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THE CONDITION OF THE SEVEN CHURCHES

The final pro-Domitianic argument from the internal evidence that we will consider is that which is drawn from the epistolary preface to Revelation. It is averred by many that the Seven Letters to the churches of Asia contain historical allusions demanding a late date. Turning our attention again to the order of argument given by Morris, we cite his fourth objection to the early date: "A further indication is that the churches of Asia Minor seem to have a period of development behind them. This would scarcely have been possible at the time of the Neronic persecution, the only serious competitor in date to the Domitianic period. " [1] Guthrie also lists this as his fourth argument, and confidently so. After expressing some hesitancy in employing the Nero *Redivivus* myth, he notes of the present argument that here "we are on firmer ground" due to "certain positive indications of internal conditions" indicated in the letters.[2] This line of reasoning is cited as Swete's first point in establishing the late date from internal considerations;[3] it appears as the second argument in Charles, Moffatt, and Mounce (among his minor arguments), and third in Kümmel.[4]

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1. Leon Morns, *The Revelation of St. John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), p. 37.

2. Donald Guthrie, New *Testament Introduction*, 3rd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1970), p. 954.

3. Henry Barclay Swete, *Commentary on Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, [1906] 1977), pp. c-ci.

4. R. H. Charles, *The Revelation of St. John, 2* vols. International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920) 1 :xciv; James Moffatt, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine*, in W. R. Nicoll, cd., *Englishman's Greek Testament, vol. 5* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, rep. 19S0), p. 316; Werner Georg Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 17th ed., trans. Howard C. Kee (Nashville Abingdon, 1973), p. 469; Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation. New* International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), p. 34.

The data discerned from this perspective is almost universally employed among late date advocates. Although there is a wide variety of approaches constructed from the material of the Seven Letters, only the more solid evidences will be tested at this juncture. We will show that none of the arguments is detrimental to early date advocacy. In keeping with the approach utilized throughout this section of our work, we will follow the order found in Morris's work on Revelation.

The Wealth of the Church in Laodicea (Rev. 3: 17)

Revelation 3:17 reads:

> Because you say, "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing," and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked.

Morris notes that in the Laodicean letter "we are told that the church in Laodicea was 'rich, and increased with goods' (iii. 17). But as the city was destroyed by an earthquake in A.D. 60/61 this must have been considerably later."[5] Mounce and Kümmel also endorse this observation, a major component of the complex of evidence derived from the Seven Letters.[6]

It is true that Laodicea was destroyed by an earthquake about this time; the evidence for both the fact of the earthquake and its date are clear from Tacitus.[7] The idea behind the argument is that such a devastating event as an earthquake must necessarily have severe and long term economic repercussions on the community. And in such a community, the minority Christians could be expected to have suffered, perhaps even disproportionately. If Revelation were written sometime in the period from A.D. 64-70, it would seem to Morris, Mounce, and others, that the time-frame would be too compressed to allow for the enrichment of the church at Laodicea, as is suggested in Revelation. But by the time of Domitian a few decades later, such

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5. Morris, *Revelation,* p. 37.

6. Mounce, Revelation, p. 35 and Kümmel, *Introduction*, p. 469.

7. Tacitus, *Annals* 1427. Most scholars accept the dating from Tacitus. Eusebius (Chronicle *64)* and Orosius speak of it as occurring after the fire that destroyed Rome in A.D. 64, according to C. J. Hemer, *A Study of the Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia with Special Reference to Their Local Background* (Manchester: unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, 1969), p. 417; cited in Mounce, *Revelation,* p. 123, n. 31.

an enrichment of the church would not be difficult to imagine.

Despite the *prima facie* plausibility of this argument it does not carry sufficient weight to serve as an anchor for the late date theory. Some suspicion is immediately cast on the argument when it is noted that it is avoided by such noteworthy late date advocates as conservative scholars Swete and Guthrie, and such liberal proponents as Charles and Moffatt.[8] The refusal of these scholars to make reference to this argument is not necessarily destructive to the cause, of course. But it is at least curious that such vigorous liberal and conservative advocates do not deem it to be of merit.

The Nature of the "Riches"

We should note also that it may be that the reference to "riches" made by John is a reference to spiritual riches, and not to material wealth at all.

