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Henry More and the Apocalypse

Philip C. Almond

In recent years there has been a burgeoning of interest in the role of apocalyptic and millenarian thought in England from the time of the end of the Puritan revolution to the middle of the eighteenth century. There has been a clearer recognition that not only with Isaac Newton himself but also with the heirs of Newtonianism apocalyptic issues were often at the forefront of their concerns.¹ This focus on post-Restoration apocalypticism, allied to a renaissance in the study of the Cambridge Platonist Henry More, has also led to a greater awareness of the diversity of Henry More's thought, especially of the role which More's prophetic writings played in the context of his other more widely analyzed writings.² As Richard Popkin has indicated, More, along with many of his contemporaries, was part of a third force in seventeenth-century thought which combined mystical, rationalist, and scientific views based on the firm conviction of the Scriptural prophecies that the Millennium was imminent.³

Apocalyptic concerns were at the forefront of More's writings from 1660 until his death in 1687. Yet there are no detailed treatments of More's apocalyptic writings. In this article I want to suggest that More's apocalyptic writings were a central feature of his attempt to construct a Christianity grounded in the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation, compatible with the new science, and religiously guaranteeing a stable and permanent social structure. I want also to argue that More's interpretations of millennial prophecies differ

¹ On Newton and his apocalyptic thought, see Frank E. Manuel, *The Religion of Isaac Newton* (Oxford, 1974); and James E. Force and Richard H. Popkin, *Essays on the Context, Nature, and Influence of Isaac Newton's Theology* (Dordrecht, 1990). A wealth of studies in Newton's millenarian ideas can be anticipated from the publication of the microfilm collection *Sir Isaac Newton: Manuscripts and Papers* (Cambridge, 1991). For other Newtonians and the Millennium, see for example, Margaret C. Jacob, *The Newtonians and the English Revolution, 1689-1720* (Sussex, 1976); M. C. Jacob and W. A. Lockwood, "Political Millenarianism and Burnet's *Sacred Theory*," *Science Studies*, 2 (1972), 265-79; James E. Force, *William Whiston: Honest Newtonian* (Cambridge, 1985); Richard H. Popkin (ed.), *Millenarianism and Messianism in English Literature and Thought, 1650-1800* (Leiden, 1988).

² See, for example, Sarah Hutton (ed.), *Henry More (1614-1687): Tercentenary Studies* (Dordrecht, 1990), 9-11.

³ See Richard H. Popkin, *The Third Force in Seventeenth-Century Thought* (Leiden, 1992).

significantly not only from the radical sectarians who expected an imminent apocalypse but also from the radical Protestant “intellectual” millenarians who saw the rise of natural philosophy as a portent of the approach of the end-times. The apocalyptic Christianity constructed by More relegated the Apocalypse from the immediate to the far distant future.

The Science of Apocalyptic

That which some have noted, if not complained of,... that the Age we live in is *Seculum Philosophicum*, a Searching, Inquisitive, Rational and Philosophical Age, is a truth so plain that it cannot be hid; but was foreseen many and many years agoe by the Prophet *Daniel* or rather foretold him by that glorious Angel that appeared unto him on the banks of the great River *Hiddekel*, *That many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased: That this should happen at the time of the End.* And I think it is manifest that we are even at the end of that time....⁴

During the seventeenth century apocalypticism and the advancement of learning in general, and science in particular went hand in hand. As Charles Webster has suggested, millenarianism “induced an increased confidence in the capacity of the human intellect; spectacular advances could be anticipated in all fields of learning,” and this on the basis of the text quoted by More in the above passage, Daniel 12.4.⁵ More, then, was an heir of this Puritan expectation of a radical increase in knowledge as a presage of the Millennium, and his apocalyptic writings were dominated by the quest for a rational and “scientific” key to the unlocking of the secrets of the books of Daniel and Revelation.

