. 1 Pet 1:10–20). The End-Times calculus did not entail quietism. Some of the most ancient Christian literature of the early second century, such as letters of Ignatius of Antioch or *Didache*, attest to End-Times fervor right alongside great concern for establishing and protecting the institution of episcopacy. Ancient Christian thinking and acting make less historical sense when isolated from that ancient sense of a transformative disclosure of divine purpose for the cosmos. This phase of antiquity has influenced all subsequent paths in the development of Christian movements. Any treatment of the social or institutional ramifications of Christianity must account for assumptions about some kind of transformation of history itself.

Commenting upon the ancient emergence of the apocalyptic genre, McGinn notes that such writings "are products of a learned elite. Sociologically speaking, they appear to be tied to challenges to more traditional priestly authority by scribes with the skills to compose and interpret sacred writings" (1992, 6). Organizational principles of *priesthood* and *prophetic* literacy appear to be an ongoing concern wherever eschatological thinking takes shape in society. In other words, stark us-versus-them dichotomies that can be common in apocalyptic scenarios must not be read only as religious community-versus-world but also as indicative of a complex internal struggle to define rightly the institutional rela-

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2 The reference to the 'beast' is a clear reference to Revelation (and therefore also to the trailblazing book of Jewish apocalypticism, Daniel).

3 Beyond the obvious connection to the humanist author of the original *Utopia* (Thomas More), note that the word *humanist*, which once described the spiritual-minded reformers of early modernity, has now come to imply materialist secularism.

tions of the community itself. If these principles were operative in Christian antiquity, they were doubly important in early modernity in light of humanist efforts to reclaim the best of literate antiquity.

My research into End-Times idiom and associated changes to institutional priesthood contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of Reformation history, despite the narrow parameters of the test case of Heinrich Bullinger's career in Zurich. Sensitivity to theological discourse must emphatically include varieties of End-Times idiom, rather than dismissing such to a periphery. Preference for more particularly celebrated (and/or less embarrassing) loci of theology can contribute to skews in the intellectual history. Even that most conspicuous Protestant doctrine of 'justification by faith' entails ramifications for institutional leadership that are lost to view without attention to the End-Times context. On the other hand, assumptions often embedded within theories of secularization or broader confessionalization can skew religious speech of historical persons to the level of mere superficiality. Attending to an End-Times idiom allows the historian to make a rather comprehensive assessment of thoughts, actions, and motivations of historical persons and groups. I hope to strengthen the case for coordinating aspects of intellectual and social history in ways that foster comprehensiveness, that fairly respect the expressions of past groups in their own sense of context, and that avoid slippage toward any denominational or secularist triumphalism.

A brief explication of my intended use of the terms *apocalyptic* and *eschatology* may be helpful now. The technical term *apocalyptic* most fundamentally denotes a revealing of something otherwise hidden from view. It hearkens to a specific type of religious writing that developed among Hellenistic Jews awaiting final transformation of the age in the face of suffering, exile, and/or occupation. Often the seer of such a vision writes pseudonymously as a figure of biblical antiquity (such as Enoch or Daniel), but the target audience successfully perceives in this quasi-historical disclosure the key to its *own* circumstances. The Christian book of Apocalypse (or Revelation) does not employ pseudonymity, but it otherwise shares many features typical of the Jewish apocalyptic genre, including some explicit repurposing of the book of Daniel for the early Christian community of Asia. Not only does the initiated community see beyond coded tropes of the past to understand the references to the present, they also recognize that – all worldly signs to the contrary – they stand on the verge of a divine reversal of appearances that will vindicate them and bring judgment against their oppressors.[4] In other words, *apocalyptic* as a genre is typically *eschatological*. Eschatology itself implies any theological/philosophical system attempting to

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4 The Apocalypse of John similarly draws on the coded language and imagery of earlier biblical texts, even though it explicitly addresses the Christian churches of Asia Minor.

define an end, and therefore the punctuated sense, of all human experience. I intend to combine the eschatological and apocalyptic terms with my broader expression 'End-Times idiom.' I want to convey a comprehensive rationale, a worldview, emcompassing the deeply felt poetic and discursive theological convictions. Such a matrix encourages certain kinds of action within communities whose members consider themselves called to persevere in light of an imminent upending of history.

All squares are rectangles, but not all rectangles are squares. Christian apocalyptics as a genre is always eschatological, but the reverse is not necessarily so. Strictly speaking, eschatology concerns 'last things.' Finality can work in many ways and it need not involve disclosure or revealing of the sort of cosmic cataclysm and vindication commonly associated with the apocalyptic genre. Non-apocalyptic Christian eschatology usually appears in contexts in which violence against Christians has diminished.[5] Without conditions of persecution, there may be less urgent need to speak in a coded way to preserve awareness of divine favor in a world of ostensible God-forsakenness. One prominently non-apocalyptic mode of construing decisive finality is so-called 'realized eschatology,' which emphasizes the transformative in-breaking of spiritual truths that upend the experience of the present. Ominous tropes such as broken seals and flying horsemen can be entirely allegorized and personalized. Realized eschatology nevertheless continues to transform the meaning of all things in the light of a defining point. The broad interpretive latitude of eschatology helps to explain the enduring importance of End-Times discourse in Christian traditions, despite the ups and downs of apocalypticism.

