



1. 'Ο ἐρχόμενος: A trinitarian approach to "the One coming"

'Ο ἐρχόμενος: un enfoque trinitario a "El que viene"

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Abstract

The main question of this research is what the meaning of the title *ὁ ἐρχόμενος* (Rev 1,4.8; 4,8) is, when applied to the One sitting on the throne (Rev 4,3). The pattern of an immovable God makes His portrayal as coming to earth seem unnatural. The pattern of an ubiquitous Spirit makes His coming to earth seem unnecessary. However, there are certain directions of interpretation on which account the study suggests that the eschaton is not only the second advent of Jesus, but also the coming of the God the Father and of the Spirit. The research is based on textual critical, exegetical, and inter-textual elements, as it argues that the formula "who is, who was, and who is to come" must be interpreted against the Greek picturing of various gods as continuously being in time (past, present, and future). The coming of God in Revelation is ultimately a conveyance of a portable throne, an image which falls in tune with the Jewish representation of the divine throne, as a movable object. Likewise, the Spirit is revealed to be the cause of the grand resurrection (Romans), as well as making eschatological promises in the first-person singular, some being related to the moment of the Parousia (Revelation). This has implications for the understanding of the eschaton as the conclusion of history brought about by the presence and direct involvement of the triune God.

Keywords

Eschaton — Revelation — 'Ο ἐρχόμενος — Trinity

Resumen

El interrogante principal de esta investigación es cuál es el significado del título *ὁ ἐρχόμενος* (Ap 1,4.8; 4,8), cuando se aplica a Aquel que está sentado en el trono (Ap 4,3). El modelo de un Dios inamovible hace que su representación como Uno que viene a la tierra parezca



antinatural. El modelo de un Espíritu omnipresente hace que su venida a la tierra parezca innecesaria. Sin embargo, hay ciertas corrientes de interpretación en cuya cuenta el estudio sugiere que el *eschaton* no es solo el segundo advenimiento de Jesús, sino también la venida del Dios Padre y del Espíritu. La investigación se basa en elementos críticos textuales, exegéticos e intertextuales, y sostiene que la fórmula “el que es y que era y que ha de venir” debe interpretarse a la luz de la imagen griega de varios dioses que están continuamente en el tiempo (pasado, presente y futuro). La venida de Dios en el Apocalipsis es, en última instancia, el traslado de un trono portátil, imagen que sintoniza con la representación judía del trono divino, como objeto móvil. Asimismo, se revela que el Espíritu es la causa de la gran resurrección (Romanos) y que hace promesas escatológicas en primera persona del singular, algunas relacionadas con el momento de la Parusía (Apocalipsis). Esto tiene implicaciones para la comprensión del *eschaton* como la conclusión de la historia provocada por la presencia y la participación directa del Dios triuno.

Palabras claves

Eschaton — Apocalipsis — Ὁ ἐρχόμενος — Trinidad

Introduction

When the Parousia is referred to by the expression “the second coming” it is inferred that the One coming had come to earth before. With the immeasurable number of texts which express the coming of Jesus Christ at the end of earth’s history, there is no wonder why the Parousia came to be associated almost exclusively with Christ. The coming is Christ’s coming. The aim of this study is to look at the Parousia from a Trinitarian perspective. Therefore, the question is the following: is there evidence in the Bible that the Father and the Holy Spirit are also going to be present at the consummation of all things?

To know the answer to this question is important because of its implications for theology (it contributes to the image of God and the Holy Spirit, especially as related to their involvement in the last things) and practice (it may count for faith whether God is simply waiting in heaven for the saved to be brought or comes to meet them). The first step of this endeavor is defining God’s immutability from the perspective of systematic theology. The second step requires finding a hypothesis regarding the question of this study which springs from the other major works in the salvation history. The third step presupposes the analysis of

biblical evidence (mainly in the Book of Revelation), which seems to confirm the hypothesis.

For the sake of clarity, in this paper, the term trinity/trinitarian is used, with Thomas Aquinas, in reference to “the number of persons of one essence” and to “the Persons numbered in the unity of nature”.¹ The oneness in nature or essence is called the ontological Trinity. The oneness in purpose, when the three entities (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) work together as a team, is called the economical Trinity.² Although some have denied this distinction, there is no serious reason to do so.³ Therefore, the trinitarian hypothesis in the title of this study refers to the coming of all three entities or persons of the Trinity at the consummation of all things.

The hypothesis of a trinitarian *Parousia*

Virtually all systematic theology works⁴ explain the doctrine of the last things in terms of Christ’s return, whether it be literal at the end of time, dispensational, or already realized. A good number of systematians view God’s coming as God’s acting in and through Christ’s *Parousia*.

