Structural Characteristics of the Letters
to the Seven Churches in Rev 2-3

Introduction

In the present paper[1] I discuss some of the structural interrelationships of the letters to the seven churches in Rev 2-3.[2] Introductions, conclusions, and bodies of these letters are isolated and the clauses they contain are discussed. When this is done the clauses are seen to come in pairs, with the content of one letter corresponding to that of another in systematic ways. I suggest that a useful distinction can be made between two groups of letters within the seven--one group consisting of Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, and Thyatira (letters 1-4) and the other consisting of Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea (letters 5-7). A preliminary summary of this concept appears in table 1, where the seven churches are arranged in two columns.

Table 1
The Seven Churches
(Two Columns)

Column 1	Column 2
Ephesus	Sardis
Smyrna	Philadelphia
Pergamum	Laodicea
Thyatira	

The relationship between Ephesus and Smyrna requires special comment. Smyrna is the shortest of the letters and in a number of ways may be said to supplement the letter to Ephesus. Because the relationship between these two letters is complementary to a large extent, they are taken together for purposes of clause comparisons below. This is done for purposes of exposition only and should not be taken to represent a structural claim. Indeed it is important for other reasons to emphasize the four-plus-three arrangement indicated earlier.[3] But in table 2 the names of the seven churches are arranged in two columns and three rows--an arrangement that will help make certain insights available during the course of the paper.

Table 2
The Seven Churches
(Two Columns, Three Rows)

Column 1	Column 2
Row 1	Ephesus & Smyrna Sardis
Row 2	Pergamum Philadelphia
Row 3	Thyatira Laodicea

Introductions to the Letters

Each of the seven letters to the churches begins and ends with a set phrase. Thus, in each case we find, "To the angel of the church in . . . write:" and immediately following, "These are the words of . . ." Set formulas are also used to conclude each letter.[4] In the present section introductory formulas are discussed, in the next one concluding formulas, and then selected elements within the bodies of the letters. The introductory formulas mentioned so far are shared by all the letters, unifying the series.

But although Christ introduces Himself to each of the churches with a clearly identifiable formula that is the same in each case, what He says demonstrates His personal interest in each separate group. Each introduction begins in a stereotyped manner, but its contents are individualized to meet the needs of the group being addressed.

Some features of the introductory phrases found in Ephesus or Smyrna on the one hand and Sardis on the other, between Pergamum and Philadelphia, and between Thyatira and Laodicea are closely similar to each other. In some cases the parallels are lexical in nature, in others they are merely thematic. It is this set of paired relationships that underlies my claim for two series of letters side by side in Rev 2-3. Thus, Christ does not treat all of the groups He addresses entirely the same, nor does He treat them all differently. The way in which He introduces Himself to the seven churches is similar enough To Whom It May Concern: be equitable, yet diverse enough to show an awareness of individual needs. Parallel clauses within the introductory sentences in each group of letters are brought together in text exhibit 1 (see appendix).

Each of the clauses listed in text exhibit 1 is numbered for ease of reference. Parallels between clauses can be either lexical or thematic. The clause "These are the words of . . . ," because it does not change from letter to letter, emphasizes the ways in which all the letters are the same. Other clauses, because they differ among themselves, divide the letters into their various subgroupings. Each of the parallels is now discussed in turn.

Ephesus & Smyrna//Sardis

First parallel: line 1. "These are the words of" (Rev 2:1; 3:1). Each of the seven letters begins with this clause and so its presence here cannot be used to illustrate the special nature of the relationship between Ephesus and Smyrna on the one hand and Sardis on the other. I include it merely for the sake of completeness.

Second parallel: line 3. After the opening formula ("These are the words of"), in line 1 of text exhibit 1, the first parallel is between the terms "life" (2:8, Smyrna) and "spirits of God" (3:1, Sardis) in line 3. Thus, in Smyrna we have, "These are the words him . . . who died and came to life again" (2:8). In Sardis we have, "These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God" (3:1). Note that the parallel in this case is not between Ephesus and Sardis, but between Smyrna and Sardis.