More’s writings are suggestive of the Restoration’s increasing reliance on reason in an age which More himself saw as *Seculum Philosophicum*. Reason is used in his apocalyptic works to read Daniel and Revelation, however—not as in the English Revolution as radical socio-political manifestos but as expressing a new stable socio-political structure and as supporting monarchy, episcopacy, good government, religious reform, and religious peace. The ideal millennial world was, if not the real then an ideal post-Restoration England:

... the true happiness of those days is not to be measured by Formalities or Opinions, but by a more corroborated Faith in Christ and his Promises, by Devotion unfeigned, by Purity of Heart and Innocency of Life, by Faithfulness, by common charity, by comfortable provisions

⁴ Henry More, *A Modest Enquiry into the Mystery of Iniquity, The First Part, Containing A Careful and Impartial Delineation of the True Idea of Antichristianism in the Real and Genuine Members thereof, such as are indeed opposite to the indispensable Purposes of the Gospel of Christ, and to the Interest of his Kingdome* (London, 1664), 482.

⁵ Charles Webster, *The Great Instauration: Science, Medicine and Reform, 1626-1660* (London, 1975), 8.

for the poor, by cheerful Obedience to our Superiours, and abundance of kindness and discreet condescensions one to another, by unspotted Righteousness and an unshaken Peace....⁶

Thus a proper reading of the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation was essential to the new social order. Moreover the knowledge of their true meaning was, according to More, crucial to good government. The right reading of the prophecies enabled Government to control not only atheists but, more crucially, spirit-filled enthusiasts:

... it behoves the Christian Rulers, whether *Ecclesiastical* or *Civil*, to be so well acquainted with the meaning of these *Prophecies*, that they may be able to stop the mouths of these loud *Fanaticks* by those holy Oracles they pervert thus and abuse ... and that it was both the *Doctrine* of the Apostles, and *Practice* of the Church, while it was *Symmetrical*, to *obey the Magistrate* and *live peaceably under him*.... That *Superiour* and *Inferiour* are as natural in a people as *Head* and *Feet* in an Humane body; and that therefore no man can decry Government but out of madness or some villainous design to enthrall others at last under the yoke of their own lawless Fury.⁷

In short the prophecies were crucial in a world now turned right-side up. More's apocalyptic writings entailed a new conservative reading of Daniel and the Apocalypse, one more in keeping with both traditional Catholic and mainstream Protestant wariness of millenarianism and in the interests of continuing Monarchy and Episcopacy. Indeed as early as 1660 More was suggesting that the apocalypse was still some time off, and he was clearly rejecting millenarianism in the strict sense, which was that Christ would reign on earth for a thousand years prior to the final Judgment: "The Personal Reign of Christ upon Earth and of his holy Martyrs is a very rash and groundless and unsafe conceit, fit for nothing but heat and tumult both of phansie and action."⁸

For More then, the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation were powerful because of their role among radicals during the Commonwealth period. But they were powerful too precisely because they were prophetic. When properly analyzed, declared More, prophecy "is one of the most irrefragable Arguments for *Natural* Religion, viz., for the existence of God, and of Angels, and for a

⁶ Henry More, *An Explanation of the Grand Mystery of Godliness; Or, A True and Faithful Representation of the Everlasting Gospel Of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the Onely Begotten Son of God and Sovereign over Men and Angels*... (London, 1660), xvi.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 204.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 181.

Divine Providence over the affairs of men, and a reward after this life....”⁹ As natural philosophy was suggestive of the regularity of nature, so prophecy implied the regularity of history.

In *Synopsis Prophetica* (1664), his first major work on prophecy, More provided a grammar by means of which the inward sense of prophecies may be discerned from, what he called, their adorned and embellished cortex. The grammatical rules of prophecy were listed under ten heads: Diorismus, Hylasmus, Henopeia, Zoopeia, Israelismus, Ellipsis, Metalepsis, Homonymia, Antichronismus, and Icasmus.¹⁰ This was followed by a vocabulary of prophecy developed from the *Oneirocriticon* of Achmes, on the principle of the identity of dream and prophetic symbolism.¹¹ Without putting too fine a point on all this, one can say that the meaning of the prophetic texts was to be determined from Scripture by Reason and the tradition of oneirocriticism. In other words a prophetic “science” replaced what More saw as the apocalyptic ravings of revolutionary enthusiasm.