Considering the great degree to which Renaissance and Reformation agents drew upon antiquity – including the distinctive contributions of ancient Christians in reconceiving an End-Times idiom – Bullinger's agenda for priesthood takes on special significance. Bullinger engaged with his contemporary humanists within this longer story of Christian development. In contrast to caricatures that may exaggerate or otherwise mistake his own End-Times thought and action, Bullinger made a nuanced eschatology seem compatible with a sharp apocalyptics, all while shaping the institutional course of Protestant Zurich.

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5 To be sure, a minority subgroup may perceive itself as persecuted – and thus go on to embrace apocalyptic rhetoric – even in a time hailed by other Christians for its peace and triumph.

1.3   End-Times Idiom in the Development of Ancient Priesthood

End-Times idiom has always involved institutional structures. An early example appears in the second-century movement known as 'New Prophecy' (also known as Montanism after its charismatic leader, Montanus). This movement coalesced around claims of special revelation: the heavenly Jerusalem would soon descend among the faithful in Phrygia of Asia Minor. Montanus and his two female fellow prophets, Prisca and Maximilla, seem to have asserted a sort of prophetic class in conflict with the priestly establishment. Efforts arose within the network of churches to curtail perceived apocalyptic excesses. This conflict did not itself give rise to episcopacy, but it certainly did push that institutional development in new ways. It is also true that the Montanists defined their own institutional leadership as a kind of prophethood over against these bishops. This era is now widely regarded among historians as the crucible of 'proto-orthodoxy.' Bishops moved to sequester New Prophets from the demographic majority by dint of ex-communication. Corresponding action against the threat posed by the prophets Prisca and Maximilla may also help explain some proto-orthodox retrenchment from female leadership of the sort mentioned a century earlier in the writings of the Apostle Paul.[6] Furthermore, the leaders of proto-orthodox episcopacy expressed critique of the New Prophets through some rather critical reception of the book of Revelation (that is, the Apocalypse) (McGinn: 1992, 18).

  Circumstances grew even more, not less, fraught when the institutions of the Roman Empire came to favor Christianity. This time of transition deeply influenced ongoing Christian eschatological ways of thinking, particularly with respect to church and state. In the course of the fourth century, prior visions of a cataclysmic end to Roman government could now carry overtones of outright sedition against God's providential hand. Eusebius of Caesarea, a Constantinian apologist, confidently extolled the *present* Christian culmination of the ages. In this light, it makes sense that the embarrassing phenomenon of apocalyptics receded. Eusebius did not go quite so far as to reject the book of Revelation outright, but neither did he find it as firmly canonical as Paul's epistles.[7] Other fourth-century bishops, such as Cyril of Jerusalem and John Chrysostom, were

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6 In the indisputably Pauline Letter to the Romans, for example, Paul not only refers to a woman serving as a deacon (Phoebe, in Romans 16:1), but also a female apostle (Junia, in Romans 16:7).

7 After listing the four Gospels, Acts, the Pauline epistles, 1 John, and 1 Peter, Eusebius writes in 3.25 of his *Ecclesiastical History:* "To these may be added, if it is thought proper, the Revelation of John…. These are classed as Recognized Books." In 3.39, Eusebius clarifies that the author of Revelation is not John the Evangelist, but rather a certain Asian presbyter named John. Cf. Eusebius: 1989, 88f, 101f. Irena Backus overstates Eusebius' supposed reluctance to place Revelation within the canon (2000b, 5f).

not so magnanimous. In the wake of opposition to Montanist New Prophecy and in defense of the structures of Christian empire, the book of Revelation (with its apocalyptic challenge to the institutional structures) barely retained a place in the Christian canon. Eschatology more broadly also continued to present difficulties for Christian institutional life. Again, it is significant that the perceived excesses of a 'prophetic' sect galvanized the development of the 'priestly' episcopal structure of proto-orthodoxy.

1.4   Late Ancient Foundation for Early Medieval Eschatology

Perhaps because of the weaker presence of Montanism in the West, Westerners upheld the apostolic authorship of the book of Revelation more consistently than Eastern Christians did. In fact, an important Western interpretive tradition flourished around the book.[8] This is not to say that straightforward apocalypticism was a constant, but the acceptance of Revelation (with all its dramatic images and themes) shaped an enduring Western legacy (McGinn: 1983, 269). Late antique contributions by Tyconius, Augustine, and Jerome provided a stable foundation for Western elaboration. This conceptual matrix endured until the High Medieval transformation around 1100. To overlook this late ancient and medieval background would be to miss critical aspects of later Renaissance and Reformation developments.