It is an interpretation on my part that "life" and "spirits of God" are similar in meaning, but a connection between the ideas of life and spirit can be found in a number of unrelated passages. For example 1 Cor 15:45 says, "So it is written: 'The first man Adam became a living being'; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit.'" See also John 6:36, which says: "'The words I have

spoken to you are spirit and they are life.'" This is not to say that the author of Revelation had 1 Cor 15:45 in mind as he wrote or that there is any direct link between Rev 2:1; 3:1 and John 6:36, but only that a natural similarity exists between the ideas of life and spirit used in all the above references. The clauses in line 3 of exhibit 1 represent a thematic parallel.

Third parallel: line 4. The next pair of clauses, in line 4, read: "him who holds the seven stars in his right hand" (2:1, Ephesus) and "the seven stars" (3:1, Sardis), respectively. In this case the connection is lexical in nature, with the word "stars" (Greek *asteras*) appearing in both cases. The added words, "and walks among the golden lampstands" (2:1), completes the thought in regard to the "seven stars" and is not a separate clause. Note that the holding of "seven stars" is part of an earlier description of Christ in Rev 1:16.[5]

Unique clause: line 2. There is no other clause that corresponds to "him who is the First and Last" (2:8, Smyrna) in line 2. This statement is unique in the sense that it has no thematic or lexical parallel in the introduction to any of the other letters.

Pergamum//Philadelphia

First parallel: line 5. "These are the words of" (Rev 2:12; 3:7).

Second parallel: line 7. The connection between Pergamum and Philadelphia in line 7 of text exhibit 1 concerns the words "sword" (2:12, Pergamum) and "key" (3:7, Philadelphia). This again is a thematic parallel. The figure of a sword is mentioned in an earlier chapter: "and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword" (Rev 1:16). It is of interest that the sword is in Christ's mouth and not in his hand. Comparing what Christ says with a sword is an idea that finds support elsewhere. In the book of Hebrews God's word is described as follows:

> The word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. (Heb 4:12)

Note that in Matt 16:19 also, where Peter is given the "keys of the kingdom of heaven," the giving of the keys stands in direct association with something that is said--i.e., Peter's confession of Jesus' messiahship and divinity. The keys themselves, however, are not the words of Peter but the words of Christ. With these words of more than human origin Peter and the other apostles could open heaven to anyone who believed the message they conveyed. By contrast, disbelieving what God revealed through the apostles--about Jesus' messiahship and divinity--would close heaven to others. The power of the word is illustrated further in John 12:47-48, where Christ says,

> (47) "As for the person who hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge him. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save it. (48) There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day."

Two more objects can be drawn into the present comparison as well, making a total of four. The four objects--all found in the book of Revelation--are "sword,"[6] "scepter,"[7] "key,"[8] and "sickle."[9] At least three were made of metal at the time John wrote (sword, scepter, sickle),[10] two were sharp (sword, sickle), and all four were stiff, slender, and small enough to be held in the hand. Apart from these general physical similarities there is a common theme, such that with

His word God separates truth from error (word as sword),[11] gathers souls to Himself (word as sickle),[12] rules and makes known the basis for His government (word as scepter),[13] and opens things to human minds that He wishes to reveal (word as key).[14] In Matt 16:19 the divine word opens heaven to any who accept what is revealed by it. All four lines of symbolism are closely related and should be considered together.

In line 7, therefore, the figures of both a sword (Pergamum) and a key (Philadelphia) can be compared to God's word.[15]. The additional sentence, "What he opens, no one can shut; and what he shuts, no one can open" (Rev 3:7) continues the previous thought in regard to key symbolism and is not treated as a separate clause.

Unique clause: line 6. There is no parallel statement in line 6 corresponding to, "him who is holy and true" (3:7, Philadelphia).

Thyatira//Laodicea

First parallel: line 8. "These are the words of" (Rev 2:18; 3:14).

Second parallel: line 9. In line 9 of text exhibit 1 the connection between "the Son of God" (2:18, Thyatira) and "the Amen" (3:14, Laodicea) is an especially interesting one. In origin "amen" is a Hebrew word. The verb root *ʾmn* is cognate with it and means to "be trustworthy, firm, steady."[16] A corresponding adjectival form *ʾmûnâ*[17] is used in Exod 17:12.
 "Aaron and Hur held his [Moses'] hands up--one on one side, one on the other--so that his hands remained steady [*ʾmûnâ*] till sunset."