The Structure of Prophecy

If a prophetic grammar and vocabulary provided the key to the parts of prophecy, it was the method of Joseph Mede, More’s former tutor at Cambridge, that provided the key to the structure of the whole. It was Mede whose methods

are with that care and caution, with that clearness and strictness of reason, with that accuracy of judgement and unparallel’d modesty and calmness, that the study and enquiry into these matters, which had even grown odious and infamous by the wild and ridiculous miscarriages of hot fanattick spirits, has in my apprehension gained much credit and repute by the orderly and coherent methods and unexceptionable ratiocinations of this grave and venerable person.¹²

Mede was a millenarian who expected the imminent return of Christ to reign upon earth for a thousand years. As I have suggested above, More expected

⁹ Henry More, *Paralipomena Prophetica; Containing Several Supplements and Defenses of Dr. Henry More his Expositions of the Prophet Daniel and the Apocalypse, whereby the impregnable Firmness and Solidity of the said Expositions is further evidenced to the World. Whereunto is also added, Philicrines upon R.B. his Notes on the Revelation of St. John* (London, 1685), 3.

¹⁰ Henry More, *Synopsis Prophetica; or, The Second Part of the Enquiry into the Mystery of Iniquity: Containing a Compendious Prospect into those Prophecies of the Holy Scripture, wherein the Reign of Antichrist, or The Notorious Lapse or Degeneracy of the Church in all those Points composd in the Idea of Antichristianism, is prefigured or foretold* (London, 1664), 213ff.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 226ff. On Achmes (Ahmed), see Charles H. Haskins, *Studies in the History of Mediaeval Science* (New York, 1924), 5, 146, 216ff.

¹² More, *An Explanation*, 172.

neither the imminent return of Christ nor his reign upon *earth* for a thousand years. But he fully utilized Mede's unique contribution to the interpretation of the prophetic writings, namely, his account of the synchronistic structure of the Book of Revelation.

In his *Clavis Apocalyptica* (1627) Mede rejected the tradition which saw the Book of Revelation as one continual history. Rather Revelation was to be read as a series of repetitions of the same history (or parts thereof), overlapping one with another and capable therefore of being synchronized.¹³ Although the synchronisms in Mede's reading of Revelation were stricter than in More's, both employed essentially the same method. According to More, the Book of Revelation consisted of three main prophecies: the Epistolar prophecy to the Seven Churches (Rev. 1.4-3.22), the Sealed Book Prophecy (Rev. 5.1.-9.21), and the Opened Book Prophecy (Rev. 10-end). Each of these recapitulated the history of the Church (and/or Empires) from its beginnings until the apocalypse. In conjunction with these main prophecies were several lesser prophecies.

What was crucial about More's structuring of the Book of Revelation using the method of Mede's synchronisms was the principle that interpretation of the prophetic texts could only proceed upon the discerning of structures and patterns within the texts themselves. The structure of the Book of Revelation was itself the key to its interpretation. Thus extra-textual reference could only be determined from an intra-textual structural analysis. Although More nowhere says so, one might suggest that the strategy used by More to discern the structure of Revelation prior to the interpretation of it was analogous to the stress in Baconian circles on the necessity of the laborious collection of data prior to the theoretical interpretation of it.¹⁴ However that may be, what is clear is that the Book of Revelation, like the book of Nature, could be read by using the same methods.

Determining the Past

The power of apocalyptic interpretation lies in determining the structure of the future by locating the present through a systematic interpretation of the past. How then is the past interpreted by More on the basis of his analysis of the structure of the prophetic books? Where does More locate the present and how will the future unfold according to his reading of the Prophetic texts of Daniel and Revelation? We can discern minor shifts in his interpretation of the structure of these works; and yet when we examine the corpus of More's apocalyptic writings from 1660 to 1685, sufficient consistency remains for us to construct the chronology implicit in his writings.

¹³ See Joseph Mede, *The Key of the Revelation, Searched and Demonstrated out of the Natural and Proper Character of the Visions* (London, 1650).

¹⁴ See, for example, Michael Hunter, *Science and Society in Restoration England* (Cambridge, 1981), ch. 1.