Tyconius wrote amidst upheavals of fourth-century North Africa. His writings are no longer extant, but his influence may be seen in quotations and references among later Christian thinkers. Tyconius was a Donatist partisan. As a regional minority opposed by the Roman Empire and the episcopal authorities favored by that state, Donatists could have been expected to echo the sharp apocalypticism of New Prophecy. Montanists had prophesied concerning an imminent descent of God's kingdom down from heaven. Tyconius, however, articulated a distinctly *non*-millennialist interpretation of Revelation. For Tyconius, the 'thousand years' of Revelation 20 did not stand for an imminent age of worldly perfection; rather, it concerned an *indefinite* span of *all* history of the institutional church. Further unlike Montanism, Donatism did not develop into conflict between Christian prophets versus Christian priesthood/episcopacy. In fact, the essential point of Donatists' dissent regarded the rigorous purity of authentic episcopacy. Donatists defined themselves through their clerical structure in opposition to the perceived corruption of the Roman church. In this vein, Tyconius considered the apocalyptic 'millennium' as the period of the 'first Resurrection' of Christ's body,

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8 For more on the wide-ranging role of apocalyptics in medieval culture, see, for example, Emmerson: 1992, 293–332.

defined ecclesiologically (Fredriksen: 1992, 28).[9] The case of Donatism illustrates some important facts of church conflict and development in an eschatological mode. Such contexts do not always break into simplistic camps of supporters versus detractors of apocalypse, or of prophets versus priests. An embattled minority may espouse apocalyptic dissent that still vigorously defends institutional episcopacy.

In a Western context that largely assumed the genuine apostolic Johannine authorship of Revelation together with Johannine epistles, Tyconius linked the term 'Antichrist' with imagery of the beast(s). This was more than an interesting aside; it supplied Tyconius' optic for all of Scripture, and through it, all of human experience.[10] He established seven interpretive rules, the first of which identified Christ with his body as the Church and the seventh of which identified Satan with his body as the anti-Church (the *corpus diaboli*) (Backus: 2000b, xiii, xv). He made no use of the sort of literal millennium emphasized among earlier apocalyptic interpreters, but he retained the eschatological and even apocalyptic vision of history as two warring camps. For Tyconius, the 'Antichrist' was not an identifiable individual or group, and not even principally the wicked pagans, but rather all the wicked (*especially* among ostensible Christians) who persecuted the true church defined by the ritual purity of its priesthood. Tyconius considered it a preeminent biblical truth that the final phase of human history was presently underway; in his view, this served to elevate the importance of institutional agency in the here and now. True believers who upheld authentic episcopacy faced off against the Lamb's beastly counterfeit (cf. Rev 13:11).

Augustine famously hammered against the Donatist movement in North Africa, and yet he assimilated much of Tyconius' thinking. Circumstances did favor a growing sense of eschatological urgency. By Augustine's later adulthood, many Western imperial Christians found themselves under real or threatened persecution at the hands of Germanic Arian Christians (themselves a legacy of an earlier era of the Roman Empire that had favored semi-Arianism). The context does bear a certain likeness to the travails of earlier Donatists. Some of Augustine's peers gravitated to the hope and vindication of apocalypticism. That Augustine did not take an apocalyptic stance in the mode of earlier doomsdayers has had enormous implications for Western history. Following Tyconius, Augustine highlighted the *non*-literal millennium.[11] He explicitly linked this 'millennium' with the entire indeterminate period of Church history between Christ's

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9 For the textual basis of the term 'first resurrection,' see Revelation 20:5–6.

10 The popular assumption that the 'Antichrist' is a prominent character in the book of Revelation testifies to the entrenched Western conflation of Revelation with Johannine texts elsewhere in the Christian Bible. The term 'Antichrist' (or 'antichrists') does not appear at all in Revelation. It is only found in 1 John 2:18 and 22, 1 John 4:3, and 2 John 1:7.

11 N.b. Book 20 of his *City of God*.

first and second Advents.[12] Augustine would become one of the most influential theological writers in the Western tradition, and his eschatology prompted countless discourses through future centuries on the nature of the church (including its organization, its clerical staff, and its relation to political structures).

Jerome, Augustine's contemporary, supplied another editorial touch to what became the dominant eschatological matrix of medieval Western Christendom. A Christian bishop named Victorinus of Pettau (or Poetovia) had been martyred in approximately the year 304 during the reign of Emperor Diocletian. As one of the last martyrs of pagan Rome, Victorinus had left a commentary on Revelation that offered the millennial consolation of apocalypticism. Through Jerome's mediation, however, this millennium underwent an allegorical transformation (Matter: 1992, 38 f).[13] The thousand years referred no longer to a future period of cataclysm, but rather to the ethical life of faith transforming experience in the here and now.

