point only is the character of the former  
vision sustained. It is the *“dwellers upon  
the earth”* who are the objects of the  
judgment invoked: as it was the earth,  
and its inhabitants, and its produce, which  
were the objects of the former judgments.  
See again below on the sixth seal.

**9.] And when he opened the fifth seal, I  
saw under the altar** (it is an altar of *sacrifice*  
which is here meant; the peculiar form  
of the word *slain*, which follows, seems  
plainly to imply this: see below) **the  
souls** (i.e. departed spirits. It is manifestly  
idle to enquire, seeing that the  
Apostle was in a state of spiritual and  
supernatural vision, *how* these disembodied  
spirits became visible to him, That they  
were not clothed with bodies is manifest)  
**of those that have been slain on account  
of the word of God and on account of the  
testimony which they had** (so literally:  
i.e, which was committed to them to bear,  
and which they bore: see ch. xii. 17.

Much has been said about the souls  
of the martyrs not being their departed  
spirits, which must be conceived of as  
being in bliss with Christ, and in consequence  
it has been imagined that these  
were only their animal lives, resident in the  
blood and shed forth with it. But no such  
difficulty really exists. We know, whatever  
be the bliss of the departed martyrs and  
confessors, that they are waiting for the  
coming of the Lord, without which they  
are not perfect: and in the holy fire of  
their purified zeal, they look forward to  
that day as one of righteous judgment on  
the ungodly world. The representation  
here, in which they are seen *under the  
altar*, is simply symbolical, carrying out  
the likening of them to victims slain on an  
altar. Even as the blood of these victims  
was poured under the altar and the life was  
in the blood, so their souls are represented  
as under the symbolical altar in heaven,  
crying for vengeance, as blood is often said  
to do. After this, it hardly need be said  
that no inference can be drawn from this  
vision respecting the intermediate state  
between the death of the saints and the  
coming of the Lord): **and they cried  
with a great voice, saying** (**they**, viz.  
*the souls*, which are identified in the sentence  
with the persons themselves: not, as  
some think, the *slain* as distinguished  
from the *souls*), **Until when** (i.e. how  
long), **thou Master** (it is God who is here  
addressed; with Him rests the time when  
to avenge His elect, see Luke xviii. 7, 8)  
**holy and true, dost thou not judge** (give  
decision in the matter of) **and exact  
vengeance for our blood from them that  
dwell on the earth** (i.e. the ungodly  
world, as distinguished from the church of  
God)?

As hitherto, so here again, the  
analogy and order of our Lord’s great prophecy  
in Matt. xxiv. 11 is closely followed.  
“The signs of His coming, and of the end  
of the world” were there announced by  
Himself as war, famine, and pestilence,  
vv. 6, 7. And when He had declared that  
these were but the beginning of sorrows,  
He next, vv. 9 f., announces the persecution  
and martyrdom of His people.  
Similarly here, after the judgments already  
announced, we have the prayer  
for vengeance on the part of the martyrs,  
and the announcement of more such  
martyrdoms to come. And as our Lord’s  
prophecies revived a partial fulfilment  
in the events preceding the destruction  
of Jerusalem, and may have done so  
again and again since, but await their great  
and final fulfilment when the day of His  
coming approaches, so it is with these.  
The cry of the martyrs’ blood has been  
ever going up before God since Stephen  
fell: ever and anon, at some great time of  
persecution, it has waxed louder: and so  
on through the ages it shall accumulate  
and gather strength, till the great issue of  
the parable Luke xviii. 1 ff. is accomplished.  
**And there was given to them  
each a white robe** (there will be no real