Moses' hands were characterized in this situation by firmness and stability; they were *ʾmûnâ*. The quality illustrated in Exod 17 by an adjective related to the word "amen" is a significant one. In both testaments stability of purpose characterizes God's dealings with mankind, in marked contrast to our dealings with Him. Thus, in the Old Testament God says through His prophet, "'I the Lord do not change'" (Mal 3:6), while in the New Testament we read that "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Heb 13:8). No one else could make such a claim. In regard to us Scripture says, "We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isa 53:6). A claim to moral firmness and stability, taken in the largest and fullest sense, as in Rev 3:14, is a claim to deity.[18] Christ makes this claim in two different ways in the passages before us--by the term "the Amen" (Laodicea) and by the more explicit term "the Son of God" (Thyatira). These two expressions, in my view, are equivalent. To call Christ "the Amen" is to say he is "the Son of God."[19]

Third parallel: line 10. In line 10 the parallel is between "eyes" (2:18, Thyatira) and "witness" (3:14, Laodicea). In both cases God is shown to have a complete understanding of His people's lives and characters. In an unrelated passage we read:

Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account. (Heb 4:13)

Unique clause: line 11. No other statement corresponds to "the ruler of God's creation" (Rev 3:14, Laodicea) in line 11 of exhibit 1.

Conclusions to the Letters

Each of the seven letters in Rev 2-3 ends with two formulaic expressions. The one is, "He who has an ear" (Ephesus [2:7], Smyrna [2:11], Pergamum [2:17]); the other is, "He who overcomes" (Thyatira [2:26], Sardis [3:5], Philadelphia [3:12], Laodicea [3:21]). Whichever formula a given letter's conclusion begins with, it ends with the other. Both parts of the larger formula appear in the conclusions to all seven letters, but the order of presentation varies as indicated. Parallel expressions in the letters' concluding statements are brought together in text exhibit 2 (see appendix).

Ephesus & Smyrna//Sardis

First parallel: lines 1 and 6. "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (Rev 2:7, 11). The first three letters have conclusions which begin with the above clause. In the remaining four letters it is last. For the corresponding words in Sardis (3:6) see line 6.

Second parallel: line 2. "To him who overcomes" (2:7, 11; 3:5). This clause is second in the conclusions to Ephesus and Smyrna, but first in the conclusion to Sardis.

Third parallel: line 4. In line 4 of text exhibit 2 there is a three-way parallel among the expressions "tree of life" (Rev 2:7, Ephesus), "second death" (2:11, Smyrna), and "book of life" (3:5, Sardis). On the one hand there is "life" (Ephesus, Sardis), on the other hand "death" (Smyrna). Note the similarity between the use of these terms and my earlier comments on "spirit" (Smyrna) and "life" (Sardis). Also note the reference to death in the introduction to Smyrna (2:8). This was the church that was told it would "suffer persecution for ten days" (2:10).

Fourth parallel: line 5. In line 5 the parallel is between "the paradise of God" (2:7, Ephesus) and the phrase, "before my Father and his angels" (3:5, Sardis). Both expressions refer to heaven--the place where God dwells and therefore the place one would have to be in order to stand in His unmediated presence.

Unique clause: line 3. There is nothing else in line 3 that corresponds to "will, like them, be dressed in white" (3:5, Sardis).

Pergamum//Philadelphia

First parallel: lines 7 and 12. "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (2:17; 3:13). This clause comes first in the conclusion to Pergamum (line 7), but last in the conclusion to Philadelphia (line 12).

Second parallel: line 8. "To him who overcomes" (2:17; 3:12). This clause is second in the conclusion to Pergamum, but first in the conclusion to Philadelphia.

Third parallel: line 10. In line 10 of text exhibit 2 the parallel is between "white stone [*psēphos*]" (2:17, Pergamum) and "pillar [*stulon*]" (3:12, Philadelphia). The *psēphos* or "white stone" of Rev 2:17 is a pebble;[20] the *stulos* or "pillar" of 3:12 would bear no comparison with it in size. But in terms of their material composition both objects are stone.