With increasing coherence, Western Christians conceived of 'church' in terms of an End-Times opposition of the corporate bodies of Christ and Devil defined by competing clerical institutions. They envisioned an otherwise apocalyptic 'millennium' in allegorized service to the collective church and to each constituent soul. This interpretive approach appears in such diverse authors as Primasius and Bede. This more or less definitive vision among early medieval Western Christians featured eschatology without some of the sharper edges of apocalyptics. Early medieval Western Christians believed that the events of their lives punctuated a single era of the 'first resurrection.' There is no significant body of literature speculating about phases of human history proceeding through eras symbolized by apocalyptic bowls, seals, or the like.[14] The book of Revelation and the related apocalyptic materials throughout Scripture were no longer a sourcebook of historical predictions, but they remained a guide to Christian existence by providing spiritualized insight into Christ's reign as exercised through the institutional Church.

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12 See, e.g., Book. XX.8 in Augustine: 1984, 911.

13 It is not surprising that Jerome, who spent a considerable portion of his life in Eastern Christendom, would have assimilated the ethicized allegorizing so typical of late ancient Eastern Christians, including the enormously influential legacy of Origen.

14 This mentality of living in an indeterminate 'millennium' may have a great deal to do with the fact that early medieval scribes generally produced chronicles rather than analytical histories.

1.5   Resurgent Apocalypticism in the High and Later Middle Ages

The period around the year 1100 was vibrant and vexed. Sharper aspects of apocalypticism returned the fore in Western Christianity.[15] Most germane to the present study was the growing influence of monastic reformers, especially mendicants. Robert Lerner has asserted that the scholastic need for instructional tidiness amidst confusion contributed to a newly historicized approach to Revelation (1992, 55). Perhaps so, and perhaps the economic boom and urbanization of the era gave some new gravitas to traditionally monastic ideals of 'evangelical' (and counter-cultural) collective poverty. Apocalypticism became conspicuous within theological discourses articulated by scholastics at emergent universities. This likely served as the most popularly accessible idiom of scholasticism itself. The *glossa ordinaria* in the early twelfth century already illustrates the desire of theological commentators to stretch and organize the predictive capacity of Revelation. By 1329, for example, Nicholas of Lyra treated Christian history *not* in the customary way, as an indeterminate span following the Resurrection, nor even as an earthly fulfillment begun at Constantinian Nicaea. To his mind, Revelation spoke of specific events surrounding his own fateful days (Backus: 2000b, xvi). The scholastics' tidy didactic groupings sharpened reaction to some wide-ranging anxieties then gripping Western Christendom.

In the late eleventh century, Pope Gregory VII had sought to reform moral and administrative aspects of Christian existence, but concomitant tendencies toward papal supremacy only exacerbated church-state difficulties. Pope Gregory's tumultuous demise was not an encouraging omen. Shortly thereafter, popes promoted Crusading conquests in the hope that they could harness (or at least distract) the passions then distressing European realms. Whatever accomplishments Crusaders may have achieved, they certainly did not bring peace to Christendom. Already in the early twelfth century, competing blocs put forward simultaneous claimants to the papacy, an office now believed to be more determinative than ever in matters of salvation. Western Christians clung to a hope that seemed to be emerging from just the other side of their current turmoil (McGinn: 1978, 157).

A critical voice of organizational sense (and hope) in this time of transition was Joachim of Fiore (d. 1202). His colossal influence through Christendom exceeds what one might expect from a small monastic enclave in Calabria. Joachim achieved celebrity in his own time. Like Augustine long before him, he agreed that the apocalyptic 'millennium' ought not to be read in any literal sense, but rather as an indeterminate 'plenitude.' Nevertheless, Joachim also characterized that plenitude as a discrete historical period identified as the 'age of the

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15 A convenient sampling of this cultural development may be found in McGinn: 1998.

Son,' which itself had succeeded the prior (Old Testament) 'Age of the Father.' Giving expression to the peculiar hopes and frustrations of his own time, Joachim turned new attention to the imminent period that would follow the present age of the church. Augustine may have spoken correctly in a certain sense about the clerical church, but Joachim asserted that the term *millennium* would best describe an era of human history to begin *after* the overthrow of the Antichrist (Lerner: 1992, 57–60).

Joachim read Revelation as the promise of an 'age of the Holy Spirit.' He understood the angel of Revelation 7:2 to convey a message about an eschatological quasi-pope who would lead the faithful through a transformative cataclysm of apocalypse. This eschatological pope would inaugurate the new spiritual age by *abolishing institutional clergy*, the very institution in which papacy had theretofore played such a crucial role. In the coming 'Age of Spirit,' clerical leadership would be replaced altogether by 'spiritual men' (McGinn: 1989, 228). Even though this millennial age would probably only last about six months before Judgment would introduce eternal rest, Joachim's return to a species of apocalyptics gave ample opening for elaboration and speculation (Lerner: 1992, 57ff; Backus: 2000b, xvii).