¹ Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, trans. by Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, 2009), s. v. I q.31 a.1 ad 1.

² Robert A. Morey, *The Trinity: Evidence and issues* (Iowa Falls, IA: World Bible Publishers, 1996), 438–439.

³ John M. Frame, *The doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2002), 706-707.

⁴ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998), 1191-1200; Louis Berkhof, *The history of Christian doctrines* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1949), 270-272; Roy E. Gingrich, *Introduction to theology*, 2 vols. (Memphis, TN: Riverside, 2001), 2:35; Robert L. Reymond, *A new systematic theology of the Christian faith* (Nashville, TN: T. Nelson, 1998), 988-1047; Augustus Hopkins Strong, *Systematic theology* (Bellingham, WA: Logos, 2004), 1003-1014; Morton H. Smith, *Systematic theology*, vol. 1: *Prolegomena, theology, anthropology, Christology* (Greenville SC: Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary Press, 1996), 765-789; Rousas John Rushdoony, *Systematic theology*, 2 vols (Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books, 1994), 2:877-881; Robert Duncan Culver, *Systematic theology: Biblical and historical* (Ross-shire, UK: Mentor, 2005), 1111-1119; Norman L. Geisler, *Systematic theology*, vol. 4: *Church, last things* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2005), 552-553; Charles Hodge, *Systematic theology*, 3 vols (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos, 1997), 3:790-836; Edward Wilhelm August Koehler, *A summary of Christian doctrine: A popular presentation of the teachings of the Bible* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1999), 296-298; James Petigru Boyce, *Abstract of systematic theology* (Bellingham, WA: Logos, 2010), 451-453.

It is not clear whether this overlap comes from an exaggerated divine transcendence that paints a God similar to the unmoved Mover of Greek philosophy.⁵ Some theologians perceive that divine immutability means not only or not so much covenantal permanence, but rather “complete unresponsiveness”.⁶ In passing, we can easily sympathize with Norman Geisler in affirming: “While God is the unmoved mover, He is not the unmoving mover. He is immovable but not immobile”.⁷ But this may not be the only or the main reason why the *Parousia* is not associated with the Father. This may very well have been caused by the scarcity of evidence about the Father’s eschatological coming in the New Testament, despite the Old Testament generous evidence about the Day of the Lord⁸ and God’s coming.⁹

The hypothesis that God the Father should be involved in the last things, in the *Parousia* to be more specific, comes in two layers. First, from the perspective of protology, since creation was a Trinitarian work,¹⁰

⁵ C. Fred Smith, “Does classical Theism deny God’s immanence?,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 160 (2003): 23-33, esp. 26.

⁶ Thomas C. Oden, *The living God: Systematic theology* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992), 1:29.

⁷ Norman L. Geisler, *Systematic theology*, vol. 2: *God, creation* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2003), 257.

⁸ Isa 13,6,9; Ezek 13,5; 30,3; Joel 1,15; 2,1.11.31; 3,14; Amos 5,18.20; Obad 1,15; Zeph 1,7; Zech 14,1; Mal 4,5. Cf. Acts 2,20; 1 Cor 3,13; 1 Cor 5,5; 2 Cor 1,14; 1 Thess 5,2; 2 Thess 2,2; 2 Pet 3,10; Rev 1,10.

⁹ Psa 50,3; Isa 19,1; 40,10; 62,11; 66,15; Jer 47,4; Ezek 7; Hab 3,3; Mal 4,1.

¹⁰ A footnote would definitely be insufficient to articulate this hypothesis. However, and in brief, the idea is that the creation act is associated in Scripture not only with God the Father, but also with the Spirit and Jesus. The Spirit can lay behind the expression רִיחַ אֱלֹהִים (Gen 1,2), though contemporary scholarship recognizes that this is not without doubts. E.g., Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis— Chapters 1-17*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 111-114; Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, WBC (Dallas, TX: Word, 2002), 16-17. Cf. E. A. Speiser, *Genesis: Introduction, translation, and notes*, AYB (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 5. If the expression means “the Spirit of God” as elsewhere in the Old Testament (e.g., Gen 41,38; Ex 31,3; 35,31; Num 24,2; 1 Sam 10,10; 11,6; 2 Chr 15,1; etc.) this may affirm the presence of the Spirit at the act of creation. That Christ is presented in the NT as a Creator is a fact present in multiple texts. The most evident are John 1,3; Col 1,15-16; and Heb 1,2.10. For more details, see Ekkehardt Mueller, “Creation in the New Testament,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, 15, no 1 (Spring 2004): 47-62, esp. 57-59.