> These riches and other goods in which the Laodicean Church and Angel gloried we must understand as *spiritual* riches in which they fondly imagined they abounded. . . . [T]his language in this application is justified by numerous passages in Scripture: as by Luke xii. 21; 1 Cor. i:5; 2 Cor. viii. 9; above all, by two passages of holy irony, 1 Cor. iv. 8 and Hos. xii. 8; both standing in very closest connexion with this; I can indeed hardly doubt that there is intended a reference to the latter of these words of our Lord. The Laodicean Angel, and the church he was drawing into the same ruin with himself, were walking in a vain show and imagination of their own righteousness, their own advances in spiritual insight and knowledge.[9]

A good number of commentators suggest allusion here to 1 Corinthians 4:8 and Hosea 12:8. Additional passages such as Luke 18:11, 12; 16: 15; and 1 Corinthians 13:1 can be consulted as well. If this interpretation of "riches" in Revelation 3:17 is valid, then the entire force of this argument is dispelled. Surprisingly, this is even the view of Mounce: "The material wealth of Laodicea is well established. The huge sums taken from Asian cities by Roman officials during the Mithridatic period and following indicate enormous wealth. . . . The 'wealth' claimed by the Laodicean church, however, was not

8. See references to their works cited above.

9. R. C. Trench, *Commentary on the Epistles to t/u Seven Churches*, 4th ed. (London: Macmillan, 1883), p. 210.

material but spiritual. . . . [T]he Laodiceans felt they were secure in their spiritual attainment ." [10]

The Ease of the Recovery

In addition, there is the impressive historical evidence of the situation that tends to undermine the rationale of the argument, even if material riches are in view. Most ruinous to the entire argument is the documented fact of Laodicea's apparently effortless, unaided, and rapid recovery from the earthquake. Tacitus reports that the city did not even find it necessary to apply for an imperial subsidy to help them rebuild, even though such was customary for cities in Asia Minor. As Tacitus records it, Laodicea "arose from the ruins by the strength of her own resources, and with no help from us. " [11] This is as clear a statement as is necessary to demonstrate that Laodicea's economic strength was not radically diminished by the quake. Despite the quake, economic resources were so readily available within Laodicea that the city could easily recover itself from the damage. Interestingly, both Morris and Mounce make reference to this statement by Tacitus, despite their using the argument to demand a late date. [12]

Furthermore, it would seem that the time element would not be extremely crucial for "earthquakes were very frequent thereabouts, and rebuilding doubtless followed at once. " [13] The quake occurred in A.D. 61; if Revelation were written as early as A.D. 65 or early A.D. 66 (as is likely), that would give four years for rebuilding. We must remember that the recovery was self-generated. Simple economic analysis demands that for the resources to survive, rebuilding would have to be rapid.

The Epicenter of the Quake

In addition, who is to say that the Christian community was

10. Mounce, *Revelation,* p. 126. This is not the first time that Mounce employs an argument in his introduction that he fails to follow through adequately in his commentary. See our observations in Chap. 18 on his contradictory treatment of the Nero *Redivivus* myth. It would seem most reasonable to expect that if the argument in his introduction is to be given weight, it must not be allowed to shift its meaning in the commentary.

11. Tacitus, *Annals 1427.*

12. Morris, *Revelation,* p. 37; Mounce, *Revelation,* p. 123.

13. F. J. A. Hort, *The Apocalypse of St. John: I-III* (London: Macmillan, 1908), p. xx. See Strabo (64 B.C. – A.D. 19), *Geographic* 12:8; Dio Cassius, *Roman History* 54:30.

necessarily overwhelmed by the quake in that city? After all, in the Revelation 3:17 statement it is the *church* that is in view, not the city. Even the horribly destructive earthquakes in Mexico City on September 19 and 20 of 1985 did not destroy every sector of the city. Perhaps, by the grace of God, the Christians were in areas less affected by the quake, as Israel was in an area of Egypt unaffected by the plagues (Ex. 8:22; 9:4, 6, 24; 10:23; 11:27). Would this token of God's providence lead the Laodiceans to a too proud confidence in their standing as in Revelation 3:17? Perhaps a roughly analogous situation is found with the situation at Corinth, which Paul set about to correct (1 Cor. 4:6-8).

The first argument from the Seven Letters is less than convincing.

The Existence of the Church in Smyrna

Morris's second evidence from the Seven Letters is that "the church at Smyrna seems not to have been in existence in the days of Paul."[14] Obviously, if the church mentioned in Revelation 2:8-11 did not exist until after Paul's death it would have to have been founded *later* than A.D. 67 or 68. This would push the dates forward too far to allow any view of Revelation's dating that precedes A.D. 67 or 68 – although it would not necessarily affect a date after A.D. 68 and well before A.D. 95.