Christendom between 1200 and 1500 teemed with efforts to pinpoint signs of the times, to anticipate antichrists, and to prepare for the unfolding of the apocalypse. The new mendicant orders of Dominicans and Franciscans understood their role in history with reference to Joachim's Age of Spirit. Joachim had, after all, described the coming age as led by 'spiritual men' of precisely two sorts – preachers and contemplatives. The correlation is obvious, with a Dominican Order of Preachers on the one hand and a Franciscan order that produced mystics such as Bonaventure on the other. The Franciscans in particular elaborated upon Joachite themes. Alexander Minorita already exemplified this tendency in the early decades of the order's development in the 1200s. He shared Joachim's historicizing bent, yet with some differences in the details. Rather than an indeterminate plenitude of time, Alexander articulated a Franciscan notion of time in which precisely one thousand years were to pass between the establishment of Christendom under Constantine and Pope Sylvester and the projected end of that era in 1326.[16]

Another Franciscan, Peter John Olivi (d. 1298), agreed with the literal millennium comparable to the Joachite 'Age of the Son,' but he placed more detailed emphasis than did Alexander Minorita on the coming Age of the Spirit. In his own reading of Revelation, Olivi determined that the future age would last for 600 or 700 years, rather than the roughly six-month period envisioned by the Cala-

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16 On the apocalypticism of Alexander Minorita, especially its relation to Joachite influence, see Schmolinsky: 1991.

brian abbot. Given the increasingly bitter hostilities between more and less rigorous factions of the order, Olivi sensed the threshold of the third age marked by the rise of the Antichrist. He seems to have been the first to identify this antichrist explicitly as an amalgamation of emperor and pope in the role of the 'two beasts' of Revelation 13 (Backus: 2000b, xviii).[17]

Western Christendom entered yet another stage of infamous turmoil when the papal court relocated from Rome to Avignon between 1309 and 1377.[18] The papacy's increasingly centralized, and increasingly French, administration drew more and more critical attention, and many observers found that its weighty claims were not balanced by concomitant saintliness. The outbreak of the Hundred Years' War between England and France aggravated tensions. Yet another Franciscan prophet, John of Rupescissa (or Jean de Roquetaillade, d. *ca.* 1365), summed up the apocalyptic fears of many when he elaborated his thoughts about an imminent antichristian climax.[19] Rupescissa argued largely on the basis on Revelation 20. He predicted specific timeframes: in 1366 the Antichrist (emperor and pope) would rage, but by 1369 a sort of *anti*-Antichrist (a Franciscan pope) would crown a good emperor of Christendom (a king of France) and thereby introduce millennial perfection (McGinn: 1978, 170; cf. also Lerner: 1992, 66f). Rupescissa agreed with the literal view of the millennium, but unlike certain Franciscan forebears, he located the precise thousand years *not* in the quasi-Augustinian sense of church history post-Resurrection or even post-Constantine. For Rupescissa, the exclusive reality of the 'millennium' concerned the other side of the advent of an apocalyptic angel-pope.

In the tumultuous later phases of medieval history, many Franciscans incurred suspicion as eccentric prophets, and in some cases even as outright heretics. Nevertheless, their message changed Christian Europe. The Great Schism of competing anti-popes (a depressing epilogue to the era of Avignon papacy) underscored the widespread comprehensibility of foreboding and of dread. Even the resolution of a reunified papal institution achieved by the Council of Con-

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17 Although most Franciscans seem to have continued to identify the 'two beast' Antichrist as a combination of emperor and pope, by the early fourteenth century, Ubertino de Casale even identified the antichristian office as composed of two papal beasts, Popes Boniface VIII and Benedict XI.

18 One should not forget that the Black Death occurred in this period. Estimates vary, but perhaps as much as forty percent of the total European population was lost to plague alone. The corresponding horrors of famine and war added to the toll.

19 Anything described as 'antichristian' in contexts such as this conveys more than the general phenomena of opposition to Christianity. It is a specific theological-apocalyptic notion of the work of a mythic figure known as the Antichrist who, together with assembled demonic forces, engages in open warfare on the Christian Church at the culmination of human history. Thus, 'antichristian' as used in the present work connotes a particular sense of 'anti-Christian.'

stance in the early fifteenth century hardly silenced apocalyptic speculations. Sporadic identifications of popes as 'sons of perdition' (cf. 2 Thess 2:3–4) reached full bloom in the late medieval (largely Franciscan) apocalyptic antichristologies (McGinn: 1989, 221–51).[20] Using the book of Revelation as a lens for viewing all of Scripture and even of the signs of their own times, the people of Western Christendom anticipated cataclysm, and a new world.

1.6   Apocalypticism through Renaissance Humanism and Reformation

Observers of the Renaissance may assume that here arose an era of human-centered optimism that defined itself by reacting against medieval apocalypticism. Scholarship itself is sometimes complicit in giving this impression, especially when historians develop certain variations of the secularization thesis.[21] Yes, excesses – particularly among the more radical offshoots of mendicancy – had left 'a general aura of unease' about the book of Revelation (Backus: 2000b, xviii). And yes, any reader of the arch-humanist satire *Praise of Folly* correctly concludes that Renaissance literati revolted against the rottenness they associated with 'medieval' Christendom. Nevertheless, it would be inaccurate to consider the Renaissance an about-face from an End-Times worldview. Distinctly eschatological implications appear vigorously, if implicitly, in the humanists' fondness for satire as a genre. Satire is a medium not of simple mockery, but of the *reversal* of expectations. Humanist satire promoted a vision of transformation wherein the first are last and the last are first. This reflects humanist interest in classical satirists such as Lucian, but it is also highly amenable to the Christian apocalyptic key that opens an otherwise hidden experience of truth. In this and other respects, humanism did influence