one may see eschatology in the same terms. Second, as far as soteriology is concerned, the problem of sin was and is being solved by the interplay between the Father, the Son, and the Spirit.¹¹ Christian soteriological experience comprises—from a Trinitarian standpoint— atonement (Heb 9,14; 10,29-31), knowing God (Acts 2,38-39), salvation (Rom 5,5-6; 8,9.11; Eph 2,18.21-22; 1 Pet 1,2), and assurance of salvation (Rom 8,14-17; Gal 3,3-6; 4,6), all blended around the triune Godhead.¹² Since the final victory is to be completely won at the consummation of all things, it is expected that the Trinity be involved in it. We are now turning to the New Testament (i.e. Revelation) evidence about the Father’s and the Spirit’s involvement in the *Parousia*, which are meant to test this hypothesis.

A trinitarian *Parousia* *The Parousia of the Father*

In the Book of Revelation, one of the divine titles of the Father is “the One who is, who was, and who is coming” (Rev 1,4.8; 4,1).¹³ Instead of ending the temporal formula with ὁ ἐσόμενος (“who will be”), as one might expect, John prefers ὁ ἐρχόμενος (“who is coming”). Phonetically,

¹¹ It is probably an oversimplification but the idea can be supported that God provided the means of salvation, which is Christ’s sacrifice, and that the Spirit is the one securing this sacrifice for individual benefit of the repentant and believing sinner. In other words, salvation is a work that involves all three persons of the Trinity. The illustration of Kevin Vanhoozer, *The drama of doctrine: A canonical-linguistic approach to Christian theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 448, is well fit here:

The Father is the playwright and producer of the action; the Son is the climax and summation of the action. The Spirit, as the one who unites us to Christ, is the dresser who clothes us with Christ’s righteousness, the prompter who helps us remember our biblical lines, and prop master who gives gifts (accessories) to each church member, equipping us to play our parts.

¹² Larry L. Lichtenwalter, “The person and work of the Holy Spirit in the general Epistles and the Book of Revelation,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 23, no 2 (2012): 72-111, esp. 75-76. See also J. Todd Billings, *The Word of God for the people of God: An entryway to the theological interpretation of Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 197-206.

¹³ In 1,8 one may conjecture that the subject is Christ, since He is the one described in v. 7 as the One coming. However, the title “the One who is and was and is coming” is a title exclusively applied to the Father as other titles which are descriptive of the Father (e.g., Alpha and Omega, the Almighty, etc.) are used in conjunction with this. See also Woodrow W. Whidden, “Trinitarian evidences in the Apocalypse,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 11, nos 1-2 (Spr-Aut, 2000): 248-260, esp. 249-250.

it is not a huge distance, but theologically it definitely is. God is not only One whose present existence prolongs into the future, but He is the One who holds the future and who comes.

Mounce says: “In the Greek world, similar titles for the gods are found. In the song of the doves at Dodona we read of ‘Zeus who was, Zeus who is, and Zeus who will be’”.¹⁴ It is also true of the Jewish thinking about the temporal infinity of YHWH.¹⁵ Many scholars do not perceive any difference in meaning between Zeus who was, is, and will be, and God who was, is, and is coming.¹⁶ The title in Revelation 1,4 seems to them to denote eternal existence only.¹⁷

But John seems to be using ὁ ἐρχόμενος in order to express something more than just the future aspect of divine existence. For R. H. Charles, this is because of Christ’s return, so much present in the book, in whom God Himself will come: “As for ὁ ἐρχόμενος, where our author returns to the participial construction, it is clear that he uses ἐρχόμενος, instead

¹⁴ Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 46. Mounce refers to Pausanias, *Description of Greece* 10: Ζεὺς ἦν, Ζεὺς ἔστιν, Ζεὺς ἔσσεται; Mounce also mentions that the “shrine of Minerva at Sais provides the inscription, ‘I am all that hath been and is and shall be’ (Plutarch, *De Isid.* 9)”. Other references include Plutarch, *Isis and Osiris* 9; Plato, *Timaeus* 37E (λέγομεν γὰρ δὴ ὡς ἦν ἔστιν τε καὶ ἔσται).

¹⁵ Clemens Alexandrinus, *Stromata* 5.6.34.6.1, explains the meaning of the tetragrammaton (YHWH) as ὁ ὦν καὶ ὁ ἐσόμενος. See also the Jerusalem Targum to Deut 32,39: “I am he who is and who was and I am he who will be ...”. J. Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation: Introduction, translation, and commentary* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 377.