This late date objection is founded on the well-known statement in a letter written to the church at Philippi by Polycarp: "But I have not found any such thing in you [i.e., the church at Philippi], neither have heard thereof, among whom the blessed Paul labored, who were his letters in the beginning. For he boasteth of you in all those churches which alone at that time knew God; for we knew him not as yet." [15] Polycarp (c. A.D. 69-155), bishop of the church at Smyrna, is thought to have been a disciple of John the Apostle. He seems to refer here to the Smyrnaean church when he writes "we knew him not as yet ." [16] This may mean: our church at Smyrna was not yet

14. Morris, *Revelation,* p. 37.

15. Polycarp, *Letter to the Philippians* 11:3.

16. The original Greek statement of Polycarp does not specifically use the word "Smymaeans," which so many translators place into the text. See J. B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers, 2* vols. (London: Macmillan, 1889) 2:926, or the Latin manuscript in J. B. Lightfoot and J. R. Hermer, *The Apostolic Fathers* (Grand Rapids: Baker, [1891] 1984),

founded. Charles and Moffatt deem this to be the most substantial of the arguments drawn from the contents of the Seven Letters.'7 Charles makes much of this argument, which is the only one from the Seven Letters material that he presses into service in his section on the date of Revelation:

> The Church of Smyrna did not exist in 60-64 A.D. – at a time when St. Paul was boasting of the Philippians in all the Churches. Cf. Polycarp (*Ad Phil . . .).* But though Polycarp's letter tells us that the Church of Smyrna was not founded in 60-64 A. D., he gives no hint as to when it was founded. Hence several years may have elapsed after that date before it was founded. When, however, we turn to Rev. 2:8-11 we find that our text presupposes a Church poor in wealth but rich in good works, with a development of apparently many years to its credit. This letter, then, may have been written in the closing years of Vespasian (75-79) but hardly earlier. . . . The natural conclusion, therefore, is that though our author wrote the Letters in the reign of Vespasian, he re-edited them in the closing years of Domitian for incorporation in his Book.[18]

Guthrie reckons this approach by Charles as having "considerable weight, " although he points out that Feine and Behm "are very cautious on this point. "[19] It appears as Moffatt's second argument for a late date[20] and has found currency in a host of scholarly works.[21]

The Interpretive Problem

We should note that scholarly objections even from more liberal

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p. 172. This may or may not be a part of the problem; early date advocates Lightfoot and Robinson do not express any reservations with understanding the pronoun to refer to the Smyrnaeans. Light foot, *Apostolic Fathers,* 2:927. John A. T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), p. 229.

17. Charles, *Revelation,* 1 :xciv; James Moffatt, *Introduction to the Literature of the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T. &T. Clark, 1911), p. 507.

18. Charles, *Revelation, 1* :xciv.

19. Guthrie, *Introduction,* pp. 954 n. 6,955.

20. Moffatt, *Revelation,* p. 317.

21. See in addition to Morns, Mounce, Guthrie, Charles, and Moffatt, mentioned heretofore: Theodor Zahn, *Introduction to the New Testament, 3rd* ed., trans. John Moore Trout, 3 vols. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1909) 3:412ff,; A. H. McNeile, *An Introduction to the Study of the New Testament,* revised by C. S. C. Williams (Oxford: Clarendon, 1953), p. 262; Isbon T. Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John: Studies in Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, [1917] 1967), p. 207; and Kümmel, *Introduction,* p. 469.

authors have been lodged against the interpretation of Polycarp's statement cited above. It is not at all necessary that Polycarp's statement be interpreted in the manner that Charles and Moffatt do – an interpretation that supposes the church to have been *founded* after Paul's death. Torrey is dogmatically opposed to the approach of Charles and Moffatt: "Polycarp, moreover, is misquoted. He is merely complimenting the Philippians church on its very early reputation. He refers expressly to the beginning of Paul's Epistle (Phil. 1:5), and adds: We, the church of Smyrna did not exist at the time when you of Philippi were already praised by Paul, as he went about among the earliest churches (referring to Phil. 4:5f.)."[22] Robinson is just as certain as to the precariousness of the argument from Polycarp as Morris, Charles, Moffatt, and others are of its usefulness:

