

THE MANDATE OF THE CHURCH
IN
THE APOCALYPSE OF JOHN

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The Mandate of the Church in the Apocalypse of John
Thesis Abstract

The Apocalypse of John has elicited a wide range of responses. Captivated by its bizarre imagery, obscure references, and mythopoetic discourse, some (especially in popular writings) have engaged in an almost endless discussion attempting to decode the symbols and set out the order of predicted events. Others, convinced that it was intended to serve a pastoral function among its original recipients (the churches of Asia Minor), have focused on the practical message of its letters and visions for the Church. The scholarly consensus, as demonstrated in recent literature on the Apocalypse, is that John (the author) is not only interested in revealing things that must soon take place (Rev 1:1), but also in identifying what the Church must be and do (cf. Revelation 2-3). However, while recent scholarship demonstrates this common understanding that the Church is of vital concern to the author of the Apocalypse, and that the Apocalypse contains various tasks and functions for its recipients, the field lacks a comprehensive and cohesive discussion of all that the Church is meant to be and do. As a contribution, then, this dissertation is a study of what constitute various tasks and responsibilities of the Church as mandated in the Apocalypse of John.

Obviously, in literature that abounds on the Apocalypse, several attempts have been made to identify and discuss particular issues, themes, and motifs that point to the task and mandate of the Church. However, there has been no systematic and comprehensive effort to explore all that the Apocalypse of John considers to be the mandate of the Church, and to demonstrate how the various tasks relate to one another. One of the main concerns of this dissertation, then, is the investigation of a category that encompasses the various tasks of the Church in the Apocalypse of John. In light of the prominence of the “witness” terminology in the Apocalypse of John and the dominance of the mandate to witness in other New Testament writings, this dissertation explores the possibility that the primary mandate of the Church in the Apocalypse of John is to maintain the “witness of Jesus” (ἡ μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ), and it also examines whether the various tasks of the Church found in the Apocalypse are intended to converge under the mandate of the Church to maintain the “witness of Jesus.” Furthermore, as a contribution to the μαρτυρία debate, an attempt has been made in this dissertation to draw attention to evidence that the “witness” terminology in the Apocalypse of John functions in more ways than are discussed and debated in scholarship.

In terms of procedure and methodology, this dissertation examines various scholarly works that treat particular tasks and functions of the Church in the Apocalypse of John. However, in exploring the possibility that the various tasks and functions of the Church converge under the mandate to maintain the “witness of Jesus,” it focuses mainly on primary literature, the Apocalypse of John. It examines all the implicit and explicit references to the mandate of the Church in the Apocalypse of John and also explores the possibility that the author uses the phrase “the witness of Jesus” (ἡ μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ) as an umbrella expression for various aspects of the Church’s mandate.

For structure, the introduction outlines the task of this dissertation and presents a summary of the “state of the question” in contemporary scholarship. The first chapter provides a survey of the Apocalypse, identifying the relevant texts and classifying the various functions of the Church that are discussed in this dissertation. Subsequent chapters are devoted to detailed discussions of the tasks and functions of the Church with a main focus on the tasks of worship, witness and repentance. Through these discussions the comprehensive and cohesive nature of the mandate of the Church in the Apocalypse is demonstrated. The extent to which the tasks and functions of the Church are both varied and unified is also made evident.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The sixteenth century essayist Montaigne once concluded a lecture to a circle of French philosophers with these words:

Gentlemen, I have done nothing more than present you with flowers which others have picked. All I have contributed is a ribbon to tie them into a bouquet.

Similarly, there are several individuals who deserve recognition for their contribution to the successful completion of this dissertation. First of all, my gratitude goes to Dr. Stephen Westerholm, my primary supervisor, for both his personal attention and professional assistance. The quality of supervision given by Dr. Westerholm has taught and helped me to “read and write” at this academic level. My gratitude is also extended to the other members of my supervisory committee, Drs. Adele Reinhartz, and Alan Mendelson, for the guidance, suggestions and support which I received from them. All the members of my supervisory committee have made significant comments, corrections, and even criticisms that have enhanced the quality of my dissertation.

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Abbreviations of Journals

ASTI	Annual of the Institute Swedish Theological Institute
ATR	Australasian Theological Review
AUSS	Andrews University Seminary Studies
Bib	Biblica
BJRL	Bulletin of John Rylands University Library of Manchester
BR	Biblical Research
Bsac	Bibliotheca Sacra
BT	The Biblical Translator
BibTo	Bible Today
BTB	Biblical Theology Bulletin
CBQ	Catholic Biblical Quarterly
CH	Church History
ChrT	Christianity Today
CJT	Canadian Journal of Theology
CTJ	Calvin Theological Journal
CTM	Concordia Theological Monthly
CurBS	Currents in Research: Biblical Studies
CurTM	Currents in Theology and Mission
DTT	Dansk teologisk tidsskrift
EvQ	Evangelical Quarterly
ExAud	Ex Auditu
ExpTim	Expository Times
GR	Gordon Review
GTJ	Grace Theological Journal
Int	Interpretation
JBL	Journal of Biblical Literature
JETS	Journal of Evangelical Theological Society
JR	Journal of Religion
JRoS	Journal of Roman Studies
JSNT	Journal for the Study of the New Testament
JTC	Journal of Theology and the Church
JTS	Journal of Theological Studies
Neot	Neotestamentica
NovT	Novum Testamentum
NRTh	La nouvelle revue théologique
NTS	New Testament Studies
RB	Revue biblique
ResQ	Restoration Quarterly
RevExp	Review and Expositor
RR	Reformed Review
RTR	Reformed Theological Review

SAn	Sociological Analysis
Semeia Semeia	
SJT	Scottish Journal of Theology
ST	Studia theologica
Th	Theology
ThLi	Theology and Life
ThStKr	Theologische Studien und Kritiken
TJ	Trinity Journal
WTJ	Westminster Theological Journal

INTRODUCTION

The Apocalypse of John is a fascinating document that has elicited a wide range of responses. Captivated by its bizarre imagery, obscure references, and mythopoetic discourse, some (especially in popular writings) have engaged in an almost endless discussion attempting to decode the symbols and set out the order of predicted events.¹ Others, convinced that it was intended to serve a pastoral function among its original recipients (the churches of Asia Minor), have focused on the practical message of its letters and visions for the Church.² The scholarly consensus, as demonstrated in recent literature on the Apocalypse, is that John (the author) writes not only to inform his recipients about things that must soon take place (Rev 1:1), but also to instruct them about what they must be and do (cf. Revelation 2-3).³ In his commentary on the Book of Revelation, Morris cautions that the Apocalypse is not “a kind of intellectual puzzle (spot the meaning of this symbol!) sent to a relaxed church with time on its hands and an inclination for solving mysteries.”⁴ Yarbrow Collins, in her article “Reading the Book of Revelation in the

¹ For example, H. Lindsey, The Late Great Planet Earth (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970).

² That the function of Apocalyptic literature should receive as much attention as the issues of form and contents has been appropriately stressed by various scholars: D. Hellholm, Shepherd of Hermas and the Book of Revelation (Lund: Gleerup, 1980); D. Aune, “The Apocalypse of John and the Problem of Genre,” Semeia (1986), 36, pp. 65-96; J. Gager, Kingdom and Community: The Social World of Early Christianity (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1975), pp. 49-65; and E. S. Fiorenza, The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgment (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), p. 183.