¹⁶ According to Pierre Prigent, the meaning really is that God will be. Pierre Prigent, *L’Apocalypse de Jean*, Commentaire Du Nouveau Testament XIV (Lausanne, CH: Delachaux et Niestlé, 1981), 16. Prigent would translate ὁ ἐρχόμενος as ὁ ἐσόμενος, although he recognizes that the would-be formula has been altered in order to describe God in Christological terms, as the idea of coming is usually conveying the return of the Son.

¹⁷ So Simon J. Kistemaker and William Hendriksen, *New Testament commentary: Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, NT 20 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1953-2001), 81. They affirm: “This greeting is unique and reveals God’s infinity with respect to present, past, and future. God is timeless from eternity to eternity”. Richard Lehmann argues that the coming of God conveys two things: God is not atemporal or timeless (He comes into our history) and He is in “constant proximity” (based on the present participle).

God is present but also on the way to his followers. Cf: Richard Lehmann, *L’Apocalypse de Jean: Commentaire biblique* (Norderstedt, DE: BoD, 2018), 26-27.

of ἐσόμενος, with a definite reference to the contents of the book and especially to the coming of Christ, 1,7; 2,5.16; 3,2; 22,7.12, etc., *in whose coming God Himself comes also*.¹⁸ Eugene Boring contends that unlike the Greek formulas, “John speaks not only of God’s being but of his acts: ‘he comes’”.¹⁹

From the above lines, one distinguishes three explanations for the use of the participle ἐρχόμενος: (a) it signifies that God is eternal, (b) it tells that God comes in Christ, and (c) it is a straightforward information about God that He will come at the end of time. The first two views find support in the biblical intertextuality. God is eternal, without a beginning and an end.²⁰ It is also correct to say that, to some extent, God was in Christ in the work of redemption and in the manifestation of Christ as a human being.²¹ But are these definitive reasons to believe that the application of the phrase ὁ ἐρχόμενος to the Father does not imply that the Father actually comes?

It is the purpose of this study to provide neglected evidence which support the last view. First, to a certain extent, the expression speaks for itself. The Greek language has all the necessary means to express the future of “to be”, either in the indicative or in the participle. The fact that John does not opt for any of these but chooses an alternative is meaningful.²² It appears that he wanted to say something other than what he would have been able to declare by the future of the verb “to be”. Second,

¹⁸ R. H. Charles, *A critical and exegetical commentary on the Revelation of St John*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh, UK: T&T Clark International, 1920), 10 (italics mine).

¹⁹ M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation, interpretation, a Bible commentary for teaching and preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1989) 75.

²⁰ E.g., Isa 40,28 (παῖς ἡ γῆ), Rom 16,26 (ὁ αἰώνιος θεός). See also Heb 9,14 which speaks about the eternal Spirit and the living God: πόσω μᾶλλον τὸ αἷμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὃς διὰ πνεύματος αἰωνίου ἑαυτὸν προσήνεγκεν ἄμωμον τῷ θεῷ, καθαρῆι τὴν συνείδησιν ἡμῶν ἀπὸ νεκρῶν ἔργων εἰς τὸ λατρεύειν θεῷ ζῶντι.

²¹ E.g., 2 Cor 5,19 (θεός ἦν ἐν Χριστῷ κόσμον καταλλάσσων ἑαυτῷ); John 14,9-10 (λέγει αὐτῷ ὁ Ἰησοῦς τοσοῦτω χρόνῳ μεθ’ ὑμῶν εἰμι καὶ οὐκ ἔγνωκας με, Φίλιππε; ὁ ἑωρακώς ἐμὲ ἑώρακεν τὸν πατέρα πῶς σὺ λέγεις δεῖξόν ἡμῖν τὸν πατέρα; οὐ πιστεύεις ὅτι ἐγὼ ἐν τῷ πατρὶ καὶ ὁ πατὴρ ἐν ἐμοὶ ἐστιν).

²² Steven E. Runge, *A Discourse grammar of the Greek New Testament* (Bellingham, WA: Logos, 2010), 16, gives a generic example:

the same expression appears truncated elsewhere in the book, the key phrase, ὁ ἐρχόμενος, being left out. Indeed, God is called in Revelation 11,17 and 16,5 by the idiom ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν. Minuscules between the 10th and the 15th centuries (051, 35, 1006, 1773, 1957) try to harmonize the divine name adding the missing ὁ ἐρχόμενος in Revelation 11,17. These late manuscripts, nonetheless, cannot compete with the agreement between early manuscripts (P47, Ⲙ, A, C).²³ Based on this omission, like many others,²⁴ Ekkehardt Mueller inferred that “God will have come at

If I choose to do X when Y and Z are also available options, this means that I have at the same time chosen *not* to do Y or Z. Most of these decisions are made without conscious thought. As speakers of the language, we just do what fits best in the context based on what we want to communicate. Although we may not think consciously about these decisions, we are nonetheless making them.