> One objection however can be dismissed, which is constantly repeated from one writer to another. This is that Polycarp in his epistle to the Philippians (11.3) states that his own church at Smyrna had not been founded till after the death of Paul – so that it could not therefore be addressed as it is in Rev. 2.8-11 as early as the late 60s. But, as Lightfoot observed long ago, all that Polycarp actually says is that "the Philippians were converted to the Gospel before the Smyrnaens – a statement which entirely accords with the notices of the two churches in the New Testament." It is astonishing that so much has continued to be built on so little.[23]

The Evangelization of Smyrna

As seems likely, "Smyrna must have been evangelized very soon after Ephesus, see Acts 19:10, 26; that is, *before* the year *60."*[24] The Acts account emphasizes in conjunction with Paul's labors in Ephesus, that "all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus," and that "in almost all of Asia" Paul was making progress in the promotion of the Gospel. If it were the case that the Smyrnaens were evangelized not very long after the Ephesians — and what is unreasonable in such a supposition, in light of Acts 19? — then there is ample time for a situation as presupposed in John's letter to Smyrna in Revelation to have transpired.

The extreme difficulty of dating Paul's epistle to the Philippians

22. Charles C. Torrey, *The Apocalypse of John* (New Haven: Yale, 1958), p. 78.
23. Robinson, *Redating*, pp. 229-230.
24. Torrey, *Apocalypse*, p. 78.

should be understood as impacting on the question arising from consideration of Polycarp's letter. Both Guthrie and Hendriksen find it necessary to employ ten pages of intricate (and inconclusive!) argument to arrive at a possible date for the writing of the canonical Philippians epistle toward the end of Paul's first Roman imprisonment. This imprisonment is mentioned in Acts, and occurred around A.D. 63. Müller expends seven pages to arrive at the same conclusion.[25] J. B. Lightfoot and H. C. G. Moule held to an earlier date toward the beginning of his captivity; this would yield a date of around A.D. 61.26 Kümmel and Robinson, as well as a number of others, hold to an Ephesian provenance for the epistle, which would place it as early as A.D. 53, but certainly no later than A.D. 58.[27] Guthrie even notes that "there is a much greater inclination to attribute Philippians than the other Captivity Epistles to Ephesus" among modern scholars. 28 Scott deems the arguments supportive of an Ephesian provenance to be "of peculiar force. "2[9]

These dates for the writing of Paul's epistle to the Philippians — particularly the two earlier possibilities — provide ample time for the Philippians letter to have preceded even the founding of the Smyrnaean church. This is particularly significant if it is argued that the Philippians letter itself must precede the founding of the church of Smyrna, and not just the founding of the Philippians church.

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25. Jac J. Müller, *The Epistles of Paul to the Philippians and to Philemon. New* International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), pp. 21-28. See also: Guthrie, *Introduction,* pp. 526-536 and William Hendriksen, *Philippians. New* Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1962), pp. 21-31.

26. J. B. Lightfoot, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, rep. 1953), pp. 30ff. H. C. G. Moule, *Studies in Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, [1893] 1977), p. 19. In agreement also is Samuel A. Cartledge, *A Conservative Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1938), pp. 111-112.

27. Kümmel, *Introduction,* pp. 324-332; Robinson, *Redating,* p. *61;* Leander E. Keck "The Letter of Paul to the Philippians" in Charles M. Laymen, cd., *The Interpreter's One-Volume Commentary* on *the Bible* (Nashville: Ahingdon, 1971), p. 846; and Otto F. A. Meinardus, *St. Paul in Ephesus and the Cities of Galatia and Cyprus (New* Rochelle, NY: Caratzas Bros., 1979), pp. 79-86. See also G. S. Duncan, *St. Paul's Ephesian Ministry (New* York: Scribners, 1930), pp. 100ff.; D. T. Rowlingson *Anglican Theological Remew 32 (1950): 1-7.* Duncan (*Expository Times* 67:6 [March 1956]) cites the following as supportive of the possibility of the Ephesian provenance of the letter: A. H. McNeile, Kirsopp Lake, F. B. Clogg, F. F. Bruce, J. H. Michael, M. Dibelius, P. Bonnard, P. Benoit, P. Feine and J. Behm, Albertz, and W. Michaelis.

28. Guthrie, *Introduction,* p. *531.*

29. Ernest Findlay Scott, *The Literature of the New Testament.* Records of Civilization 15 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932), p. 189.

Furthermore, this allows more than enough time to meet the conditions of the church at Smyrna evidenced in John's letter. After all, how much time is necessary to demonstrate a zealous faith adorned with good works? There really seems to be no necessity for presupposing a late date for Revelation based on the letter to Smyrna and Polycarp's letter to the Philippians.