Fundamental to More's interpretation was his conviction that the Church had not become Anti-Christian until around A.D. 400, until which time it had been "symmetrical." Thus, for example, in 1664, in *Synopsis Prophetica*, More focussed on Rev. 17.10: "And there are seven kings: five are fallen, and one is, and the other is not yet come; and when he cometh, he must continue a short space." For More, this implied the reign of Antichrist from A.D. 432. The seventh king who must reign a short space was interpreted as the Christian Caesars. These had reigned for a third of that space which one might call long. The sixth king was interpreted as the pagan Caesars from Julius to Constantine. Since the pagan Caesars ruled for 360 years, the Christian Caesars ruled for a third of that time, i.e., 120 years. Thus the symmetrical period ended 120 years after the conversion of Constantine, i.e., A.D. 432. For the period of the eighth king, More used Rev. 13.5: "and power was given unto him [the beast] to continue forty and two months." Thus the eighth King, the Beast that was and is not, reigned from the end of the symmetrical period for 42 months. By the rule of Homonymia, according to which there were a variety of significations in one and the same symbol, the 42 months were interpreted by More as 42 x 30 years of days, i.e., 1260 years. Thus, the period from the end of the symmetrical period to the end of the reign of Antichrist was 1260 (i.e., 432 + 1260) years, that is, A.D. 1692. Thus "according to Prophetical Compute the Ruine of Antichrist is near...";¹⁵ that is, the collapse of papal power was at hand.

More did not want to be bound to closely to such dates, although he nevertheless saw them as approximately correct. As he put it,

... the whole Book, in a manner, of the Apocalyptical Visions in reference to the Church, seems such as if the Penman thereof did not industriously aim at anything more then at a certain, though aenigmatically prefiguration and prediction of the Apostasy thereof into Antichristianism by the misguidance of the Church-men, with an Indication of the time no preciselier then was useful; and that this Antichristianism will be again chased out of Christendom, and pure and Apostolical times return again. These things are most certainly, punctually and manifestly set out in the *Apocalypse*.... But that every pompous Prophetical Expression is to have its distinct Event answering to it, it may be is no more necessary, then that every circumstance of a Parable should have a moral meaning in it.¹⁶

Construing the author of Revelation as intending only to give approximate dates undoubtedly gave More much more leeway in his interpretations, for it enabled a richer structural analysis and interpretation and excused historical imprecision. Thus even in this same work, More also gave A.D. 400 as the end of the

¹⁵ More, *Synopsis Prophetica*, 365.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 200-201.

symmetrical period. For the period after the symmetrical he used Rev. 11.11: "And after three days and an half the Spirit of life from God entered into them, and they [the two witnesses] stood upon their feet." More interpreted the days before the resurrection of the two witnesses as equivalent to 1260 years ($3\frac{1}{2}$ days = $3\frac{1}{2}$ years = 42 months = 42×30 years of days = 1260 years); and he was thus able to identify the resurrection of the two witnesses precisely with the restoration of Monarchy and Episcopacy in 1660 (and more generally with the whole English Reformation). What is the resuscitation of regal and episcopal power in England, inquired More, "but another Resurrection from the dead of the slain witnesses, and a second testimonie from Heaven to the Sacredness and Inviolableness of our English Reformation ... it falling out not within the last Semi-Time at large, as the former [i.e., the English Reformation] did, but just at the expiration thereof, or if you will, of the 1260 Days"?¹⁷

In *Apocalypsis Apocalypseos* (1680) a different and very complex calculus was used, this time to date the beginning of the Antichristian period from A.D. 360. This occurs in an exposition of Rev. 11.2: "But the court which is without the temple leave out, and measure it not; for it is given unto the Gentiles: and the holy city shall they tread under foot forty *and* two months." More reads this verse in the following way:

... a kind of Paganochristianity instead of pure Christianity shall visibly domineer for forty and two months of years, that is 1260 years; which is the proportion of Time to the commensurate Time of the Church under the *Ephesine* and *Smyranean succession*, and a little further, that the proportion of the outward court has to the inward court, which proportion is as 1260 to 360; that is the outward contained the inward three times and a half in quantity.¹⁸

What is particularly interesting here is that the temporal relation of the Antichristian period of the Church to the symmetrical period (1260:360) is related to the spatial relation of the outward court of the Temple where Gentiles were permitted to the inward court where they were not ($3\frac{1}{2}:1$). The transition from spatial to temporal relations is explainable under the rules of Homonymia and Hylasmus.¹⁹ Unfortunately More did not expand on the derivation of the ratio of $3\frac{1}{2}:1$. But we can reconstruct his argument and illuminate the logical form of it.