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20 See especially McGinn's conclusion on 250f: "The *pastor angelicus* was *saintly* in his poverty of life – the great contrast between him and the worldly popes of his era. But the real demonstration that he was indeed the final saint rested on his miraculous powers to do what no one else had done or would ever be able to do before the end of this age, that is, to crown the Last Emperor and thus achieve perfect concord between the two pillars of Christendom, and then, with his aid, to defeat the enemies of Christ, to reform the Church and restore it to pristine poverty and piety, to unite the Eastern and Western Churches, to regain Jerusalem, to convert the Jews and even the Saracens. This was quite a task! It could only be done by a very special saint. And it would only need to be done once."

21 The Swiss historian Jakob Burckhardt originated the secularization thesis in his 1860 tome, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*. The thesis has been modified and criticized in many respects since then, but its influence may be perceived to linger until even very recently. It is evident, for example, in the way that Brad Gregory argues that Protestantism necessarily, even if involuntarily, culminated in the radical secularizing of European culture (cf. Gregory: 2012).

incipient confessional conflicts among Protestants, Catholics, and Anabaptists; and here, too, 'antichristology' (albeit variously construed) is one of the more conspicuous, abiding legacies of medieval End-Times discourse. Early modernity is an era that does not make historical sense without the medieval End-Times matrix of radical transformation, which could even overturn traditional institutions of the church. Everyone hoped for new life in the *corpus Christianum* (McGinn: 1989, 223).

As the centerpiece of their agenda to retrieve the best from antiquity – and thereby to circumvent the supposed worst of the Middle Ages – humanists developed new approaches to their greatest ancient source, the Christian Bible. This was no mere scholarly enterprise, but a vigorous effort to revitalize Christian culture. As proponents of cultural renewal, humanists abhorred the sophistries of scholastics as much as the enormities of non-university-based apocalypticists. While it can be said that humanists focused on the Pauline subset of the Christian Bible, they did also make important claims about the book of Revelation. Erasmus openly criticized Western traditions for placing Revelation on a par with the rest of Scripture. Comments in Eusebius and other ancient testimonies corroborated Erasmus' stylistic evaluation: John of Revelation was simply not the same author as John the Evangelist. Apostolic authorship had been a mainstay of canonicity in the West, so this observation was quite contentious. By his 1522 edition of Scriptural *Annotations*, Erasmus even wondered if the apocalyptic vision of a millennium bore traces of ancient Christian heresies. It would be understandable if Erasmus also had in mind certain late medieval apocalypticists when making such claims. As for the book of Revelation, the best that Erasmus could do was to suggest finally that the consensus of the church was enough to preserve canonicity. Even if Revelation was not, according to his own tastes, quite as refined as the other books of Scripture, Erasmus sought to rescue Revelation from the wild-eyed visionaries who threatened to demolish the institutional matrix of Christendom (Backus: 2000b, 6). It is worth remembering, too, that humanists articulated hope of radical renewal while still relying on established patrons such as popes and/or political protectors.

Martin Luther knew Erasmus' opinions on these matters. Though never a humanist himself, Luther seems to have shared some similar reservations about Revelation. Compared to Erasmus, he focused more on the book's supposed theological weakness than on the question of apostolic authorship. Ironically, the late medieval apocalypticism that had aroused negative attention to the book of Revelation now emerged again when the cause of Reformation ran up against an increasingly hostile papacy. Previous condemnations of papal corruption (from spiritual-Franciscan and/or Wycliffite sources) again became urgently relevant. Luther himself wrote a new preface for an old Wycliffite work reprinted in Wittenberg in 1528. In this preface, he revived some elements of the apocalyptic

identifications of the pope as Antichrist.[22] Luther did not adopt the Franciscan vision of an angel-pope and/or a Joachite third world-age, but he clearly borrowed some themes of Revelation mediated through medieval apocalyptic traditions. The rise of the papal Antichrist suggested to him the end of the 'thousand years,' the imminent march of marauding Turks in a papal retinue (Gog and Magog), and the coming of the Final Judgment. In such respects, Luther saw his own efforts to reform Christianity within an End-Times matrix.[23]

The Swiss Reformer Huldrych Zwingli also had qualms about Revelation. This may not be surprising for someone affiliated more strongly with Erasmian humanism than was Luther. And yet Zwingli, too, found himself vindicating the book of Revelation in some important ways in the course of ecclesiastical conflict. *Contra* Zwingli and his colleagues, traditionalist polemicists had argued that the self-proclaimed 'evangelicals' – otherwise noted for asserting a strictly biblical standard – were hypocrites. For all their biblical rhetoric, Zwingli and others revealed – so went the polemic – their sinister identity in muttering against the received text of the Vulgate, including the book of Revelation.[24] Traditionalists defended papal institutions and doctrines by asserting their own biblical high ground, drawing proof texts pointedly from Revelation. The scene of the '24 elders' in Revelation 5:8–10 is one such example. Whereas evangelical reformers scorned the practice of invoking saints, here was a biblical justification for just such devotion. In the pivotal Zurich disputations of 1523, Zwingli came prepared to address such bones of contention. Zwingli appears to have overcome a degree of humanist reluctance toward Revelation in order to develop and defend theological arguments in his conflict with the papal institution. Apocalypse served as a matrix for a variety of important Zwinglian assertions.