The Spiritual Decline in Ephesus, Sardis, and Laodicea

The most familiar of the evidences from the Seven Letters is that derived from warnings of spiritual decline in at least three of the churches: Ephesus, Sardis, and Laodicea. The relevant verses from Revelation are:

> But I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first (To Ephesus, Rev. 2:4, 5).
>
> You have a name that you are alive, and you are dead. Wake up, and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die; for I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God (To Sardis, Rev. 3:1c-2).
>
> I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I would that you were cold or hot. So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth. Because you say, "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing, " and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked, I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire, that you may become rich (To Laodicea, Rev. 3:15-18a).

The utility of this evidence for the affirmation of a late date for Revelation is expressed by Morris: "All the churches in chapters ii and iii appear to have had a period of history. Especially is this the case with those of whom things could be said like 'thou hast left thy first love' (ii. 4) ."3° Swete comments in the same vein: "The condition of the Asian Churches, as it is described in cc. ii., iii., is that of a period considerably later than the death of Nero. Their inner life has undergone many changes since St Paul's ministry at Ephesus, and even since the writing of the Epistles to the Ephesians and Colossians and

30. Morris, *Revelation*, p. 37.

the two Epistles to Timothy. Deterioration has set in at Ephesus, and at Sardis and Laodicea faith is dying or dead."[31] Morns, Swete, and others argue that the supposed magnitude of the spiritual decline manifested in the churches, evidenced in John's admonitions, demands a period of time more readily available if John wrote during Domitian's reign, than if he wrote during Nero's.[32] It would seem a reasonable expectation that the early fervency of a new-found faith would wane only after the passing of various perils over an extended period of time.

Despite all the seemingly credible assertions advanced toward the establishment of the above argument, however, at least two important counter considerations militate against any confident acceptance of them.

Time Required for Spiritual Decline

First, granting that there is "a marked deterioration"[33] in the churches, the whole question of the length of time necessary for such a waning of faith lies at the heart of the situation. Though it is quite reasonable to expect that a passage of time is best suited to a decline of a newborn faith, surely the passage of time is not a *sine qua non* for such. In fact, a classic illustration of a rapid decline is contained in the New Testament itself.

In Galatians 5:7 Paul writes to the Galatians that initially "you were running well." The very purpose of Paul's letter, however, is to deal with the rapid decline of the apostolic faith among those in the congregation: "I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you, and want to distort the gospel of Christ" (Gal. 1:6-7). The inspired apostle considers the congregation to be "deserting" Christ. And this desertion of the faith was occurring "quickly."

Consider also Paul's concern over the multitude of troubles within the church of Corinth, a church founded in A.D. 49 and to which he wrote with heavy heart in A.D. 57. Indeed, Paul anticipated such problems to be experienced among the churches virtually as soon as

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31. Swete, *Revelation,* pp. c-ci.

"32. Morris, *Revelation,* p. 37; Mounce, *Revelation,* p. 34; Swete, *Revelation,* pp. c-ci; Guthrie, *Introduction,* p. 954.

33. Guthrie, *Introduction,* p. 954.

he left the scene (Acts 20:29ff). Was not Timothy urged to remain at Ephesus because of the entry of false doctrine within Paul's lifetime (1 Tim. 1 :6)? Paul also experienced distressing defections from fidelity to him as a servant of Christ within his ministry (2 Tim. 4). He felt the particularly sharp pang caused by the desertion of Demas (2 Tim. 4: 10). Paul seems to be concerned with the labors of Archippus at Laodicea (one of the churches in question) when he warns him to "take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it" (Col. 4:16-17).34 As Lightfoot notes on this particular matter:

> Some signs of slackened zeal seem to have called forth this rebuke. It may be an accidental coincidence, but it is at least worthy of notice, that lukewarmness is the special sin denounced in the angel of the Laodiceans, and that the necessity of greater earnestness is the burden of the message to that Church. As with the people, so it is with the priest. The community takes its colour from and communicates its colour to its spiritual rulers. The "be zealous" of St John is the counterpart to the "take heed" of St Paul.[35]

How much more would such a problem be aggravated by the political circumstances generated from the initiation of the Neronic persecution in A.D. 64!