The obvious source of More's reasoning is 1 Kings 6.2-3, 19-20. Here we find that the inward court measures 20×20 (400) square cubits, the temple itself 60×200 (1200) square cubits, and the porch in front of it 20×10 (200) square cubits. Only if we include the porch can we generate the appropriate ratio of

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 202.

¹⁸ More, *Apocalypsis Apocalypseos*, 102.

¹⁹ See More, *Synopsis Prophetica*, 215ff.

outward to inward parts of $3\frac{1}{2}:1$, i.e., 1400:400. Thus the temple is configured on the basis of the symbolic power of this ratio. As we have seen already in discussing Rev. 11.11, $3\frac{1}{2}$ days is symbolically equivalent to 1260 years. Moreover in Rev. 11.2, the Gentiles shall tread Jerusalem under foot for forty two months which is symbolically equivalent to 1260 years (42×30 days of years); and More reads Daniel 7.25,²⁰ where the fourth beast is said to reign for a time, times, and the dividing of times as symbolically equivalent to $3\frac{1}{2}$ ($1 + 2 + \frac{1}{2}$) times or years, which equals 42 months, i.e., 1260 years.²¹ In sum the proportions of the temple are constructed by More to symbolize spatially the reign of the fourth beast and the treading of Jerusalem underfoot for a period of 1260 years after the 360 years of the symmetrical period.

The Antichristian period of 1260 years was interpreted by More as ultimately related to the Catholic Church and Papal power. Thus that the 1260 years had ended or were about to end was a crucial part of the interpretation of Revelation and Daniel. More's interpretation of the past is primarily an anti-papal polemic. As he put it in 1681,

Nor have I out of any curiosity of prying into hard and obscure things medled with either the *Apocalypse* or *Daniel*, but merely for more full satisfaction in the great Controversy betwixt us and the Papists, who leave no stone unturned to pervert souls, and to bring them over to their Idolatrous Church.²²

In other words More's interpretative strategies were directed towards the identification of Rome and the Antichrist and the locating of his own period at the end of the 1260 years of the reign of the Antichrist.

Locating the Present

The location of the present was determined not only by the prophecies of Daniel 7.25 and Revelation 11.2 but also by the interpretation of the prophecy of the letters to the seven churches.²³ The seven Churches represent seven periods in the history of the Church from the time of Christ until the Day of Judgment. The Ephesine period was interpreted by More as having lasted until A.D. 63, the Smyranean until A.D. 300, the Pergamenian until around A.D. 1242,

²⁰ "And he shall speak *great* words against the most High, and shall wear out the saints of the most High, and think to change times and laws: and they shall be given into his hand until a time and times and the dividing of time."

²¹ See Henry More, *A Plain and Continued Exposition of the several Prophecies or Divine Visions of the Prophet Daniel, which have or may concern the People of God, whether Jew or Christians...* (London, 1681), 56, for an interpretation of Daniel 7.25.

²² *Ibid.*, 267-68.

²³ Henry More, *An Exposition of the Seven Epistles to the Seven Churches; together with a brief Discourse of Idolatry, with application to the Church of Rome* (London, 1669).

the Thyatirian until the Reformation, the Sardian until the last vial, the Philadelphian until the fourth thunder, and the Laodicean until Christ comes visibly in the clouds. The shift from an *interpretation* of the first four periods by reference to events outside the text to an account of the *structure* of the last three within the text enables us to see More's own period as that of the Sardian. Moreover, his descriptions of the Philadelphian period were all future oriented.²⁴ There is a clear expectation that the Philadelphian period is imminent.

We find other clues to where More locates his own time elsewhere. It is the time of the seventh seal for that was opened at the end of the symmetral period;²⁵ it is the time of the seventh trumpet for that is contemporary with the Sardian, Philadelphian, and Laodicean periods.²⁶ We get a further clue from More's *Divine Dialogues*, the last two of which dealt with the Kingdom of God.²⁷ Here, More analysed the pouring out of the seven vials by seven angels (Rev. 16.1-21). The first three vials, he suggested, covered the period from the reign of Edward VI until the end of the reign of James I. The remaining vials were yet to be poured out. The fourth would correspond to the conversion of some emperor illuminated by true knowledge of the Gospel, the fifth and sixth to the overwhelming of the Papacy and the conversion of the Jews (and perhaps the Muslims), and the seventh was a forewarning to seek after happiness in the first part of the Philadelphian period. Thus *Divine Dialogues* located itself between the third and fourth vials and shortly before the Philadelphian period.