³ The understanding that the historical referents, theological and pastoral principles, and cultural values in the Apocalypse of John which affect interpretation must all be examined is well maintained and discussed by R. Bauckham, The Theology of the Book of Revelation (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 17-22.

⁴ L. Morris, The Revelation of St. John (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), p. 20.

Twentieth Century,” notes that “the Book of Revelation provides a story in and through which the people of God discover who they are and what they are to do.”⁵ David Aune maintains that it is implicit through the entire Apocalypse that the author is vitally concerned that the people of God remain faithful to their Lord.⁶ Also in a very recent commentary on the Book of Revelation, Beale observes that the Apocalypse of John “is not intended as an apocalyptic curiosity to tantalize the intellect but to inform Christians about how God wants them to live.”⁷ While recent scholarship demonstrates this common understanding that the churches of Asia Minor are of vital concern to the author of the Apocalypse, and that the Apocalypse sets forth what its recipients ought to be and do, the field lacks a comprehensive and cohesive discussion of all that the churches of the Apocalypse are meant to be and do. As a contribution, then, this dissertation seeks to discover, discuss, and develop what constitute the various tasks and responsibilities of the Asian churches in the Apocalypse of John.⁸

Obviously, in the literature that abounds on the Apocalypse, several attempts have been made to identify and discuss particular issues, themes, and motifs that point to the task and mandate of these churches. This is evident especially in commentaries that have a devotional

⁵ A. Y. Collins, “Reading the Book of Revelation in the Twentieth Century,” *Int* 40 (1986), p. 229.

⁶ D. Aune, “St. John’s Portrait of the Church in the Apocalypse,” *EvQ* 38 (1966), p. 131.

⁷ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), p. 184. The necessity and value of reading the Apocalypse of John for its relevance to the churches of Asia Minor pervades Beale’s commentary.

⁸ For Church theologians, as well as Biblical scholars, ecclesiology (the teaching regarding the Church) is a lively issue in the study of the New Testament documents. However, a study of literature on the Church reveals an overwhelming concentration on the gospels and the letters, almost to the exclusion of the Apocalypse.

emphasis and that attempt to make the message of the Apocalypse of John relevant to the contemporary Church.⁹ It is also obvious in some of the articles that address the character, experience, and destiny of the Church in the Apocalypse of John. Notable articles in this regard include “St. John’s Portrait of the Church in the Apocalypse,” in which Aune simply singles out symbolical depictions of the Church to discuss the character and functions of the Church;¹⁰ and “La mission prophétique de l’Église dans l’Apocalypse johannique,” in which Poucouta also focuses primarily on different titles and various images to discuss the mandate of the Church in the Apocalypse of John as that of fulfilling a prophetic mission, testifying to and reflecting the Light of God.¹¹ These two articles are helpful in identifying several of the tasks and functions of the Asian churches. However, these discussions are limited, as Aune and Poucouta focus primarily on images, symbols and titles as a basis for treating the various functions of the Church in the Apocalypse of John. Other articles on the mandate of the Church in the Apocalypse of John are equally lacking in terms of comprehensiveness and cohesion.¹² There appears to be no systematic and comprehensive effort to explore all that the Apocalypse of John considers to be the

⁹ Cf. G. B. Caird, A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John The Divine (New York: Harper & Row, 1966); G. R. Beasley-Murray, The Book of Revelation (London: Oliphants, 1974); R. H. Mounce, The Book of Revelation (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977); and G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation.

¹⁰ D. Aune, “St. John’s Portrait of the Church in the Apocalypse,” EvQ 38 (1966), pp. 131-149.

¹¹ P. Poucouta, “La mission prophétique de l’Église dans l’Apocalypse johannique,” NRTh 110 (1988), pp. 38-57.

¹² For instance, see W. H. Brownlee, “The Priestly Character of the Church in the Apocalypse,” NTS (1958), pp. 224-25; J. Du Preez, “Mission Perspective in the Book of Revelation,” EvQ 42 (1970), pp. 152-67; and A. J. Bandstra, “‘A Kingship and Priests’: Inaugurated Eschatology in the Apocalypse,” CTJ 27 (1992), pp. 10-25.

mandate and task of the Church. Even when several of the tasks of the Church in the Apocalypse of John have been identified and discussed in secondary literature, there has been no conscious effort to demonstrate how the various tasks of the Church relate to one another; discussion often focuses on different parts, rather than on the whole of the mandate of the Church in the Apocalypse. One of the main concerns of this dissertation, then, is to explore the possibility of a category that encompasses the various tasks of the Church in the Apocalypse of John. Is there a primary mandate to which other mandates of the Church in the Apocalypse of John are connected? In his attempt to find a motif that unifies the Apocalypse of John (not so much a mandate that embraces all the tasks and functions of the Church), Leonard Thompson argues that “the language of worship plays an important role . . . in making a coherent Apocalypse in both form and content.”¹³ Latent in Thompson’s view is the possibility of finding, in the mandate of the Church to worship, the dominant and unifying mandate in the Apocalypse; this possibility will be investigated in this dissertation. However, considering the prominence of the “witness” terminology in the Apocalypse of John and the importance of the mandate of the Church to witness in other New Testament writings,¹⁴ this dissertation explores the possibility that the primary mandate of the Church in the Apocalypse of John is to maintain the “witness of Jesus (ἡ μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ)”; it also examines the possibility that various tasks of the Church found in the Apocalypse are intended to converge under the mandate of the Church to maintain the “witness of Jesus.”

¹³ L. Thompson, The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 53.

¹⁴ For instance, see John 15:27; Luke 24:46-49 and Acts 1:8 for the imperative to the Church to bear witness to Jesus (cf. Acts 2:32; 3:15; 5:32).

Regarding the concept of “witness” in the New Testament documents, there is certainly a fundamental difference in scholarly opinion which has a bearing on the focus of this dissertation. Most scholars would concede that there is a juridical background to the term “witness” in the New Testament: the term has been borrowed from the language of the lawcourt by the teachers and writers of both ancient Israel and the early Church.¹⁵ However, scholars disagree over how this terminology functions in several of the writings of the New Testament. Some have stressed the martyrological implication of the term “witness,” even to the point of equating μαρτυρία with suffering and martyrdom. Others see μαρτυρία designating primarily “testimony” or “confession of faith.” Much of the discussion of the term amounts to an attempt to define its meaning and function in the Apocalypse of John. For instance, Sweet thinks the “witness of Jesus” in the Apocalypse consists of verbal witness to the truth of God and living obedience to the commands of God.¹⁶ On the other hand, Mazzaferri and Lampe argue that the phrase has a clear martyrological nuance; μαρτυρία in the Apocalypse is in the final stage of becoming a technical term for martyrdom.¹⁷ For our purpose, an investigation is carried out to see if the mandate of the Church to “witness,” as expressed in the Apocalypse of John, has room to accommodate other

¹⁵ Cf. R. V. Moss, “The Witnessing Church in the New Testament,” *ThLi* 3 (November, 1960), p. 262. A. A. Trites, *New Testament Concept of Witness* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1977), pp. 35-47, has provided a valuable analysis and discussion of the background and development of meaning in the history of the usage of “witness” terminology.