Because of such examples as those found in Paul's writings, Kümmel makes no reference to the argument from the spiritual condition of the churches. [36] Moffatt even suggests its avoidance because of the slippery nature of the matter: "The religious development of the churches is often held to presuppose a considerable length of time, but this argument must be used with caution. Worldliness and error and uncharitable feelings did not require decades to spring up in the primitive churches of Asia Minor and elsewhere. No great stress can be laid on this feature. "[37] Guthrie, though he employs the

34. A few examples of commentators who see the statement regarding Archippus as an admonition include: J. B. Light foot, *St Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, [1879] 1959), pp. 42-43; Trench, *Commentary*, p. 200; William Hendriksen, *Colossians and Philemon, New* Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1964), p. 198; H. C. G. Moule, *Studies in Colossians and Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, [1893] 1977), p. 144.

35. Light foot, *Colossians and Philemon*, pp. 42-43. Light foot's comparison of Paul's and John's labors in Asia is most enlightening, pp. 41ff.

36. Kümmel, *Introduction,* p. 469.

37. Moffatt, *Revelation*, p. 318.

argument, states that the argument "could be disputed."38

The Problem with the Domitianic View

Second, it must be noted that except for the matter of time, the Domitianic date is not necessarily any more conducive to the decline than the Neronic. That is, late date advocates have John on the scene with these seven churches for over twenty-five years, but still they declined. It is not as if (on the late date view) the churches have been left without apostolic oversight. Both the early and late date views face the same "problem" in this regard.

There does not seem to be any compelling reason to reject the early date of Revelation on the basis of the spiritual decline in certain of the Seven Churches.

Conclusion

Although there are other arguments that have been drawn from the Seven Letters, those presented are the leading ones. A careful consideration of the merits of each of the arguments, however, demonstrates their inconclusive nature. Not one of the arguments considered individually, nor all of them considered collectively, compel acceptance of the Domitianic date of Revelation. This is made all the more serious when their inconclusive nature is contrasted with the wealth of other internal considerations for an early date, as rehearsed heretofore in the present work.

The Seven Letters even have elements more suggestive of a period of time prior to the destruction of the Temple. A major one of these has been discussed previously: the presence of strong Jewish elements in the churches. This feature bespeaks an early period of Christian development prior to the cleavage between Jew and Christian, which was enforced by the complex of events associated with both the Neronic persecution and the Jewish War (Rev. 2:9; 3:9).39

38. Guthrie, *Introduction,* p. *955,*

39. See Chap. 13 above. An interesting and reasonable conjecture regarding the derivation of the name "Nicolaitan" (Rev. 2:6, 15) has enjoyed wide currency, and is also subtly suggestive of the early date of Revelation in that it bespeaks an era prior to the final separation of Christianity from Judaism. That is, that the name "Nicolaitan" is intentionally derived from the Greek (*νικᾰ́* and *λαόν*) which means "conqueror of people," and as such reflects the Hebrew term "Baalam" (from בלע and עם), which means "destruction of the people." This indicates John is giving a Greek designation to the Hebrew word, as he does elsewhere in Revelation (e.g., 9: 11; 16: 16; cf. 12:9; 20:2).

Another important factor involves John's exhortation to the churches in anticipation of the "judgment coming" of Christ (Rev. 2:5, 16; 3:3, 10). There are no events that could be expected soon in Domitian's day that approached the magnitude and significance – both culturally and theologically – of the Neronic persecution of Christianity, the destruction of Judaism's temple, and the near demise of Rome in the Civil Wars of A.D. 68-69.[40] The early date stands, despite the presumed objections on the foregoing bases.

Just as John called Jerusalem "Sodom and Egypt" (Rev. 11:8), here he calls the Judaizers "Nicolaitans" (or "Baalamites"). As Stuart noted, "It was common among the early Hebrew Christians, to give persons of Hebrew origin a Greek name corresponding in sense with their Hebrew one," e.g., Peter and Dorcas (Moses Stuart, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, 2 vols. [Andover: Allen, Merrill, and Wardwell, 1945] 2:64). See:

Friedrich Düsterdieck, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Revelation of John*, 3rd ed., trans. Henry E. Jacobs (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1886), pp. 134ff.

James M. Macdonald, *The Life and Writings of St. John* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1877), p. 155.

J. L. Ratton, *The Apocalypse of St. John* (London: R. & T. Washbourne, 1912), p. 143ff.

Charles, *Revelation* 1:52-53.

Trench, *Commentary*, p. 90.

Morris, Revelation, pp. 61-62.

Moffatt, *Revelation*, p. 352 (he adds to the list: Ewald, Hengstenberg, Schürer, Jülicher, and Bousset).

40. See Chap. 9 above.