Structuring the Future

From this reconstruction of where More located the present according to his reading of the prophetic texts, we can now determine how he saw the future unfolding. To my knowledge, there is no indication within More's writings of a precise or even an imprecise date for the return of Christ, but we can construct it from his reading of the prophetic texts. Before the return of Christ we know that the Sardian period will come to an end and that the Philadelphian and Laodicean periods must run their courses. If we can determine broadly the time spans involved, we will be able locate the date implicit in the writings for the return of Christ.

The key to unravelling these time spans lies in More's interpretation of Revelation 20 and 21, and Daniel 12, the specifically apocalyptic sections of these texts. As I have suggested, More was no millennialist in the strict sense.

²⁴ See *ibid.*, 141.

²⁵ See e.g., More, *Apocalypsis Apocalypseos*, 53ff.; More, *A Plain and Continued Exposition*, lxx.

²⁶ See e.g., More, *Apocalypsis Apocalypseos*, 91.

²⁷ Henry More, *Divine Dialogues, Containing sundry Disquisitions and Instructions Concerning the Attributes and Providence of God in the World. The Last Two Dialogues Treating of the Kingdome of God Within Us...* (London, 1668), 203ff. The last two dialogues are separately paginated.

He rejected the apocalyptic scenario of Christ's reign upon earth with the resurrected saints for a thousand years prior to the resurrection of the wicked and the final Judgment at the end of that time. Rather the thousand-year reign of Christ is to be a heavenly reign. The martyrs in their celestial bodies are raised at the beginning of the Millennium²⁸ into the celestial realms, located by More beyond the regions of the air in the pure and lucid aether. There will be "a *Resuscitation* of the Soul into a perfect blessed Immortality by her union with an *Heavenly* or *glorified* Body."²⁹ At the same time Satan will be bound for a thousand years,³⁰ and the devils and wicked persecutors of the saints of God will be cast down into Hell within the fiery core of the earth and imprisoned there until "the *Claviger* of the *Abyss* with his Ministers brings them out again after the thousand years...."³¹

That the millennial rule of Christ would be in Heaven and not on earth was strategically crucial to More's interpretation of the prophetic texts, for it enabled the millennium to be projected as occurring not at the end of history but in the course of it. More specifically, the Millennium was to begin shortly after the start of the Philadelphian period and would end before its completion. All this means that the Millennium was shortly to begin in the heavenly realm, but the course of history on earth would continue as normal. Thus the final Judgment was not an imminent event but rather one that would take place only at the end of the Millennium. The world could not expect the Apocalypse until more than a thousand years into the future. The description of the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21 was read as an account not of the post-apocalyptic world but rather of the Church on earth during the Philadelphian interval³² as an earthly reflection of its heavenly counterpart—the rule of Christ and his saints. According to More, the Philadelphian Church would degenerate into the Laodicean after the millennial period. During the Laodicean period Christ would return to earth: "... in the next thunder [i.e., the seventh] to his *Laodicean Interval* Christ comes to Judgement and presently after is the Conflagration. And Satan is to be let loose [after the millennium] but a little time; so that the time of the *Laodicean* Church cannot be long."³³

The details of the Day of Judgment were most explicitly given in *An Explanation of the Grand Mystery of Godliness* in 1660. The earth and its surrounding air would be totally destroyed. Natural causes would play a part—an eruption of volcanic fires, destruction from comets, falling stars, and lightning—assisted by direct providential action.³⁴ On that day,

²⁸ See More, *Apocalypsis Apocalypseos*, 208; More, *Paralipomena Prophetica*, 153.

²⁹ More, *Paralipomena Prophetica*, 151.

³⁰ See More, *Apocalypsis Apocalypseos*, 206.

