is not slavery but racism. The volatile interaction of race and religion has shown America at its best and its worst. Race remains an enduring presence in American society. Racism ironically has both been defended and condemned by religion and politics. Noll’s analysis reveals that the more religious Americans are, the more they tend to vote conservatively, supporting less government intrusion into local affairs, which has had the effect of reinforcing racism in many parts of the country. Conservative governments are less willing to use the power of the government to ameliorate the historic and continuing wrongs committed against Blacks. In this sense, religion becomes an ally of racism. It appears that racial solidarity invariably trumps loyalty to truth and justice.

Knoll’s analysis of these most complicated issues in American history reveals a narrative of often contradicting religious and moral complexities. He wrestles with his subject, not shying away from this difficult assignment, with moral dexterity, skilful analysis, and solid historic research. Knoll has provided much food for thought.

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Ranko Stefanovic now teaches New Testament at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University. This second edition of his commentary on Revelation is not greatly different from the first edition, but it does make some subtle improvements in a few areas, apparently in part at least to feedback received from readers of the first edition. Aside from the correction of a few editorial errors or misstatements, the major content changes involve a number of additions and a few revisions in selected areas of the commentary.

The first major revision is with the methodological approach to the text. One finds that Stefanovic has added some clarity to the approach that he follows in the commentary. Although he still notes that all of the various approaches “have some elements of truth” (12), a debatable premise, he ends up concluding, “Despite the fact that historicism has generally been denied and marginalized by modern scholarship, this commentary shows it to be the most appropriate approach to the book of Revelation” (14; cf. 16). He seemed unwilling to make such a statement in the first edition, adopting rather an eclectic methodology that lets “the text govern the interpretation,” whether it be historicist, preterist, futurist, or idealist (12, 1st ed.). This change will please many Adventists who follow the historicist interpretation of Revelation, but it will not endear him to those who prefer an eclectic—or other—approach. To Stefanovic’s credit, he has followed a historicist approach fairly consistently throughout the commentary.

The clearer and more consistent historicist approach plays out in notable fashion in his exposition of the letters to the seven churches, where he notes that “it would be quite appropriate to read the seven messages of Revelation 2–3 in the final stage of interpretation as Christ’s evaluation of the Christian
church throughout history” (88). Then at the end of each of the seven letters, he incorporates a “Historical application” that shows how the message of each church applies appropriately to specific consecutive periods of church history. In this way, the new edition moves closer to traditional Adventist historicist interpretation.

Similarly, Stefanovic has attempted to add some material on the parallels between the historicist interpretation of the seven churches and that of the seven seals, positing “specific applications in different periods in Christian history” (227; cf. 235, 242).

In the case of the Two Witnesses of Revelation 11, Stefanovic has revised his statement regarding the failure of the historicist interpretation to one that admits that “such a historical application is quite tenable” (354), although he offers a second, nonhistorical interpretation as well.

Another area in which Stefanovic has attempted to accommodate Adventist historicism more in his revised edition is in his discussion of the 1,260-day/year period at various points where it appears in Revelation (11:2-3; 12:6,14; 13:5). He still does this a bit awkwardly, clearly preferring an approximate period to a specific one, but at least he does acknowledge the existence of the traditional Adventist interpretation beginning in 538 a.d. and ending in 1798 a.d. (346, 387, 392, 411). At the same time, he argues for both a quantitative and qualitative understanding of this time period (346-47, 387), detracting somewhat from a purely historicist interpretation. He still tends to be evasive on the application of the oppressive power during this time period, referring at some points to “the church’s religious-political oppressive power” (346, 415), at another point to the “oppressive power . . . described in Daniel 7:25” (350), again to “the church . . . as an ecclesiastical power” (387, 411, 415), also to “the authoritarian ecclesiastical rule of the Middle Ages” and “the medieval ecclesiastical oppressive rule” (392), and, finally, pressed to come up with an interpretation that fits the 1,260-year period, confesses, “The only religious-political power that matches the description of the sea beast and its activities in Revelation 13 during the Medieval period was the papal ecclesiastical authoritarian rule that, having established itself as an institutional power in the sixth century, dominated the Western world in the name of heaven for more than twelve centuries” (419-420).