¹⁶ J. P. Sweet, “Maintaining the Testimony of Jesus,” in *Suffering and Martyrdom in the New Testament*, ed. W. Horbury and B. McNeil (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 101.

¹⁷ F. Mazzaferri, “Martyria Iesou Revisited,” *BT* 39 (1988), pp. 114-22; and G. W. H. Lampe, “The Testimony of Jesus is the Spirit of Prophecy (Rev 19:10),” in *The New Testament Age* (Vol. 1), ed. William C. Weinrich (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1984), pp. 245-58.

functions of the Church. As a contribution to the μαρτυρία debate, an attempt is made to draw attention to evidence that the “witness” terminology in the Apocalypse of John functions in more ways than are often discussed and debated in scholarship.

In exploring the possibility that the various tasks and functions of the Church converge under the mandate to maintain the “witness of Jesus,” the main focus is on primary literature, the Apocalypse of John. Since no systematic and comprehensive attempt has been made in secondary literature to discuss the various tasks and functions as a unified mandate, this dissertation focuses on a close examination of all the implicit and explicit references to the mandate of the Church in both the letters and visions of the Apocalypse of John,¹⁸ it also explores the possibility that the author uses the phrase “the witness of Jesus (ἡ μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ)” as an umbrella expression for various aspects of the Church’s mandate.

The designation “Church,” as used in this thesis, is a “shorthand expression” for the sum of all the churches that received the Apocalypse of John. John does not use the term ἐκκλησία of the “universal Church,” though he does use other terms to refer to what we would mean by the phrase.¹⁹ As for the interpretative framework within which we approach the Apocalypse of John, we are cognizant of a variety of interpretative schemes adopted in the history of interpretation. Among them we may mention the “preterist or contemporary-historical” approach; the

¹⁸ There is no attempt here to limit the discussion of the mandate of the Church to the first three chapters of the Apocalypse of John. Both the letters in chapters 2-3 and the visions in the rest of the Apocalypse provide rich materials (literal and non-literal) for the understanding of the mandate of the Church.

¹⁹ The most common word for “church” in the New Testament, ἐκκλησία, appears twenty times in the Apocalypse, nineteen times in the first three chapters and once in the closing chapter. All twenty occurrences of ἐκκλησία in the Apocalypse point to a community or fellowship of believers gathered together in a particular locality.

“historicist” method; the “futurist” viewpoint; and the “idealist” approach.²⁰ For our purpose, the contemporary-historical approach, which understands the Apocalypse from the standpoint of the historical setting of its first-century readers and the author’s immediate purpose, is primarily adopted. However, this is not to deny the value of other appropriate methods of interpretation, nor to imply that the mandate of the Apocalypse starts and ends with its original recipients (the seven churches of Asia Minor). In fact, the mandate of the Apocalypse may be applied to a broader audience, the “Church universal.”²¹ The author of the Apocalypse, as Mounce rightly observes, “could without contradiction be preterist, historicist, futurist and idealist.”²² It should be made clear, though, that a proper understanding of the letters and the visions of the Apocalypse calls, first of all, for a basic approach along the lines of the contemporary-historical view. In the words of Hemer, “other methods may contribute quantitatively more to a deeper understanding but their superstructure requires a solid foundation in historical exegesis.”²³

With regard to structure, the opening chapter of this dissertation begins with an exploration of the ethical dimensions of the Apocalypse of John to show that the Apocalypse can be read with an emphasis on its ethical injunctions as to what the Church is called upon to be and

²⁰ Other approaches include the philological, literary-critical, traditional-historical, religious-historical, philosophical and psychological methods. For analysis, see R. H. Charles, The Revelation of John (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920), pp. clxxxiii-clxxxvii.

²¹ G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation, pp. 63-64, 186-187, for instance, upholds the traditional view that John’s choice of “seven churches” points to the completeness and universality of the Church in his Apocalypse.

²² R. H. Mounce, The Book of Revelation, p. 44.

²³ C. J. Hemer, The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in Their Local Setting (Sheffield: Journal for the Study of the Old Testament — N/T Supplement, 1986), p. 45.

do. It is demonstrated that the letters of the Apocalypse (chapters 2-3) are filled with commendations, criticisms, cautions, counsels, and commands of ethical significance; and that the visions of the Apocalypse (chapters 4-22) also contain an underlying ethical instruction as to what the Asian churches ought to be and do. In connection with the main thesis of this dissertation, that the term “witness” serves as an umbrella expression for the tasks and functions of the Church, it is indicated in the first chapter of this dissertation that the mandate to maintain the witness of Jesus finds expression in the explicit (as well as implicit) instructions to the Asian churches to give a positive ethical response to the contents of the Apocalypse.

The opening chapter also provides an enumeration, analysis, and synthesis of the different functions and tasks of the Church, as well as an identification of the primary tasks and relevant texts to be discussed in succeeding chapters. Without embarking on any detailed discussion of specific functions, but giving some attention to exegetical issues, the focus of this chapter is simply a chapter-by-chapter analysis and survey of the functions and tasks of the Church in the Apocalypse of John. Through this exercise, the complex and comprehensive character of the tasks of the Church, which calls for a broader and more coherent discussion, becomes more evident.

The second chapter is devoted to the discussion of one of the prominent tasks of the Church: the worship mandate of the Apocalypse, as it is reflected in the Apocalypse’s liturgical language, background, and contents which include worship scenes, hymnic materials, and petitionary statements. Through this discussion, it is maintained that the Apocalypse places a strong emphasis on worship as a function of the Church which embraces other related tasks, and which is vitally connected with the primary task of maintaining the witness of Jesus.

The third chapter focuses on the primary task of the Church to bear witness to Jesus. The manner in which the different tasks and functions of the Church (including the mandate to worship) converge under the mandate to maintain the faithful witness of Jesus is examined. Emphasis is placed on the usage of the witness terminology and the implications of the mandate of the Church in the Apocalypse to maintain faithful witness.

The fourth chapter calls attention to the task of repentance which is expected of the Church, especially when its members have failed in any of the tasks and functions of the Church that are unified by the mandate to maintain faithful witness to Jesus. The significance of the task of repentance is shown particularly through the exposition of texts in the letters of the Apocalypse which contain explicit invitations and commands to repent, as well as a study of passages in the visions of the Apocalypse which contain warnings and judgments that are meant to elicit a positive response of repentance on the part of the readership of the Apocalypse.

The concluding chapter highlights and summarizes the results of our research as to the comprehensive and cohesive nature of the mandate of the Church in the Apocalypse of John. The extent to which the functions and the tasks of the Church are both varied and unified becomes evident in this investigation.