Fourth parallel: line 11. In line 11 the expressions "new name" (2:17, Pergamum) and "name of my God" (3:12, Philadelphia) provide a lexical parallel based on the word *onoma* "name."[21]

Unique clause: line 9. There is no counterpart elsewhere for the clause, "I will give you some of the hidden manna" (2:17, Pergamum).

Thyatira//Laodicea

First parallel: line 13. "To him who overcomes" (Rev 2:26; 3:21). Since both Thyatira and Laodicea are among the last four letters both begin their concluding message with the above clause. The letters, the seals, the trumpets, and the plagues can all be subdivided four plus three.[22] The reason why just the conclusions to the seven letters are subdivided three plus four, and no other part, remains unclear.

Second parallel: line 14. The connection between Thyatira and Laodicea in line 14 of text exhibit 2 has to do with what is given in both cases: "I will give authority over the nations" (2:26, Thyatira), and "I will give the right to sit with me on my throne" (3:21, Laodicea). In line 14 we also find the statement, "'He will rule them with an iron scepter'" (2:27, Thyatira). Thus, in Thyatira the reference is to authority or rule and in Laodicea it is to the throne from which that authority is exercised.

Third parallel: line 15. In line 15 we find the same concepts as those in the previous line ("authority" [Thyatira], "throne" [Laodicea]). Thus, in Thyatira we read "just as I have received authority from my Father" (Rev 2:26) and in Laodicea "just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne" (Rev 3:21). One could make a case for combining line 15 of exhibit 2 with line 14. There is a difference, however. In line 14 the right to rule is something the saints receive; in line 15 it is something Christ receives. The two thoughts are of course closely related. By receiving Christ we fall heir with Him to the benefits He Himself has received from His Father. There is a distinction, however, between our role and His.

Fourth parallel: line 17. "He who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (2:29; 3:22). As stated earlier, the conclusions to the last four letters end with this clause, as opposed to the first three, which begin with it.

Unique clause: line 16. In line 16 there is no clause corresponding to "I will also give him the morning star" (2:28, Thyatira).

Summary of the unique clauses in
introductions and conclusions

Notice that, for both introductions and conclusions, each combination of letters discussed has one line with no parallel in the corresponding letter. Those clauses that are unique to a given column and row are now summarized for introductions in table 3 and for conclusions in table 4.

Table 3
Unique Introducing Clauses
Row 1: him who is the First and Last (Smyrna)
Row 2: him who is holy and true (Philadelphia)
Row 3: the ruler of God's creation (Laodicea)

Table 4
Unique Concluding Clauses
Row 1: will, like them, be dressed in white (Sardis)
Row 2: I will give some of the hidden manna (Pergamum)
Row 3: I will also give him the morning star (Thyatyra)

Notice that in each of the three unique introducing clauses we find a description of Christ, while in each of the three unique concluding clauses we find a blessing for those who would remain faithful to Him.

Not only is there one unique clause for each pair of letters, but an interesting pattern can be seen as regards where the unique material is located within the series of letters. See tables 5 and 6.

Table 5
Placement of Unique Clauses
in Letter Introductions

Column 1	Column 2
Row 1	*Ephesus & Smyrna Sardis
Row 2	Pergamum *Philadelphia
Row 3	Thyatira *Laodicea

Note: Let asterisk (*) indicate the presence of a unique clause.

Table 6
Placement of Unique Clauses
in Letter Conclusions

Column 1	Column 2
Row 1	Ephesus & Smyrna *Sardis
Row 2	*Pergamum Philadelphia
Row 3	*Thyatira Laodicea

Note: Let asterisk (*) indicate the presence of a unique clause.

For introductions the unique clause appears first in column 1, then in column 2 and again in column 2; for conclusions the unique clause appears first in column 2, then in column 1 and again in column 1. When the letters' introductions and conclusions are taken together each of the six blocs of clauses going to make up the larger six-part matrix has one and only one unique clause, as shown in table 7.

Table 7
Summary of Placement of
Unique Clauses

Column 1	Column 2
Row 1	Introduction Conclusion
Row 2	Conclusion Introduction
Row 3	Conclusion Introduction

Bodies of the Letters

Framework for an outline

The fact that the letters to the seven churches come in two clearly distinguishable groups, going to make up a matrix of parallels with highly structured characteristics, is at this point merely an interesting fact. In the present section I offer supporting evidence for the above analysis and suggest that a concept of the groups addressed which limits analysis of them to geographical distinctions is inadequate.[23] Only entities distinguished in time can fully account for the implications of the structures that have been pointed out above and those, not yet discussed, to which we turn in the present section. The text of the bodies of the seven letters is outlined in text exhibit 3 (see appendix).