- ²³ The best manuscript agreement is not the only reason why ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν should be accepted in Rev 11,17. The most effective text-critical methodology especially applicable in Revelation is the following. J. K. Elliott, in “A short textual commentary on the Book of Revelation and the ‘New’ Nestle”, *Novum Testamentum* 56 (2014): 68-100, esp. 71:

I tend to accept as “original” a reading that conforms to the language, style, vocabulary (and, indeed, the theology) of the earliest recoverable text. One can plot and establish each Biblical author’s style and usage from the many ‘safe’ places where all extant manuscripts are in agreement, there being no reported variant. Having established the usage from the secure places, variants that concern a feature agreeing with the authors’ practice elsewhere are likely to represent the earlier text. Obviously, it may transpire that some hitherto firm readings may be challenged by subsequent collations, but, in general, it often works out that one is able to establish an author’s preferences and then one can see which variants conform to and which readings disagree with that usage.

In our case, the original formula appears to have been the complete one (1,4,8; 4,1) while the scribe tries to harmonize 11,17 with this earlier formula, nonetheless, leaving the short formula in 16,5 as it is.

- ²⁴ “Dieu et le Christ n’ont plus a ‘venir’, la Parousie a eu lieu”. Ernest Bernard Allo, *Saint Jean L’Apocalypse*, 2nd ed. (Paris, FR: Librairie Victor Lecoffre, 1921), 150. “On ne dit pas, cette fois: ‘qui vient’ (cf. i,8; iv,8), parce que précisément, Dieu arrive” (“It does not say this time ‘who is coming’ (cf. I,8; iv,8) because precisely, God is coming”). Alfred Loisy, *L’Apocalypse de Jean* (Paris, FR: Émile Nourry, 1923), 219. So also Gerhard Maier, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes Teil 1: Kapitel 1-11*, HTA (Witten, DE: SCM, 2014) 497; Ranko Stefanović, *Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2002) 360; George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972), 162. “Its absence (except in some inferior authorities) in 11:17 illustrates the meaning, for there a visitation of God is spoken of as having already come to pass”. F. J. A. Hort, *The Apocalypse of St. John 1-3: The Greek text with introduction, commentary, and additional notes* (London, UK: Macmillan, 1908), 11.

that time. God the Father is also coming”.²⁵ Moreover, even the late manuscripts which alter Revelation 11,17 leave Revelation 16,5 untouched and this text again has ὁ ἐρχόμενος removed from the divine title.

There is no reason to omit ἐρχόμενος if it simply carries the same denotation as ἐσόμενος. If one does that, it is like depriving God of his future eternity. However, if ὁ ἐρχόμενος reflects God’s movement towards earth at the great consummation,²⁶ it makes sense to drop it in two sections of the book where indeed the great consummation is in view.

According to Ranko Stefanović,²⁷ the seventh trumpet, which 11,17 is part of, is blown at the end of earth’s history (cf. 11,15.17-19). The idea that God is “the One who is and who was” means that by the time of the seventh trumpet God will have come (cf. 10,7). A general overview of the structure of the book indicates that “the visions prior to the break at the end of chapter 14 deal primarily with the Christian Era. The visions after that break are focused on the era of eschatological judgment”.²⁸ Revelation 1-14 presents the various Christian eras from different angles, in a recapitulative form. In other words, all major sections present phenomena that deal with the church or with the world between the two advents of Christ. For this reason, the seventh trumpet must be the end of the earth, which culminates with the *Parousia*.

²⁵ Ekkehardt Mueller, “Jesus and His Second Coming in the Apocalypse”, *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 11, nos 1-2 (Spr-Aut, 2000): 205-215, esp. 206-207.

²⁶ John does not only describe the future God ontologically, but in terms of His works: He comes to save and judge. The NT writer most probably envision those plentiful OT prophetic instances where God is depicted as coming to do these very things: to save and judge (e.g. Psa 96,13; 98,9; Isa 40,10; 66,15; Zech 14,5). Early Christians understood this Jewish background in reference to God’s coming to complete the final purpose of the world and identified the event as the Parousia of Jesus Christ. Richard Bauckham, in *The theology of the Book of Revelation*, NTT (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 29-30, says:

Thus John interprets the divine name as indicating not God’s eternity in himself apart from the world, but his eternity in relation to the world. This is the biblical God who chooses, as his own future, his coming to his creation, and whose creation will find its own future in him (cf 21:3).