CHAPTER ONE

FUNCTIONS AND TASKS OF THE CHURCH IN THE APOCALYPSE

Formerly, there was a widely held view that apocalyptic, in contrast to prophecy, is escapist, deterministic, otherworldly and inactive in history, and therefore indifferent (to say the least) to existential issues of ethical importance for its recipients.¹ Known for this view is Martin Buber's typology, clearly developed in his article "Prophecy, Apocalyptic and the Historical Hour."² Contrasting the historical aspects of prophecy in the Book of Jeremiah with the distinctive characteristics of apocalyptic in the Fourth Book of Ezra, he underscores the lack of ethical concern as well as the lack of freedom of the human will, decision and action in apocalyptic literature. Focusing on the Book of Fourth Ezra to express his assumptions regarding the contrast between apocalyptic and prophecy, Buber writes:

Nowhere in the book does there stir the prophetic breath of actually-happening history and its fullness of decision. Everything here is predetermined, all human decisions are only sham struggles. The future does not come to pass; the future is already present in heaven, as it were, present from the beginning. Therefore, it can be 'disclosed' to the speaker and he can disclose it to others. His innermost question accordingly, is not concerned with what poor man shall undertake but why things happen to him as they do.³

However, contrary to this understanding of the contrast between apocalyptic and prophetic literature, there is a growing scholarly consensus that both types of literature are full of

¹ Cf. D. Rössler, Gesetz und Geschichte. Untersuchungen zur Theologie der jüdischen Apokalyptik und der pharisäischen Orthodoxie (WMANT 3), Neukirchen/Vluyn, 1962, who concludes that the Apocalyptists felt no need for an ethical-religious standpoint, since they were concerned with a very different set of problems.

² M. Buber, "Prophecy, Apocalyptic and the Historical Hour," in Pointing the Way, ed. M. S. Friedman (New York: Schocken Books, 1974), pp. 192-207.

³ M. Buber, "Prophecy, Apocalyptic and the Historical Hour," p. 201.

ethical concerns. An important work in this respect is that of Lebram, “The Piety of the Jewish Apocalyptists,” in which he insists that several apocalyptic writings contain an explicit paraenetic section and that, even where this is lacking, the authors of these works presuppose the requirement of a certain religious attitude. This then, according to Lebram, means that the study of the characteristics and the substance of the ethical concerns of the writer, as well as of the anticipated pious response of the readership to the apocalyptic message in the individual Apocalypses, is fully justified.⁴ In this vein, it has been demonstrated in recent literature that the Apocalypse of John may be read with an emphasis on its “moral instruction”⁵ as to what the Church is called upon to be and do.

Despite the scholarly consensus that the Apocalypse of John is written with a focus on what the Church is called upon to be and do, there is still much discussion and debate over the characteristics that the Church is expected to display and the functions it is expected to carry out. As a contribution to the ongoing discussion, an attempt will be made here to identify, list and summarize various functions of the Church that become apparent in the course of reading the Apocalypse, including both the paraenetic and visionary sections. This will confirm the complex and comprehensive character of the tasks of the Church, and the need for a broader and more

⁴ J. C. H. Lebram, “The Piety of the Jewish Apocalypstists,” in Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1983), pp. 171-210. See also B. Reicke, “Official and Pietistic Elements of Jewish Apocalypticism,” JBL 79 (1960), pp. 137-50, who in his attempt to trace back the apocalyptic traditions to old prophetic customs argues that the use of apocalyptic communications is to aid or guide both the political and religious life of the Jewish people.

⁵ R. H. Mounce, The Book of Revelation, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), p. 66. See also W. Schrage, The Ethics of the New Testament (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), pp. 329-48, who writes about the connection between eschatology and ethics in the Book of Revelation.

coherent discussion than is found in existing literature on the Apocalypse. Following, then, is a chapter-by-chapter analysis of the mandates of the Church in the Apocalypse of John.

A. Survey of the Functions and Tasks

Chapter One

In the introductory paragraph (1:1-3), John identifies his work as one that is both apocalyptic (Ἐποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ) and prophetic (τοὺς λόγους τῆς προφητείας). It contains materials to be passed on to the Church (ἣν ἔδωκεν αὐτῷ ὁ θεὸς δεῖξαι τοῖς δούλοις αὐτοῦ), where it is to be read (ὁ ἀναγινώσκων), heard (οἱ ἀκούοντες), and obeyed (τηροῦντες). On those who read, hear, and obey the contents of his Apocalypse, John pronounces his benediction (1:3).⁶ The task of the Church in relationship to the Apocalypse of John is to hear and, most significantly, obey its contents. Repeatedly, the Church is called upon to hear and respond positively to the contents of the Apocalypse (cf. 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22; 13:9, 18).⁷

The Apocalypse of John is said to come to the churches of Asia Minor from Jesus Christ, who bears the titles of faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth (1:5). No explicit mandate is here given to the Church. However, it would be worth exploring the ways in which the role of Jesus as a “faithful witness” provides a pattern for the

⁶ In the opening and closing chapters of the Apocalypse (cf. 1:3; 22:7), benediction is pronounced on those who obey its words. In the closing chapter, in particular, explicit warning is given to the Church to treat the Apocalypse of John with utmost care and respect (22:18-19).

⁷ Obedience is one of the themes that features significantly in the Apocalypse of John: benediction is pronounced on those who obey (1:3; 22:7); the church of Sardis is commanded to obey what she already received and heard (3:3); the church of Philadelphia is commended for her obedience (3:10); several individuals are noted for their obedience to the commandment of God and the words of John’s prophecy (12:17; 14:12; 22:9).

Church that is called upon to maintain its witness and remain faithful to Jesus (cf. 2:10, 13, 15; 3:4, 10-11; 6:9; 12:11, 17; 20:4).

In his doxology, John offers eternal glory and power to “the one who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and father” (1:5-6). In terms of the character of the Church, this doxology describes the Asian churches (cf. 1:4) as those who are loved, delivered from sin, and constituted as a kingdom and priests to serve God. Implied in this description is the expectation of the Church to function in ways that correspond to the description. Thus, the church of Ephesus, a church loved by Jesus (1:5), is later chastised for abandoning her initial love for Jesus (2:4);⁸ the churches of Pergamum and Thyatira, churches that have been freed from their sin by his blood (1:5), are reprimanded for tolerating sinful activities, including eating food sacrificed to idols and committing fornication (2:14-15, 20); and the kingship and priestly services of the Church (1:6) are not only promised, both in the letters and visions (2:26-28; 3:21; 20:4-6; 22:3-5, 21), but also recognized and celebrated in the hymns of worship (5:10; 7:15; 11:18; 19:2, 5).

The first chapter draws attention to the eschatological appearance of Jesus (1:7). As if it were a present reality taking place, John writes: “Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be! Amen.” The reiteration of this eschatological appearance of Jesus in some of the letters to the seven churches and the closing chapter of the Apocalypse implies that John expects the Church to execute her functions faithfully in light of the imminent return of Jesus

⁸ This is with the understanding that the “first love” that the Ephesian church abandoned could be a reference to their love for Jesus.

Christ.⁹ To some of the churches of Asia Minor, the imminent return of Jesus serves as a warning to mend their ways (2:5, 16; 3:3, 20); to others, it is a source of encouragement to maintain faithfulness (3:11; 22:7, 12, 20).

One also observes, in the first chapter of the Apocalypse, the manner in which John identifies himself with his readership, the seven churches (1:9). He introduces himself as a brother to the members of the seven churches (ὁ ἀδελφὸς ὑμῶν), as well as a fellow-participant (συγκοινωνός) in their experience of suffering, membership of the kingdom, and commitment to patient endurance.

Of further relevance to our understanding of the character and function of the Church, in the first chapter of the Apocalypse, are two symbolic references to the seven churches: the seven stars and the seven golden lampstands (1:12-13, 28).¹⁰ The meaning and usage of these two symbols are worth exploring to see if they shed any light on the character and function of the Church to bear witness to Jesus Christ. In a more detailed fashion, later on in this dissertation, we will explore and discuss the possibility that the functions of the churches identified in the letters (chapters 2-3) may be connected with the task of faithful witness.