In text exhibit 3 the arrangement of materials for each pair of letters follows a general format consisting of the following seven elements: (1) "I Know" Clause, (2) First Commendation, (3) Counter-Commendation, (4) Action Taken, (5) Counsel, (6) "I Come" Clause, (7) and Second Commendation.

There are two preliminary matters to clarify at this point. First, the items listed in the suggested outline format do not all occur in each of the seven letters. What I here propose is a framework for an outline rather than a taxonomy of occurring elements. The first type of structure can be applied to all seven letters, the other would have to be slightly altered for each of them.

Second, it will not be possible to deal with every part of the proposed outline format in the present paper. I leave an exhaustive discussion of the letter bodies as a project for future research.[24] Attention is focused on only one item that I consider to be of special interest so as to illustrate what kinds of points might be drawn from a fuller study of the topic.

An example: commendation
clauses one and two

The item chosen for further discussion here is the arrangement of commendation clauses and the significance of their occasional absence. It is noteworthy that in column 1, which contains the first four letters, and in column 2, which contains the last three letters, the pattern of null and non-null realizations of the two expected commendation clauses is the same within a given row. Thus, as regards the first such clause--for both columns--row 1 and row 2 contain a commendation but row 3 does not. See table 8.

Table 8
First Commendation Clause

	Column 1	Column 2	Totals
Row 1	Ephesus & Smyrna	Sardis	1 each
Row 2	Pergamum	Philadelphia	1 each
Row 3	[Thyatira]	[Laodicea]	0 each

Note: Let square brackets ([ ]) indicate the absence of an expected commendation clause.

As regards the second of the two commendation clauses--for both columns--row 1 contains the clause but rows 2 and 3 do not. See table 9.

Table 9
Second Commendation Clause

	Column 1	Column 2	Totals
Row 1	Ephesus & Smyrna	Sardis	1 each
Row 2	[Pergamum]	[Philadelphia]	0 each
Row 3	[Thyatira]	[Laodicea]	0 each

Note: Let square brackets ([ ]) indicate the absence of an expected commendation clause.

Taking tables 8 and 9 together, a motif of decreasing commendability is clearly present. The spiritual condition of the seven churches to which the letters are addressed is not uniform and the lack of uniformity is systematic in nature. There is evidence of spiritual decline within the series of churches that includes Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, and Thyatira (column 1) and also within the series which includes Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea (column 2). There is no difference between the first four letters and the last three in this regard.

The information from tables 8 and 9 is now restated in tables 10 and 11, respectively. In the one case each table represents a single commendation clause and letters are compared within clauses, in the other each table represents a group of letters and clauses are compared within groups of letters. Notice that--for both table 10 and 11--in row 1 there are two examples of a commendation clause, that in row 2 there is only one example, and that in row 3 nothing whatever is said by way of praise.

Table 10
First Series of Churches
(Column 1)

	First Commendation	Second Commendation	Totals
Row 1	You have persevered	But you have this in your favor	2
Row 2	Yet you remain true		1
Row 3			0

Note: Row 1 represents Ephesus and Smyrna together, row 2 represents Pergamum, and row 3 represents Thyatira.

Table 11
Second Series of Churches
(Column 2)

	First Commendation	Second Commendation	Totals
Row 1	[Y]ou have a reputation of being alive	Yet you have a few people in Sardis	2
Row 2	[Y]et you have kept my word		1
Row 3			0

Note: Row 1 represents Sardis, row 2 represents Philadelphia, and row 3 represents Laodicea.

Discussion

When the seven letters to the churches are considered in two separate groups it is possible to recognize a progressive decline within both as regards traits that God finds Himself able to praise. There are two points to draw from this. First, this much structure cannot be the result of coincidence. It is significant and the nature of its significance must be understood.