²⁷ Ranko Stefanović, *Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2002), 357, 359-360.

²⁸ Kenneth A. Strand, “The eight basic visions”, in *Symposium on Revelation-Book I*, ed. by Frank B. Holbrook (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), 29.

At the same time, Revelation 16,5 falls in the section of the seven last plagues. This is an eschatological vision of the divine wrath ready to unleash in a time without any mediatory intervention (Rev 15,1,8; cf. 14,10). This also culminates with the coming of Christ. To call God in those two moments of history as “the One who is and who was” suggests that for John, by the time of the last trumpet and the seven bowls, God will have come.²⁹

The third argument that ὁ ἐρχόμενος conveys a God who literally comes is intertextual and based primarily on data from the vision of the seven seals. The sixth seal represents a picture of the final consummation. The whole category of the lost express their desperation in vivid and meaningful words: καὶ λέγουσιν τοῖς ὄρεσιν καὶ ταῖς πέτραις πέσετε ἐφ’ ἡμᾶς καὶ κρύψατε ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ προσώπου τοῦ καθημένου ἐπὶ τοῦ θρόνου καὶ ἀπὸ τῆς ὀργῆς τοῦ ἀρνίου, ὅτι ἦλθεν ἡ ἡμέρα ἡ μεγάλη τῆς ὀργῆς αὐτῶν, καὶ τίς δύναται σταθῆναι:

And they said to the mountains and the rocks: “Fall on us and hide us from the face of the One sitting on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb, because the great day of their wrath has come and who is able to stand?” (Rev 6,16-17).

Two details are paramount in this text. The wicked are afraid to face the One sitting on the throne and the wrath of the Lamb. These are not two images for the same entity. Two distinct characters are presented here. The One sitting on the throne is single-handedly an expression of God in Revelation (cf. Rev 4-5, 21). When Christ alludes to His sitting on the throne He means the Father’s throne that He shares (Rev 3,21). In light of 3,21, Jesus comes as enthroned with the Father, so the latter

²⁹ “Dieu n’est pas appelle ici ὁ ἐρχόμενος, parce qu’il est la deja, en pleine activite de juge” (Allo, *L’Apocalypse*, 234). So also, Loisy, *L’Apocalypse de Jean*, 287; Traugott Holtz, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes: Neubearbeitung* (Göttingen, DE: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008), 22.

comes too.³⁰ Therefore, the Lamb is “joined with God in the approaching visitation”.³¹

What also follows is that Revelation 6,16 is not a picture of God’s wrath manifested in Christ. That God is present at the time of the wicked’s lamentation derives from three lines of evidence. First is the expression “the face of”. This is a metonymy, “an anthropomorphic image evoking His presence”.³² Second, if the Lamb’s presence is taken literally, the one of the Father shares naturally the same status. Third, the expression “the day of *their* great wrath” proves that the wicked do not only fear the Lamb-Christ, but also God the Father who sits on the throne under their very eyes. That is indeed a time when “sinners dread [...] having to stand before a holy and righteous God”.³³

In this context, another intertextual argument that God the Father also comes at the *Parousia* springs from the last seal. Revelation 8,1 speaks of a silence in heaven of about half an hour. If by this silence heaven is seen as the home of a *Deus solus/solitarius* we most probably miss the point.³⁴

³⁰ Theodor Zahn, in *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, vol. 2 (Leipzig, DE: Erlangen, 1926), 365, says:

Das Himmelsgewölbe selbst, an welchem ein Licht nach dem andern erloschen ist, gleicht einer Schriftrolle, welche bis dahin entrollt gewesen war und, in welcher, wie wir hinzudenken dürfen, Astronomen und Astrologen seit Jahrtausenden forschend gelesen haben, reißt sich nun vom Horizont ab und wird nun wieder von unsichtbarer Hand zusammengerollt, weil der Menschensohn, der jetzt noch mit dem Weltschöpfer über allen Himmeln thront, auf den Wolken des Himmels zur Erde kommen soll.

³¹ Isbon T. Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John: Studies in introduction with a critica land exegetical commentary* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1919), 529-530. See also Paige Patterson, *Revelation*, NAC 39, ed. by E. Ray Clendenen (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2012), 188; Leon Morris, *Revelation: An introduction and commentary*, TNTC 20 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 111.

³² Stephen S. Smalley, *The Revelation to John* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005), 170.