⁹ The imminent return of Jesus Christ receives significant attention in the Apocalypse of John (cf. 1:7; 2:5, 16; 3:3, 11, 20; 14:1; 22:7, 12, 20).

¹⁰ A list of symbolic and literal references in the Apocalypse of John to indicate the character and function of the Church includes the following: the seven stars and seven golden lampstands (1:12, 28; 2:1, 5; 3:1); the two witnesses, two olive trees, two lampstands and two prophets (11:3-10); the bride of the Lamb (19:7-9; 21:2, 9; 22:17); the holy city, the new Jerusalem (21:2, 10); the people of God (18:4; 21:3, 7); the kingdom and priests unto God (1:6, 9; 5:10; 7:15); the saints (5:8; 8:3; 11:18; 13:7, 10; 14:12; 16:6; 17:6; 18:20, 24; 19:8); and armies of heaven (19:14).

Chapters Two and Three

In many Apocalypses, ethical injunctions are explicitly and directly given in the paraenetic portions.¹¹ This is true of the Apocalypse of John which contains, at the beginning, seven letters addressed to the seven churches of Asia Minor (chapters 2 and 3).

In terms of structure, the Apocalypse of John as a whole is given an epistolary form by its author. Like the Pauline letters, it begins (after the inscription in verses 1-3) with an epistolary style and ends with a benediction. The first chapter starts with a prescript which contains salutation and doxology (1:4-8), the main sequence of the apocalyptic visions is introduced by seven letters of highly formalized parallel structure (chapters 2-3), and the postscript in the last chapter concludes with final admonitions, warnings, blessings, and greetings (22:10-21).

The relationship that the letters in chapters 2-3 have with the rest of the Apocalypse remains controversial. An older critical view which still surfaces in recent studies is that the letters first existed independently of the rest of the Apocalypse. R. H. Charles, for instance, argues that the letters were originally sent to the various churches separately at a time prior to the fundamental antagonism which developed between Christianity and the Imperial cult. The allusion in Rev 3:10 to universal tribulation, therefore, would belong to the period of later redaction. Charles bases his observation on the view that the letters contain no reference to the cult of the Caesars or to the massive experience of martyrdom implied by the later chapters, except in 3:10. He accordingly concludes that 3:10 together with the introductory titles and

¹¹ A classic example is 1 Enoch, which includes a major paraenetic section (chapters 91-108).

concluding formulae of each letter belong to the book's Domitianic revision.¹² Charles does much more than suggest the priority of the letters in terms of time of writing. Comparing the paraenetic portion with the visionary section of the Apocalypse, he points out a few discrepancies, which set the stage for debate over the unity of the Apocalypse.¹³

In a way similar to Charles' approach, Ramsay put forward the theory that the letters have no organic connection with the main portion of the Apocalypse. He considered the Apocalypse to be complete without the letters. In fact, he looked upon them as forming a mere episode, attached loosely to a work of diverse character, as a kind of homiletic addition, the idea of which only occurred as an afterthought to the writer during the process of penning the Apocalypse proper.¹⁴

To suggest that the letters were written as an afterthought is to miss what appears to be

¹² R. H. Charles, The Revelation of John (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920), pp. xciv-xcv, 44.

¹³ Unity of the Apocalypse is supported by C. J. Hemer, The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia (Sheffield: Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, 1986), pp. 8, 41f. who makes a keen observation of three areas which connect the letters with the rest of the Apocalypse: 1) the correspondence between the initial description by which Christ introduces himself to each church (except the letter to Laodicea) and attributes ascribed to him in the Patmos vision (1:12-20); 2) the contrast between the seven earthly cities of chapters 2-3 and the heavenly city visualized in chapters 21-22; and 3) the connection between the letters and the sequence of visions which occupy chapters 4-20.

¹⁴ W. Ramsay, The Letters to the Seven Churches (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1963), pp. 36-37. That the letters (chapters 2-3) were composed after the visions (chapters 4-22) has recently been suggested by D. Aune, Revelation 1-5 (Waco: Word Books, 1997-98), pp. cxxii-cxxxiv, who in his discussion of the composition of the Apocalypse considers chapters two and three as a major literary addition of the Apocalypse's second edition.

the purpose and occasion for the writing of the visions of the Apocalypse.¹⁵ The visions were prompted by the historical situation of the churches to which John alludes in the letters. Though the letters may appear to be quite distinct from the rest of the Apocalypse, upon careful observation there are reasons to embrace the unity of the Apocalypse. A careful reader will notice, in the narrative of the visions, echoes of symbols and expressions which appear in the letters or which suggest that the circumstances of the churches addressed in the letters are present to the writer's mind.¹⁶ This is well expressed by Swete when he writes:

After c.iii the separate interests of the churches pass out of sight. . . . But the Asian churches are not forgotten even if they are not mentioned again till near the end (xxii: 16, 21). Their spiritual dangers are probably in view throughout the book, but especially in passages where the vices of heathenism are condemned and the faithful are warned against participation in them, or reminded of their obligation to keep themselves pure. And the whole series of visions which begins with c.iv is in effect an answer to the forebodings by which the faithful in Asia were harassed in view of the gathering forces of the Antichrist.¹⁷

Most modern commentators understand the letters to be an integral part of the Apocalypse, but they differ as to their literary form and function. In view of the general content

¹⁵ See C. H. Parez, "The Seven Letters and the Rest of the Apocalypse," *JTS* 12 (1911), pp. 284-6; and C. J. Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia*, p. 42, for a critique of Ramsay's view.

¹⁶ Motifs present in both the letters and the visions of the Apocalypse on the basis of which its unity can be affirmed, include the following: the tree of life (2:7//22:2, 14, 19); the second death (2:11// 20:6, 14; 21:8); the overcomer (2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21// 21:7); the sword in the mouth (2:16// 19:15, 21); the name written in the book of life (3:5// 7:8; 13:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27); the warning to take heed to the message (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22// 13:9; 22:18); white robes (3:5// 7:9); authority over the nations (2:26// 22:5); the kingly rule with an iron scepter (2:27// 12:5; 19:15); the admonition to endure patiently and witness faithfully (2:3, 10, 13// 13:10; 14:12); the new Jerusalem coming out of heaven (3:11// 22:12); the imminent return of Christ (3:11// 22:12); the morning star (2:28// 22:16). Cf. H. B. Swete, *Revelation* (London: MacMillan, 1907), pp. xlvi-xlix; and R. H. Charles, *The Revelation of St. John*, p. lxxviii.

¹⁷ H. B. Swete, *The Apocalypse of John*, pp. xcv-xcvi.

of the letters and their historical allusions, they are commonly considered as “real contemporary letters,”¹⁸ which were precipitated by the historic situation in the Asian churches. Beasley-Murray notes that, “as Paul was compelled to adapt his message to the needs of the Galatians, so John was constrained to adapt the Christian hope to the situation which was developing in Asia Minor.”¹⁹

As to the character of these letters of the Apocalypse, commentators such as Swete and Beckwith have considered them as “messages,” “special words” which form à sequel to the first chapter of the Apocalypse and part of a common epistle (i.e., the whole book in an epistolary form) sent to all the seven churches.²⁰ A similar view is expressed by Feuillet, who suggests that the letters should be viewed as “oracles.” This is based on his observation that the letters more closely resemble the prophetic oracles of the Old Testament than the epistles of the New Testament. What we have in the letters, according to Feuillet, is Christ coming to the churches to inspect them, and also to issue words of warning and notes of encouragement.²¹ As a complement to Feuillet’s classification of the seven letters, Bauckham has designated the seven letters as “prophetic messages,” whereby John understands himself to be writing at the climax of the prophetic tradition, when all the eschatological oracles of the prophets are about to be

¹⁸ However, that the letters of the Apocalypse are “real contemporary letters” is denied by M. S. Enslin, Christian Beginnings (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1956), p. 358.