Zwingli shared the opinion of many ancient authorities and many humanistic contemporaries who had argued that Revelation was the work of someone other than John the Evangelist. Nevertheless, he continued to affirm that the book remained canonical because it met criteria of authenticity applied to everything biblical; it characterized the community of faith as worshiping God alone. The true Church of Revelation avoided the idolatry that comes with conflating God and creation. Contrary to his polemical detractors, Zwingli argued that the passage in Revelation 5 concerning 24 elders did not establish a warrant for the

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22 This was a reprint of a treatise by Wycliffe's associate, John Purvey, now titled *Commentarius in apocalypsin ante centum annos aeditus* (1528). Of course, in certain contexts Luther had already begun referring to popes as 'antichrists' as early as 1520.

23 Instead of consisting of pope and emperor, Luther's vision of the traditional antichristological tandem seems to consist of pope and Turks. Cf. Backus: 2000b, 7–11.

24 Ironically, Erasmus was usually lumped together with other evangelicals in this vein of pro-papal polemics, even though Erasmus himself went to increasingly great lengths to differentiate himself from the evangelical partisans.

traditional notion of saintly intercession, but rather depicted the worship that God alone receives from *all* the blessed (ZW 1, 294f).[25] Zwingli appealed to Revelation against claims of prerogatives being reserved to special saints in heaven or, for that matter, to ordained priests on earth. He likened the 'indelible character' supposedly conferred in the sacrament of priestly ordination to an antichristian 'mark of the beast' (ZW 1, 415).[26] Zwingli agreed with the prevalent opinion of scholarship concerning Johannine authorship, but he also positively invoked the book as a reflection of proper theology, practice, and institutional structure. He also perceived a juxtaposition of Roman hierarchy and evangelical ministry that intimated the peculiar, pivotal place of reformation 'in the last times' (*in den lezten zyten*).

1.7   The Peculiar Significance of the Zurich School of Eschatology

Zwingli's vindication of Revelation illustrates some of the defining features of the Zurich Reformation. Among the evangelical hotspots, Zurich proved especially fecund territory in developing an End-Times idiom. Collegial leadership in the movement to reform Zurich's territorial church operated within an exegetical matrix with strong dependence upon End-Times themes of Revelation, Daniel, Malachi, and Matthew. Notwithstanding historians' broader profile of the Reformation in the Rhineland, including pervasive apocalyptic themes of Anabaptism as well as the upheavals of 1525, it remains valid to distinguish a discrete 'Zurich school.' Irena Backus has focused scholarly attention upon Zurich's significance in this view of exegetical history (cf. 2000a; 2000b). Building upon her contributions, I intend to clarify more of the positive correlation between End-Times idiom and the distinctive establishment of Zurich's institutional framework.

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25 The correct day in Zwingli's title, "*Uslegen und gründ der schlussreden oder artikel durch Huldrychen Zwingli, Zürich uf den XIX [*sic*] tag jenners im MDXXIII jar usgangen,*" should be the 29th. The twentieth article concerns God as the sole giver of gifts in His own name. Zwingli quotes his opponents' claim that the '24 elders' appear to pray on our behalf. Zwingli at first marshals certain opinions (ancient and modern) more critical of the book of Revelation. He adds, however: "*Blybe apocalypsis, wie es mag,*" and he goes on to point favorably to the image of prayer as the act of all the blessed who worship God alone. Zwingli also points to a supposed homily by Augustine that argues similarly on the basis of Revelation against appeals for the intercessory prayers of godlike saints.

26 The 61st article concerns "recent [literally: in these last times – *in den lezten zyten*] claims of a special priestly character that Scripture does not justify." Zwingli says that ministry is an office, not a mark of self-referential privilege: "*Es sye denn, daß sy sich des characters begeben wellind, mit dem die diener des untiers bezeichnet werdend. Apoc. XIII.16.* and *XIV.9.*"

In Wittenberg, eschatological and/or apocalyptic elements played a much more limited role in building social institutions. Luther famously emphasized anti-papal antichristology, but this did not entail specifically End-Times corollaries for positive reconfiguration of institutional leadership. Melanchthon, for his part, edited a work of world history with eschatological ramifications in 1532, but the treatise served primarily astrological purposes. The Melanchthon-inspired industry of *practica* (essentially almanacs) focused attention on the dialectic of reading through faith to grasp nature's signs of imminent cosmic breakdown. This practice did not necessitate any eschatologically motivated positive reworking of institutional life (Barnes: 2004, 131–53). Only in the build-up to the Schmalkaldic War did Lutherans begin to write with more reliance on a composite picture drawn from Daniel 7 and Revelation. Even then, they indicated no clear vision for a new society in the here and now (Backus: 2000a, 64–67).