³³ Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 1-7: An exegetical commentary* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1992) 456. Pointing to Gen 3,8 as a background, Henry Barclay Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, 2nd ed., CCGNT (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1906), 92-93, remarks: “The Apocalypticist foresees the same shrinking from the sight of God in the last generation of mankind which Genesis attributes to the parents of the race”.

³⁴ David Aune reveals five possible meanings of the silence in Rev 8,1, of which I mention only three here: primordial silence, a prelude to divine visitation, and silence in worship. Aune embraces the last option. David E. Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, WBC (Dallas, TX: Word, 2002), 507. However, the context of the seals seems to rather confirm the second option.

At the time of the seventh seal, it is silence in heaven not because God is alone, while the whole heaven is emptied. If it is true that Christ will descend with all the angels (πάντες οἱ ἄγγελοι, Matt 25,31) it is hard to conceive that God who is the Alpha and Omega will passively wait alone in heaven for the angelic and human host to reach heaven upon return. It would be more natural to admit that this may be another indicator that God the Father is present at the consummation. This, in turn, may clarify the statement of Jesus that He will return “in the glory of His Father” (Matt 16,27; Mark 8,38) or “in His glory and of the Father” (Luke 9,26). God’s glory involves God’s real presence at the event.

The Parousia of the Spirit

There is no language in the Bible that presents the Holy Spirit as coming. This is not to say that the Spirit disassociates Himself from the event of the *Parousia*. Wolfgang Pannenberg states:

In primitive Christian testimonies the importance of the Holy Spirit in the event of final consummation is not so plain as the function of the gift of the Spirit as an anticipation of eschatological salvation. Yet it would be a mistake to conclude that the Spirit will have no decisive function any longer at the eschatological consummation itself. Instead, the gift of the Spirit can have for the believer’s present the significance of an anticipation and pledge of future salvation only because the Spirit is also the power of God effecting future salvation itself.³⁵

The presence of the Spirit at the time of the consummation is discernible from His association with the preparation of the church, precursory to the final events of earth’s history, His involvement in the resurrection of the faithful, and His contribution to the eschatological promises of Revelation 2-3 and 22,17.

Joel 2,28-29 presents the spirit of God coming to Israel, through whom God is “communicating himself to his creatures”.³⁶ The special endowment with the Spirit on the day of Pentecost following Jesus’ ascension is taken by Peter as a direct fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy (*cf.* Acts.

³⁵ Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991-1998), 3:622.

³⁶ Leslie C. Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiab, Jonah, and Micah*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), 98.

2,17-21). According to Joel, this precedes the Day of the Lord, but before that moment, the presence of the Spirit is a time of salvation. Later, Peter addresses a strong call to repentance so that the times of refreshing can come and Jesus be sent (*cf.* Acts 3,19-20). The Spirit has the role to prepare for the return of Christ.³⁷ “For the Spirit brings to the churches the powerful word of Christ, rebuking, encouraging, promising and threatening, touching and drawing the hearts, minds and consciences of its hearers, directing the lives and the prayers of the Christian communities towards the coming of Christ”.³⁸

This argument tells us that the Spirit is in the world, at work, prior to the *Parousia*. If this does not mean that the Spirit comes proper, some biblical theologians perceive the event of the resurrection as similar to the *Parousia* of the Spirit and the basis hope of the faithful (*cf.* Rom 8,11).³⁹ Though the resurrection is not a coming *per se*, it “can be regarded as in a real sense the climax of the bodily outworking of the Spirit’s life in the here and now”.⁴⁰ The spirit worked out the resurrection of Christ and is the “vivifying principle”⁴¹ which will effect the resurrection of the faithful.

In the section of the seven churches in Revelation (chaps. 2-3), there is an interesting interplay between Jesus who begins each of the seven

³⁷ In ancient Christianity, to be “in the Spirit” reclaimed the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, a manifestation of the last days (Joel 2,28). Having this gift effectively working within it, it is equivalent to say that the church lives in the eschatological times. Before that actually happens, the Spirit directs the life of the church towards the Parousia. The visions received and related by John were meant to provide an eschatological meaning to the historical circumstances of the seven churches of Asia during the reign of Domitian. “They were to show the meaning in those circumstances of living towards the coming of Christ”. Richard Bauckham, *The climax of prophecy* (Edinburgh, UK: T. & T. Clark, 1993), 159.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 161.

³⁹ “Here the Spirit of God that resurrected Jesus is not only the very Spirit animating the churches in Rome but also the basis of their future hope”. Robert Jewett, *Romans: A commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2006), 492.

⁴⁰ James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, WBC (Dallas, TX: Word, 2002), 445. See also Pannenberg, *Systematic theology* 3:622.