¹⁹ G. R. Beasley-Murray, The Book of Revelation (London: Oliphants, 1974), p. 13.

²⁰ H. B. Swete, The Apocalypse of John, p. xli; and I. T. Beckwith, The Apocalypse of John (New York: MacMillan, 1919), pp. 446f.

²¹ A. Feuillet, The Apocalypse (New York: Alba House, 1965), pp. 48f. Also see E. Lohse, Die Offenbarung des Johannes (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1976), p. 21, who compares the seven letters of the Apocalypse to the seven oracles of Amos 1-2.

fulfilled; and so John interprets and gathers them up in his own prophetic revelation.²²

In recent studies on the literary background of the seven letters, it is not unusual to find attention drawn to an Old Testament or Jewish apocalyptic background that sheds light on the form and function of the letters in the Apocalypse of John. Drawing on this tradition, Shea identifies the “covenantal form” of the letters. Shea observes that each letter contains five essential segments, which thematically reflect the fivefold ancient Near Eastern covenant form imposed on Israel by Yahweh in Exodus 21ff. and throughout Deuteronomy.²³

Aune, on the other hand, looking for a Graeco-Roman background for the images, symbols and visions of the Apocalypse, considers the seven letters as “Royal or Imperial edicts.” Here in the Apocalypse, according to Aune, Christ presents himself as a king: he addresses his subjects and portrays himself as the true sovereign, in contrast to the pseudo-kingship of the Roman emperor.²⁴ All these amount to attempts to discover the character, function, and literary background of the letters of the Apocalypse.

With this introduction to the different understandings of the character, function and literary background of the letters, and their relationship to the rest of the Apocalypse, we will now give attention to each letter, focusing on the functions and tasks of the Church that they contain.

²² R. Bauckham, The Theology of the Book of Revelation (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 5.

²³ W. H. Shea, “The Covenantal Form of the Letters to the Seven Churches,” AUSS 21 (1983), pp. 71-84.

²⁴ D. Aune, “The Form and Function of the Proclamations to the Seven Churches (Revelation 2-3),” NTS 36 (1990), pp. 182-204.

1. The Church of Ephesus (2:1-7)

This letter (like several others in the paraenetic section of the Apocalypse) is marked both by commendations and by criticisms that reveal several of the functions expected of the Asian churches. Commendation begins with an acknowledgment and appreciation (οἶδα)²⁵ of a “triad of virtues”²⁶ (v. 2a) which includes deeds, hard work, and perseverance (τὰ ἔργα σου καὶ τὸν κόπον καὶ τὴν ὑπομονήν σου). That the church of Ephesus is complimented for these virtues is of course an indication that deeds (τὰ ἔργα) which are marked by hard work and perseverance (signs of faithfulness)²⁷ are expected of the Church. This statement of commendation is followed with a further ground or reason for appreciation, that the church of Ephesus cannot endure wicked people (καὶ ὅτι οὐ δύνη βαστάσαι κακοῦς)²⁸ and that they have tested some who call themselves apostles and found them to be liars (v. 2b). The character of the Ephesians’ patience is described (v. 3): they have endured hardship for the sake of Christ and have not grown weary (καὶ ὑπομονήν ἔχεις καὶ ἐβάστασας διὰ τὸ ὄνομα μου καὶ οὐ κεκοπίακες). Here it is implied that there are tasks for believers to perform for the sake of Christ, and that perseverance

²⁵ The term οἶδα, “I know,” occurs in each of the seven letters, five times introducing a commendation (2:2, 9, 13, 19; 3:7) and twice a criticism (3:1, 15); in several instances, οἶδα is specifically connected with the deeds of the churches (2:19; 3:1, 8, 15).

²⁶ D. Aune, Revelation 1-5 (Texas: Word Books, 1997-98), p. 142, notes the close parallel between this triad of virtues in Rev 2:2a and those in 1 Thess 1:3 where the three nouns ἔργον, κόπος and ὑπομονή are linked with πίστις, ἀγάπη, and ἐλπίς in the genitive.

²⁷ This understanding implies that the first καί in 2:2 may be read as epexegetic (cf. D. Aune, Revelation 1-5, p. 143).

²⁸ The term κακοί, “wicked people,” in this context is likely a reference to the false apostles mentioned in the same verse (2c). The κακοί, then, represent a generic type of which the false ἀπόστολοι are specific types (cf. D. Aune, Revelation 1-5, p. 143).

in the performance of them deserves commendation.

Further commendation is offered in v. 6, where the church of Ephesus is acknowledged and appreciated for hating the deeds of a group identified as the “Nicolaitans,” deeds which the addresser also despises (ὅτι μισεῖς τὰ ἔργα τῶν Νικολαϊτῶν ἃ καὶ γὼ μισῶ). The “Nicolaitans” are mentioned, in a negative fashion, only in the letters of the Apocalypse (2:6, 15), with reference to their practices (τὰ ἔργα) and their teaching (τὴν διδαχὴν), but without any statement of the contents of either. However, in their association with the “Balaamites,” one observes that their teaching and practices, marked by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality (cf. 2:14-15), are deemed to create a stumbling block (σκάνδαλον) to the church in Pergamum. Taken literally or symbolically, these practices suggest religious infidelity that entails idolatry, which the church of Pergamum, like Jesus and the Ephesians, should detest.

Criticism against the church of Ephesus is expressed in terms of a virtue that is lacking. The church has lost her first love (ἀλλὰ ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ ὅτι τὴν ἀγάπην σου τὴν πρώτην ἀφῆκες). The Ephesians’ loss of “first love,” especially the question of its object, is an issue which has arrested the attention of scholars. Commentators have identified this love either as the love for God or the love for other members of the Church and humankind in general. Due to the lack of clarity and specificity as to which love is implied, the probability that both kinds of love are intended is also advocated. With true insight, Hengstenberg commented that we must take this love in its largest compass, combining the love of God and the love of fellow human beings.²⁹

²⁹ E. W. Hengstenberg, *The Revelation of St. John* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1852), p. 160. However, G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), p. 230f., in his attempt to tie this criticism of the Ephesian church to the “witness motif,” suggests that the

Basic to Christian experience is the conjunction of love for both God and humanity (cf. Mark 12:29ff.). That we cannot have one without the other is rightly noted by Beasley-Murray:

Where love for God wanes, love for man diminishes; and where love for man is soured, love for God degenerates into religious formalism; and both constitute a denial of the revelation of God in Christ.³⁰

Here we see a church that is commended for possessing virtues such as perseverance, sensitivity to and rejection of unorthodox faith and practice. The Church is also condemned for lacking a significant virtue, love: a “mark of great apostasy”³¹ which the Apocalypse addresses. For this reason, the church is commanded to repent (μετανοήσου). Tied with the mandate to repent are complementary imperatives that call the church of Ephesus to remember whence she had fallen (μνημόνευε), and to do the initial works which she had neglected (τὰ πρῶτα ἔργα ποίησον).