However, having finally identified “the Roman papacy” (420), he begins to backtrack:

We must acknowledge, however, that applying the seventh head of the sea beast to the Medieval ecclesiastical power alone is inadequate. History depicts similar behaviors and activities by the hierarchy of the Eastern Orthodox Church. Sadly, religious-political oppression was also demonstrated by the newly established Protestant orthodoxy in the Western world during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries characterized by religious intolerance (420).

In the end, the vision of the sea beast turns out to be far more comprehensive than just the text’s focus on the head that has ten crowned horns, receives the fatal wound, and is healed. Stefanovic assures the reader that “the sea beast
stands as a corporate symbol of all oppressive world powers, civil and religious, that oppressed God’s people from the establishment of the church at the Exodus down to the Second Coming” (419). He thus seems to equate it with the seven-headed Dragon of Revelation 12 and the parallel scarlet Beast of Revelation 17, and he identifies the various heads the same as in Revelation 17 (419, 525).

One area in which Stefanovic has not accommodated himself to traditional historicist interpretation is in the matter of the number of the Beast’s name in 13:18. In fact, he has added arguments against the traditional interpretation (425–426), namely, an identification of the papacy based on gematria, arguing instead for a purely figurative significance based on a purported triple six, “a human number,” which “stands for the satanic triumvirate in contrast to the triple seven of the Godhead in Revelation 1:4-6. . . . This leads to the conclusion that the number 666 functions as a parody of the divine name of perfection” (437). While it is true that the traditional interpretation is not without its problems, this figurative interpretation does not really offer a better textual solution. From earliest until recent times, expositors understood the text as calling for an interpretation based on gematria. The text has not changed, but readers today are seeking for alternative explanations in the face of challenges.

Aside from the issues of historicism, Stefanovic has made some accommodation to the Adventist interpretation of Rev 1:10 in that, while he still leans toward “the Lord’s day” as referring to “the eschatological day of the Lord” (97), he now admits that “John might have used the phrase ‘the Lord’s day’ in a twofold meaning” (ibid.), including the seventh-day Sabbath as an option, which “would fit the eschatological connotation of the Sabbath in the Bible” (ibid.).

Another area in which Stefanovic has made some improvement is in the discussion of the symbolism of Revelation. He clarifies that “it is not John but God who chose the symbols of Revelation,” and that “what John saw in vision he now records, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, in his own words” (59). The messages of Revelation “come not through a literal understanding of its contents but through the interpretation of symbols” (ibid.). “The interpretive key of the book’s symbols is not allegory but typology. The meaning of the symbols must be controlled by the intention of the inspired author as well as by the meaning the symbols conveyed to those to whom Revelation was originally addressed” (59-60). “Careful study indicates that most of the book’s symbolism is drawn from the Old Testament. . . . In portraying the events to take place in the future, inspiration employs the language of the past” (60). This explanation is helpful, countering the literalism of dispensational futurist interpretations.

Still problematic is Stefanovic’s discussion of the structure of Revelation. He has made no revision of this section other than to discuss the “I heard” and “I saw” pattern, which does not affect his structuralizing of the book. The problem is an inconsistency in the structure he proposes—or perhaps I should say, in the structures he proposes, since they are not identical. He begins by arguing that Richard M. Davidson and Jon Paulien “have convincingly
shown" that there is a sevenfold structure in which “each of the seven major
divisions is introduced with a sanctuary scene” (30). He goes on to turn this
sevenfold division into a chiastic structure in which there is a movement
“from earth to heaven and then back to earth again” (31). He concludes, “This
literary arrangement indicates that chapters 12–14 form the central portion
of the book.” He further describes how there is “a definite progression” that
“moves from the continual daily (tamid) services to the yearly services of the
Old Testament sanctuary” (32) and how the annual feasts of the Hebrew cultic
calendar function as a model for the structure of the book (33). He concludes
by suggesting an eleven-part chiastic outline of Revelation that synchronizes
“the chiastic parallel segments,” including the prologue and epilogue (37). The
problem is that each time he provides an outline, which he defends or proposes,
it is different in its details, beginning on p. 30 through his final outline ending
on p. 46. When one compares the three major outlines he proposes (31, 37, 43-
46), they do not agree. On p. 31, he proposes a seven-part chiasm based on the
seven introductory visions he identifies. On p. 37, he proposes an eleven-part
chiasm, or a nine-part chiasm if one does not count the prologue and epilogue.
The central section of the chiasm is 11:19–13:18, in contradistinction to his
statement on p. 32 that the seven-part literary arrangement he proposed on p.
31 “indicates that chapters 12–14 form the central portion of the book.”