³¹ More, *Paralipomena Prophetica*, 163. See also More, *A Plain and Continued Exposition*, 44, 226-27; More, *Apocalypsis Apocalypseos*, 209.

³² See More, *Apocalypsis Apocalypseos*, 214-45.

³³ More, *An Exposition*, 149.

³⁴ More, *An Explanation*, 231-33, 237.

The Moon and Stars shall withdraw their shining, and the Sun shall be turned into bloud. For nothing but Mists and Fogs and Stench, nothing but sulphureous Vapours, smoring [*sic*] Heat, dark Clouds charged with horrid Thunder and Lightning, immense Earthquakes and innumerable Eruptions of subterraneous Flames, crackling Volcanoes, smoaking Mountains, high flakes and tortuous streams of Fire from burning Forests and Woods, lowd Shreeks and howlings of affrighted Men and Beasts, grim and grisly Apparitions, deep and dreadful Groans of tormented Ghosts.³⁵

In More's cosmology there were three possible abodes for human souls: on earth, in the air, or in the aethereal or heavenly realm. Those souls (especially the saints and martyrs) who were already in heaven were to be excluded from the Conflagration. The good, who at the time of the End were either on the earth or in the air, would be supernaturally rescued. The wicked would be eternally tormented on a fiery earth:

For who can imagine the horror, the stench, the confusion, the crackling of Flames of Fire, those loud murmurs and bellowings of the troubled Seas working and smoking like seething Water in a Caldron, the fearfull and direfull grones of those rebellious Ghosts ... in that day shall all the Faithful renew their strength and mount up with Wings as Eagles, and be carried far above the reach of this dismal Fate; that is, they shall ascend up in those *Heavenly Chariots* or *Ethereal Vehicles* ... and so enter into Immortality and Eternal rest.³⁶

It is surprising that such lengthy and delightfully grisly accounts of the Conflagration do not appear in any of More's apocalyptic writings; surprising because one might have expected these in interpretations of the last chapters of Daniel and Revelation. But as we have seen, because in More's apocalyptic writings the Millennium occurs during the course of history, the Day of Judgment is necessarily more than a thousand years into the future. More's dominant interpretative strategy in reading the apocalyptic sections of Daniel and Revelation was to postpone the Conflagration so far into the future that the details of it had little rhetorical power. The continuation of history was rhetorically secured by More by interpreting the Millennium as part of it.

More recognized that his reading was against the traditional interpretations of the prophetic writings. "Touching the *New Jerusalem*," he declared, "I cannot but observe, that there are a great many passages in the *Apocalypse* which

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 445. See also 214, 238, and More *Apocalypsis Apocalypseos*, 212.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 41.

seem to argue the time will come, when *God* and the *Son of God* will hold his Estate and Court here upon Earth."³⁷ But More's apocalyptic writings deliberately reversed millenarian strategies of reading these prophetic texts as signaling the imminent return of Christ to earth to rule for a thousand years. Spatially, the Book of Revelation was read so as to place the thousand year reign of Christ in Heaven and not on earth; temporally, the work was read so as to postpone the final Day of Judgment far into the future.

The emphasis which More placed on the necessity of correctly interpreting the prophetic writings is a crucial indicator of the continuing importance of the notion of prophecy within the Restoration context generally and among those committed to the new science in particular. More's reading of the prophetic writings, however, was intended to rescue them from the radical millenarians who saw them as demanding the turning of the world upside-down. More's interpretation of them suggested, on the contrary, the necessity of a stable and long-lasting religious and social polity; but the strategies adopted to negate the interpretation of the prophetic writings as radical millenarian manifestos also entailed a diminution of the power of apocalyptic discourse in general. The rhetorical power of apocalyptic discourse resides only in the imminence of that to which it refers. The Apocalypse only has a meaning in the present if its occurrence is imminent. An Apocalypse which is postponed for a millennium has little authority in shaping the understanding of the present. In removing the sense of the imminence of the end, More profoundly reoriented the world in which he lived. It was no longer a world lived in the shadow of the Apocalypse, a world in which God was shortly to intervene to judge the living and the dead, but a world which was to continue far into the future, a world which, in the meantime, would remain within the providence of God.

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³⁷ More, *Paralipomena Prophetica*, 332.