⁴¹ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans: A new translation with introduction and commentary*, AYB (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 491.

epistles (“Thus says He who”) and the Spirit, who ends each message (“This is what the Spirit says to the churches”). For some scholars this means that Christ works in the church through the Spirit.⁴² For others, it simply means that the Spirit speaks to the churches alongside Christ.⁴³ However, it may be much more. As Lenski suggested long ago: “Here the Spirit is named because it is his especial work to operate through the means of grace and to effect faith by hearing (Rom 10,17) and all its fruits, love, endurance, etc.”⁴⁴ The first three promises pertain to the Spirit,⁴⁵ whereas the last four are given by Jesus. What is interesting is that all are given in the first person. The Spirit promises access to the tree of life, protection from the second death, and hidden manna and a white stone. Whatever these symbols refer to, they are to be seen as promises to be fulfilled by the Spirit at the time of the *Parousia*.

The Book of Revelation presents the Spirit from an eschatological perspective. Not only that the Spirit prepares a community of faith pertaining to the age to come. Not only that He predicts the events of the end. But He is specifically present at the consummation of all things as Revelation 22,17 depicts: “The Spirit and the Bride say ‘come!’”. Richard Bauckham interprets this eschatologically. Summed up, his arguments comprise the fact that the Bride is descriptive of the church at the *Parousia* (19,7-8; cf. 21,2), that the exclamatory entreaty “come!” reflects Christ’s promise to come, three times mentioned in the epilogue of the book (22,7.12.20), and that the invitation to come and drink living water can only point to the river of life, which is part of the new creation (21,6;

⁴² “The formula also shows that Christ’s words are none other than the words of the Spirit and that Christ dwells among the churches through the Spirit” G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A commentary on the Greek text* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 234.

⁴³ “The Holy Spirit is also speaking directly through these letters, and that is the more likely emphasis here”. Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, BECNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 122.

⁴⁴ R. C. H. Lenski, *The interpretation of St. John’s Revelation* (Columbus, OH: Lutheran Book Concern, 1935), 92.

⁴⁵ Τῷ νικῶντι δώσω αὐτῷ φαγεῖν ἐκ τοῦ ξύλου τῆς ζωῆς, ὃ ἐστὶν ἐν τῷ παραδείσῳ τοῦ θεοῦ (Rev 2,7), Ὁ νικῶν οὐ μὴ ἀδικηθῆν ἐκ τοῦ θανάτου τοῦ δευτέρου (Rev 2,11), Τῷ νικῶντι δώσω αὐτῷ τοῦ μάννα τοῦ κεκρυμμένου καὶ δώσω αὐτῷ ψῆφον λευκὴν (Rev 2,17).

22,1-2).⁴⁶ Klaus Berger rightly observes that Revelation 22,17 echoes John 4,10-15 and 7,38.⁴⁷ The free water reflects Jesus’s offer at Jacob’s well that seems to relate to the abundance of the Holy Spirit at the end of times.

Conclusions

This paper raised the hypothesis that all three persons of the Trinity are involved in eschatology in general and in the event of the *Parousia* in particular. The hypothesis is evincible on several grounds.

First, in Revelation, God the Father is named ὁ ἐρχόμενος, which means more than the future aspect of divine existence. Second, God appears to be present at the *Parousia* in at least three passages when He is either described as present at *Parousia* or defined by an abbreviated form of the formula “the One who is, who was and who is coming”, wherein the last element is left out (e.g., Rev 6,16; 8,1; 11,17; 16,5). Third, in the Epistle to the Romans, the Spirit is revealed to be the one effective cause behind the resurrection of the dead. Fourth, in Revelation the Spirit makes eschatological promises in the first-person singular, some being related to the moment of the *Parousia*.

There is no wonder then, that sometimes the final consummation is simply called in the New Testament “the Day of God” (2 Pet 3,12). Therefore, depending on the context, the Greek phrase ὁ ἐρχόμενος can refer to both the Father (e.g., Rev 1,4.8; 4,1) and the Son (Heb 10,37; cf. Matt 11,3; 21,9; Luke 13,35; John 6,14). It never applies to the Spirit, but the Spirit is present at the end of all things. Accordingly, the *Parousia* denotes the presence of all three persons of the Trinity, at the very end of history.

⁴⁶ Bauckham, *Climax of prophecy*, 166-168. For similar thoughts, see Smalley, *Revelation to John*, 577; Craig R. Koester, *Revelation: A new translation with introduction and commentary*, AYB (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), 844.

⁴⁷ Klaus Berger, *Die Apokalypse des Johannes: Kommentar* (Freiburg, DE: Herder, 2017) 1516.