The explicit command to the church of Ephesus to repent, in light of her failure in one of her functions, is followed by a direct exhortation to listen and pay attention to what the Spirit says to the churches (2:7a). The letter concludes with a promise to the one who overcomes (τῷ νικῶντι) that he/she will receive the gift of eating from the tree of life. Implied in this promise is the understanding that the Church is expected to overcome in order to inherit the promise

“loss of first love” is not “for one another” nor “for the Lord,” but the suppression of spiritual gifts which are necessary for the Christian community’s witness to be effective. Thus, losing their first love is tantamount to losing zeal for witness.

³⁰ G. R. Beasley-Murray, The Book of Revelation, p. 75.

³¹ J. Sweet, Revelation (London: SCM Press, 1979), p. 79.

(2:7b);³² and that the overcomer, in this letter to Ephesus, is one who repents of the loss of first love.³³

2. The Church of Smyrna (2:8-11)

The letter to the church of Smyrna is one of the two letters that contain commendation without any criticism (cf. 3:7-13). The church is commended for its positive ethical response to the experience of persecution and the accompanying poverty, hardship, and suffering. As to the question from whose hands the Smyrneans suffered persecution, most scholars would agree that the Imperial authorities were responsible. However, since there is enough evidence to believe that there was a large Jewish population in Smyrna, which was likely at odds with the Christian community, Hemer has suggested that the persecution was probably at the instigation of the Jews.³⁴ The letter itself speaks not only of the slander to which the Christians in Smyrna were subjected from the Jews (2:9) in Smyrna,³⁵ but also of imprisonment at the hands of Imperial authorities (2:10).

³² That overcoming is the basis for inheriting the promises is a strong motif in both the letters and the concluding vision of the Apocalypse (cf. 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21; 21:7; 22:1-5, 12, 14).

³³ The context in which reference is made to the overcomer assists in determining the character and function of the overcomer in the Apocalypse of John.

³⁴ C. J. Hemer, The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in Their Local Setting, p. 91. In view of Rev 2:9 (as well as 3:9 and 11:8), A. J. Beagley, The 'Sitz im Leben' of the Apocalypse with Particular Reference to the Role of the Church's Enemies (Berlin: Walter deGruyter, 1987), goes to the extreme of arguing that the main opponents of Christians in the Apocalypse of John are the Jews and not Rome.

³⁵ Perhaps to indicate their opposition to the church, John "labels" "those who call themselves Jews" in Smyrna (as well as in Philadelphia) "a synagogue of Satan" (2:9 and 3:9); with the name "Satan" meaning "opponent" or "adversary" (cf. D. Aune, Revelation 1-5, p. 162).

Here in this letter, in the context of warning regarding further experience of sufferings, imprisonment, and distress (2:10), the church of Smyrna is given an explicit imperative, with ethical implications, to fear nothing (μηδὲν φοβοῦ) and also to be faithful even unto the point of death (γίνου πιστὸς ἄχρι θανάτου). Even if the experience of persecution takes “harsher forms of imprisonment and capital punishment,”³⁶ the church of Smyrna is to maintain courage and persevere. This ethic of suffering with patience and endurance in the midst of hostility and persecution is a strong feature of the ethics of the Apocalypse of John. It reflects the example of the Lamb who conquered through suffering and self-sacrifice (cf. 5:6; 1:6; 12:11; 19:13).

The letter to the church of Smyrna, like other letters, concludes with a challenge to listen and pay attention to what the Spirit says to the churches (2:11a), and also to overcome the challenges that might stand in the way of inheriting the promise of rescue from the second death (2:11b). Even when the Church has maintained faithfulness, she is expected to remain sensitive and responsive to the voice of the Spirit in the Apocalypse (cf. 2:11; 3:13).

3. The Church of Pergamum 2:12-17

By way of commendation, the letter acknowledges and appreciates not only the difficult context in which the church of Pergamum finds herself — where the throne (power and authority) of Satan is established (2:13a)³⁷ — but also the Church’s ethical response of faithfulness and

³⁶ G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation, p. 241.

³⁷ Even though it is difficult to determine what John specifically meant by the “throne of Satan,” the throne (ὁ θρόνος) in this context suggests an established authority that is in opposition to Christian activities in Pergamum. Adversaries in the Apocalypse that make the faithful witness of the Church difficult, if not impossible, include the dragon, the “ancient serpent” (which is identified as Satan in 12:7-12; 20:1-10; cf. 13:1-18); the woman drunk with the blood of the saints (17:6); and Babylon (18:1-24). For the Pergamum church, the throne which is characterized as ὁ θρόνος τοῦ σατανᾶ is likely a reference to the imperial cult which is

loyalty in holding on to the name of Jesus and not renouncing faith in him (2:13b). The “faithful witness” of the church of Pergamum is strongly attested by the statement that she did not deny her faith in Jesus (οὐκ ἠρνήσω τὴν πίστιν μου). Since the terms “confess” (ὁμολογέω) and “deny” (ἄρνέομαι) are frequently used as antitheses in early Christian literature (cf. Matt 10:32-33; Luke 12:8-9; John 1:20; Tit 1:16; 1 John 2:23; Ign. Smyrn. 5:1-2; Mart. Pol 9:2; Herm. Sim. 9.28.4, 7), the church of Pergamum is thus commended for her public confession of faith in Jesus.³⁸ An example of this faithful witness is Antipas, who is cited in the letter (2:13) as one who sealed his faithful witness with martyrdom.³⁹

While some of the Christians in Pergamum were prepared to maintain a faithful witness even to the extent of suffering martyrdom, others became unfaithful by succumbing to non-Christian influence; “they accommodated themselves to pagan society with its quasi-religious banquet, sexual licence, and the adulation of Rome.”⁴⁰ According to the letter (2:14-15), by way of criticism, some (in contrast to those in Ephesus) were said to have been seduced by the teachings of Balaam and the Nicolaitans.

The identification of the Nicolaitans and their relation to the Balaamites presents a problem for the student of the Apocalypse of John, since the Nicolaitans, unlike other heretical

symbolized by the power and throne given to the beast (cf. 12:9; 13:2).

³⁸ Cf. D. Aune, Revelation 1-5, p. 184; and G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation, p. 248.

³⁹ Antipas is a good example of faithful witness (2:13). Other faithful witnesses who sealed their witness with martyrdom in the Apocalypse include the slain witnesses (6:9-11), the two witnesses (11:1-17), the victorious witnesses (12:11; 15:1-2; 20:1-6), and the saints who bore witness to Jesus (17:6).

⁴⁰ J. Sweet, Revelation, p. 88.

groups, are only named but not defined in terms of their historical identity and religious tenets. One attempt to solve this problem groups the Nicolaitans with other heretical sects mentioned in the letters. A common procedure, then, is to link the Balaamites (mentioned in the letter to Pergamum) with the Nicolaitans (mentioned in the same letter), thereby making their error equivalent to that of those described as idolatrous and sexually immoral in Num 25:1-2; 31:16. This treatment also makes it possible for different commentators to conclude that in Thyatira the trouble was more or less the same; the Jezebelites thus become equated with the Balaamites, and the Nicolaitans are made to include both.