Developments in the independent city-state of Geneva also illustrate, by way of contrast, the End-Times idiosyncrasies of Zurich. Calvin never wrote or preached on Revelation and he took a rather critical stance toward the Johannine epistles featuring rhetoric of the Antichrist.[27] While he did write a commentary on Daniel in 1561, Calvin steadfastly refused to grant any precise eschatological significance whatsoever to the vision of beasts in Daniel 7. He also opposed the use of Daniel as a direct key to interpreting the book of Revelation. Calvin interpreted Daniel's prophecies without recourse to papal and/or Islamic antichrists; for him, Daniel's prophetic reach extended at most to the time of Julius Caesar, and thus lacks direct relevance for discussions of world history after Christ's first Advent or for an approaching Second Coming (Backus: 2000a, 69–72). Calvin's application of biblical End-Times rhetoric had more to do with humanistic appeals to ancient precedents than it did to any templates of an imminent transformation of Christendom.[28]

Notwithstanding Zwingli's humanistic qualms about the book of Revelation, early evangelical Zurich quickly became a center of Scriptural interpretation

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27 In his 1581 Commentary on Revelation, Nicolas Colladon claimed to have private knowledge of Calvin's fondness for the book, despite the latter's steadfast refusal to treat Revelation in any public way. Colladon's claim is at best difficult to verify, and it probably reflects an effort to give a luster of orthodoxy to a then new direction among Calvinist writers.

28 Calvin's close friend and colleague, Theodore Beza, published a new Latin edition of the New Testament in 1557 that included annotations defending the canonicity and clarity of Revelation. To some extent, this may reflect the influence of exegetical writings that already had been coming out of Zurich. But Beza did not wander far from Calvin; he utterly rejected any connection to an eschatological millennium in the book of Revelation. Beza's primary goal was not a constructive eschatology, but the more academic desire to disprove Erasmus' negative insinuations regarding Revelation's place in the Christian canon. See Backus: 2000b, 27.

with an unusually robust End-Times emphasis. As Walter Meyer has demonstrated, Zwingli developed clear eschatological language with institutional ramifications, especially in and after his 1523 works such as *Auslegen und Gründe der Schlußreden* or *Von götlicher und menschlicher grechtigheit.* Meyer observes that Zwingli, as the people's priest – especially in comparison to Luther the professor – would have naturally shown great interest in the details of church and state institutions (1987, 57 f, 108). For Zwingli, the collective realm of *corpus Christianum* was the area where human righteousness correlated with (but never merely 'relatively' embodied) the absolute, eschatological telos of divine righteousness. The already-completeness of divine righteousness was precisely the eschaton, the always outside-of-self point of reference necessary for any evangelical soteriology. Absolute divine righteousness supplied a hope of that which is not yet realized. From a berth of complete otherness, this divine righteousness nevertheless illuminated progress in human righteousness within the here and now. The specific here and now of eschatological hope and of progress toward final blessedness is the *corpus Christianum*, the institutional coordination of institutions of church and state (Meyer: 1987, 215).

Zwingli's death – itself a nearly apocalyptic shock to many Swiss evangelicals – did not diminish this interpretive trend in Zurich. Already by 1542, Leo Jud had prepared a popular paraphrase of Revelation. Its publication was widely influential, in part because this particular paraphrase was inserted into some editions of Erasmus' *Paraphases*, even though the Dutch humanist himself had deliberately excluded Revelation (Backus: 2000b, 29f). Jud did not make much of the typical identifications of the pope as Antichrist and he avoided millennial speculation but did utilize End-Times aspects of Scripture in order to orient the community in its proper profile of worship.

The erudite Zurich scholar Theodore Bibliander lectured on Revelation in 1543–1544 and collected his thoughts in a 1545 publication titled *Relatio fidelis.* Bibliander did not oppose Jud's pastoral emphasis on spiritual formation, but he took a more academic approach. He defended Revelation's canonicity on the grounds of what he took to be the clarity of its content and its apostolic authorship (*contra* the opinion of earlier humanists, including Zwingli). Bibliander also, quite significantly, read Revelation as a source of insight for categorizing world history. Here one may note a direct legacy of the later Middle Ages integrated into the constitutive framework of Swiss Protestantism. There are remnants of apocalypticism – Joachite and/or Spiritual Franciscan – in Bibliander's perception that the *corpus Christianum* stands in a pivotal, final phase of human history. Working out his own modified interpretive vision of the End Times, Bibliander identified the angel of Revelation 20 not in the tradition of the Franciscan angel-popes, but as heralding the establishment of a literal millen-