And second, for a decline of the sort pointed out to progress it must progress in some dimension or medium. The available media are space and time. I submit that to map moral decline onto the topography of Asia Minor makes no sense at all.[25] But to speak of moral or spiritual decline occurring over time bears examination and is reasonable.[26] In this case the term "church" in Rev 2-3 must not be limited to Christians of the first and second centuries living in seven ancient cities of Asia Minor. The seven messages from Christ which are recorded in these chapters address the needs and circumstances of the church during the centuries between John's lifetime and the second coming of Christ.[27]

The Christian church was established in a state of relative purity (Ephesus), but gradually became corrupt over time (Thyatira). Then during the Reformation (Sardis) it was once more brought back to first principles--particularly in the matter of a correct focus of faith on Christ. Since then, however, the natural process of decline has repeated itself, until at present the church throughout the world once more finds itself in a condition of great spiritual need--a need greater than it is able to realize (Laodicea).

The special point to draw from this discussion is that the structure of the letters to the seven churches confirms the classic historicist position in regard to the way apocalyptic authors

deal with time.[28] A prophecy is being conveyed here that deals with real history and real people. In the process we see others portrayed, but also ourselves. If Christ's seven messages are to speak as directly as they should to those who need to hear them most, our application of them must not be confined to an earlier age.

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[1]All Scripture quotations in English are from *The Holy Bible: New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), unless otherwise noted.

[2]For another approach to the same topic see William H. Shea, "The Covenantal Form of the Letters to the Seven Churches" *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 21 (1983), pp. 71-84. Shea points the similarities between a standard covenant formulary and the structure of the seven letters.

[3]There are four major series of seven in the book of Revelation (letters, seals, trumpets, plagues). Each can be subdivided four plus three. The seven seals begin with four horsemen (6:1-8) and end with three more diverse elements (6:9-17; 8:1-5), the seven trumpets begin with four comparatively less severe punishments (8:6-12) and end with three woes (a distinction made in 8:13 by the angel who relates them to John) (9:1-21; 11:15-19), and the seven plagues can also be cast in groups of four elements (16:1-9) and three (16:10-21). It would be cause for comment if the seven letters did not share the same general structure. In fact they do.

[4]Set phrases and formulas are not limited to the beginning and end of each letter, although they are especially noticeable there. According to Shea, "Covenantal Form," p. 81, each letter contains a preamble ("The word of him who . . ."), prologue ("I know your works . . ."), covenant stipulations ("Repent, . . ." [or something similar]), witness ("Hear what the Spirit says to the churches"), and blessing ("To him who overcomes I will grant . . ."). As applied to each of the seven letters these five elements occur in the following order (ibid., pp. 76-81):

Ephesus	Smyrna	Pergamum	Thyatira	Sardis	Philadelphia	Laodicea
Preamble	Preamble	Preamble	Preamble	Preamble	Preamble	Preamble
Prolog1	Prolog1	Prolog1	Prolog1	Prolog1	Prolog1	Prolog1
Stipulation	Stipulation	Stipulation	. . .	Stipulation	Stipulation	. . .
Curse	. . .	Curse	Curse	Curse	. . .	Curse
Prolog2	. . .	. . .	. . .	Prolog2	. . .	Prolog2
. . .	. . .	. . .	Stipulation	. . .	. . .	Stipulation
Witness	Witness	Witness	Bless	Bless	Bless	Bless
Bless	Bless	Bless	Witness	Witness	Witness	Witness

Attested variations in form include a division of prologue material into two subsections in Ephesus, Sardis, and Laodicea, the absence of a covenant curse in Smyrna and Philadelphia, the placement of covenant stipulations just before the witness/blessing section in Thyatira and Laodicea as opposed to just after the prologue elsewhere, and an alternation in order between witness then blessing (Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum) and blessing then witness (Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea).

In terms of the present analysis Shea's preamble is what I call an introduction, Shea's witness and blessing (blessing and witness) section is what I call a conclusion, and Shea's prologue, stipulation, and curse sections taken together are what I here call letter bodies.

[5]The "seven stars" that Christ holds cannot be dissociated from the fact that He holds them while walking among the seven lampstands. The lamps are lighted and each of the seven flames would be seen as a small flickering object which could be easily compared with a star. This imagery derives from the sanctuary.