On p. 40, Stefanovic revises his proposed structure: “This commentary
argues for the threefold structure of the book of Revelation, with a prologue
(1:1-8) and an epilogue (22:6-21). Such a structure is self-evident on the basis
of Revelation 1:19.” So what was all the former discussion of a seven-part
or nine-part chiastic structure about? Now the center of the chiasm appears
in the last of the three major parts of the book and any chiastic structure is
lost to view. Of course, “self-evident” is a bit of a stretch. There are better
alternatives for reading 1:19.

A closely related issue is the matter of what to do with 11:19. Stefanovic
follows Paulien and Davidson in making it the introductory sanctuary vision
for Rev 12–14 (31). As such, it would belong structurally to the vision of
12:1–14:20, though it is not very clear how it relates to the content of the
latter in the way that the other sanctuary introductions do. However, in his
final structural outline, Stefanovic properly includes it as the final component
of the section on “The Opening of the Sealed Scroll (4–11:19),” and he begins
“The Contents of the Seven-Sealed Scroll (12–22:5)” with 12:1 (43-44). In his
commentary section, he also closes “The Third Woe: The Seventh Trumpet”
with 11:19. However, when he begins the next section, Rev 12:1–22:5, he
labels 11:18—not 11:19—a “springboard passage” that “functions both as
the concluding statement of the preceding section and as the introduction of
the section that follows” (373). He seems unsure, however, of what to do with
11:19. In a brief section on 11:19, he begins by declaring, “With Revelation
12:1 begins a completely new vision in the book” (375). Later in the same
paragraph, he refers to “the appearance of the ark in the heavenly sanctuary
at the beginning of the completely new section of Revelation” (ibid.). There
needs to be a greater degree of consistency in defining the structure of the
text and where the various verses belong in that structure. Otherwise one might conclude that there is confusion in the mind of the interpreter.

There are other serious issues I would comment on if space permitted, but these are samples of some issues that could benefit from further clarification. There are a few items that still need to be corrected editorially. I would suggest that “The New Jerusalem (21:9–22:5)” needs to be indented under the previous line in the outline at the top of p. 31. On p. 63, Stefanovic refers to “the customary Greek greeting word charis (‘grace’).” Actually, the customary Greek greeting was not charis but chaire, which literally meant “Rejoice!” but was used not as a command but as a wishful greeting like “Have a nice day!” Charis was a Christian substitute for chaire. There is also a very strange reference in footnote 10 on p. 363 to “the 43-months/1,600-days prophetic period,” which should refer to “the 42-month/1,260-day prophetic period.”

The new edition is more attractive than the first, with a brighter, more colorful cover; whiter, better quality paper; better layout and easier-to-read fonts, with the exception of numbers, which in the Constantia font are harder to read, with several of the numbers being compressed vertically (0, 1, 2) or dropping below the base line instead of sitting on the line (3, 4, 5, 7, 9). I commend the editors for these improvements (except for the numbers).

Despite some concerns about structure and content (here and there), this is an excellent commentary, one of the very best on the market. I recommend it heartily, with only minor reservations, as an advance over previous commentaries, including Stefanovic’s first edition. I hope that with each new commentary, we will continue to make further advances in our study and understanding of the important book of Revelation. There is a blessing promised to the reader and hearer who put into practice the things that God has revealed in the Revelation of Jesus Christ. Stefanovic’s commentary should aid the reader in discovering that blessing.

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Imre Tokics is a teacher and a former dean of the Hungarian Adventist Theological Seminary. He holds three doctor of philosophy degrees: two in Old Testament from Pázmány Péter Catholic University, and one in law from Károli Gáspár Reformed University, both located in Budapest, the capital of Hungary. He is the author of eleven books and numerous scholarly articles. While his OT expertise, clearly expressed in the current book, is widely appreciated mostly in his native country, his eloquence in the use of his mother tongue is also to be acknowledged as a major strength of the book.

The current publication is partially the result of the author’s doctoral research. However, as it is said that Socrates brought philosophy and the gods down from heaven to earth; similarly, Tokics tries to communicate the