[6]Rev 1:16; 2:12, 16; 19:15 (note connection with "scepter" in this verse), 21.

[7]Rev 2:27; 12:5; 19:15 (note connection with "sword").

[8]Rev 3:7.

[9]Rev 14:14-19.

[10]Keys were not made of metal in antiquity. For background information see Georg Autenrieth, *A Homeric Dictionary*, trans. Robert P. Keep, rev. Isaac Flagg (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1958), pp. 163-65 under *kleis* and related discussion.

[11]Cf. Heb 4:12-13.

[12]Cf.John 4:34-38.

[13]Cf. Heb 1:8.

[14]Cf. Luke 24:25-27.

[15]I make no systematic distinction here between the living and written Word of God, i.e., between the person of Christ and the Scriptures which reveal Him. Both in turn reveal the Father (see John 1:1; Luke 10:22).

[16]Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, eds., *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti libros*, 2nd ed. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1958), p. 60.

[17]Ibid.

[18]Singling out this particular aspect of deity for consideration is especially significant in light of the meaning of the name "Laodicea," i.e., "a people judged." Divine judgment requires the existence of a universal and unchanging standard of both truth and behavior to which each person's life can be brought for comparison. The ability to provide such a standard is implied by the title with which Christ refers to Himself at the beginning of the letter to Laodicea.

[19]The idea of stability and reliability is one of the most prominent characteristics of Old Testament rock symbolism as that symbolism is applied to God. See Hardy, "The Old Testament Basis for New Testament Rock Symbolism," in this issue of *Historicism*.

[20]See James Hope Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963), p. 699.

[21]In the Greek, onoma kainon (Pergamum, Rev 2:17), to onoma tou theou mou (Philadelphia, Rev 3:13). [22]See n. 3, above.

[23]The concept that the seven churches of Rev 2-3 represent seven periods in the history of the Christian church is developed by Orley M. Berg in the following series of articles: "Ephesus--the Desirable Church" (*Ministry*, March 1978, pp. 14-16), "Smyrna--the Persecuted Church" (ibid., May 1978, pp. 14-16), "Pergamos--the Popular Church" (ibid., July 1978, pp. 12-13), "Thyatira--Church of the Middle Ages" (ibid., September 1978, pp. 7-9), "Sardis--the Dead Church" (ibid., November 1978, pp. 16-17), "Philadelphia--the Church of Brotherly Love" (ibid., January 1979, pp. 14-15), "Laodicea--the Self-Satisfied Church" (ibid., March 1979, pp. 16-17).

[24]The structure and content of Rev 2-3 would make an excellent topic for an M.A. thesis. There is certainly more to say about the letters to the seven churches than has been said yet or could be in a paper so brief as this one.

[25]I do not challenge the possibility that the seven letters in Rev 2-3 were sent by John to literal bodies of Christian believers, although in my personal opinion each one was probably accompanied by chaps. 1 and 4-22 when this happened. One can only speculate as to how the materials in Revelation were first distributed.

[26]In spite of the fact that Shea ("Covenantal Form") takes quite a different approach to the structure of the seven letters, he draws the same exegetical conclusion from his study that I do from mine. As regards the letters' original destination, he states: "There are two main schools of thought on this point. The first interpretation of these seven letters is that their messages apply only to the seven literal and historical churches that were known in these particular cities of Asia Minor in the time of the writer. The other view of these letters is that while they should indeed be applied in this way, they can also be seen as standing symbolically for the experience

of the church through succeeding eras of history. Viewing these letters as statements concerned with renewal of the covenant might lend some minor support to the latter point of view, since in OT times the covenant was renewed serially (Joshua, Hezekiah, Josiah), and not so much contemporaneously at different sites in Israel."

[27]The concept that the seven letters exhibit a sense of historical goal direction oriented toward the return of Christ is one that follows from an analysis of the "I come" clauses within them, as summarized in text exhibit 3. The first letter in both groups speaks of Christ coming, and the next last letter in both groups speaks of Him coming "soon." But there is a dramatic contrast in the urgency expressed by the last letter in both groups--"until I come" (Thyatira) on the one hand, "Here I am!" (Laodicea) on the other. In the last letter of the seven Christ's coming is a matter not only of importance but of immediacy.