Following this type of approach, Hemer argues that the Balaamites and the Nicolaitans are similar in both name and nature, and he concludes that the idolatry that was the problem in the case of Balaam is also in view in the error of the Nicolaitans. What the church of Pergamum is facing, then, is probably a pressure to conform to the idolatrous worship of the Emperor.⁴¹ Beasley-Murray underscores this view by maintaining that just as Balaam by his instruction caused the Israelites to stumble, so the Nicolaitans by their teachings ensnare Christians; John then sees in the Nicolaitans a counterpart to the havoc wrought by Balaam among the Jews (cf. Num 31:16; 25:1-2).⁴²

However, a critique of the aforementioned approach comes from MacKay in his article, "Another Look at the Nicolaitans."⁴³ He argues against the impression that there is in these churches a heretical sect, practicing idolatry and immorality, bearing the general name of

⁴¹ C. J. Hemer, The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in Their Local Setting, p. 194.

⁴² G. R. Beasley-Murray, The Book of Revelation, p. 85.

⁴³ W. M. MacKay, "Another Look at the Nicolaitans," EvQ 45 (1973), pp. 111-115.

Nicolaitans, but exhibiting variations in different localities which are illustrated by the attachment of the names Balaam and Jezebel. He proceeds to suggest an alternative approach which makes room for three different heretical groups: the Balaam heresy is to be identified as compromise with pagan ceremonies; the Jezebel heresy is the ousting of the truth and the setting up of false teachings within the Church; and the Nicolaitans represent a special heresy which is peculiar to the New Testament. According to MacKay, the first reference to the Nicolaitans is found in the letter to the church of Ephesus (2:1-7), where their deeds are stigmatized; and the second reference is in the letter to the church of Pergamum (2:12-17), where their doctrine is mentioned. In these two references, then, MacKay finds the doctrine of the Nicolaitans and the deeds that flow from it.

MacKay's article is indeed "another look," but it is not certain that it points in the right direction. There is enough evidence in the letters to Pergamum and Thyatira to suggest that the group advocating the teachings of Balaam has much in common with the group propagating the teachings of Jezebel. Both are charged with enticing the Church into religious infidelity marked by the eating of food sacrificed to idols and fornication (2:14, 20), which suggests that even if they are two groups in two different localities, their programs and purposes are the same.

MacKay's attempt to differentiate the Balaamites from the Jezebelites, by suggesting that one operates in pagan ceremonies while the other works within the Church, is not indicated at all in the letters. Religious infidelity seems to be a common problem in the teachings of the Balaamites, Nicolaitans, and Jezebelites. Here in Pergamum, pressures are being brought upon Christians to participate in non-Christian practices. The challenge in this letter to those in Pergamum is to remain faithful to Christ. Here we find a condemnation of idolatry through the use of the metaphor of prostitution and sexual immorality, with the understanding that idolatry itself is

considered as “the root of all other forms of vice.”⁴⁴ Since part of the church of Pergamum is involved in this sin of idolatry, there is also a call for faithfulness and purity in terms of teaching and lifestyle.

By way of admonition, the church of Pergamum is mandated (as are other churches in other letters) to repent of her unfaithfulness; she is served with a warning of what will happen if she fails to repent; and she is counseled to listen and pay attention to the voice of the Spirit (2:16-17b). Again, here is an indication that the Church is expected to repent and give a positive response to the contents of the Apocalypse, especially when she has failed in her functions.

The letter to the church of Pergamum concludes with a promise given to the overcomers. Those who overcome will inherit the blessings of the hidden manna and the white stone with a new name (2:17b). The challenge to be an overcomer in this letter to the church of Pergamum is mentioned in a context concerned with enduring persecution (2:13), and maintaining faithfulness that is marked by purity of lifestyle and teaching (2:14-15).

4. The Church of Thyatira (2:18-29)

The letter to the church of Thyatira begins, in verse 19, with a notation of several characteristics (σου τὰ ἔργα) which are commendable: love (ἀγάπην),⁴⁵ faith (πίστιν),⁴⁶ service

⁴⁴ D. Aune, Revelation 1-5, p. 188.

⁴⁵ In contrast to the church of Ephesus (cf. 2:4), the church of Thyatira sustains and increases her love (2:19).

⁴⁶ Like some in the church of Pergamum (cf. 2:13), several in the church of Thyatira kept their faith, and maintained their faithfulness to Jesus Christ (2:19).

(διακονίαν),⁴⁷ and patient endurance (ὑπομονήν).⁴⁸ All these characteristics are demonstrated to a greater degree now than previously by the church of Thyatira (2:19). The commendation implies that the Church in general is expected to show these characteristics, in an ever increasing measure.

Just as the church of Pergamum failed to maintain purity, so the church of Thyatira is rebuked for compromising with a woman called Jezebel, who claimed to be a prophetess, and who through her teaching misled (καὶ διδάσκει καὶ πλανᾷ) the servants of Christ to fornicate and to eat meat sacrificed to idols (2:20).

The admonition to the church of Thyatira, first of all, is directed to Jezebel and her children to repent, with a clear warning of impending judgment if she fails to do so (2:21-23). Secondly, in verses 24-25, a challenge comes to those who have not embraced the teachings and practices of Jezebel to remain faithful until the coming of Jesus Christ (πλὴν ὃ ἔχετε κρατήσατε ἄχρις οὗ ἂν ἴξω).⁴⁹ And lastly, the call comes to the church of Thyatira, especially to those who “have ears,” to listen and pay attention to the voice of the Spirit in the Apocalypse of John (2:29).

⁴⁷ The term “servant” (in the form either of διάκονος or δοῦλος) is one of the key designations that describe the character and function of the Church in the Apocalypse of John. The Apocalypse is sent to the servants of Christ (1:1; 22:6); the church of Thyatira is commended for her service (2:19); several references are made to the servants of God / Christ and their characteristics (cf. 2:20; 6:11; 7:3, 15; 19:2, 5, 10; 22:3, 9).

⁴⁸ Several in the letters to the seven churches are commended for their patient endurance (cf. 2:2-3, 19). In the entire Apocalypse, patient endurance stands out as one of the marks of faithful witness to Jesus Christ (cf. 6:9-11; 12:10-11; 13:9-10; 14:12).

⁴⁹ Here in 2:25 (as well as 3:11), the motif of “the coming of Christ” is combined with the theme of faithfulness (cf. D, Aune, Revelation 1-5, p. 208).

The letter to the church of Thyatira also contains a promise of rulership over the nations and of the gift of the morning star to the one who overcomes, and who keeps to the end the deeds of Jesus Christ (ὁ νικῶν καὶ ὁ τηρῶν ἄχρι τέλους τὰ ἔργα μου). In this context, it is implied that the overcomer is one who remains faithful to Jesus, even to the end. Such faithfulness may imply keeping the instructions of Jesus (cf. 3:3, 8) or displaying the characteristics that mark Jesus himself as a “faithful witness” (cf. 1:5).

5. The Church of Sardis (3:1-6)

This certainly is a church with deeds (τὰ ἔργα) which are not in keeping with appropriate Christian conduct. Thus, instead of being commended, it is criticized for deeds which exhibit deception. The church’s reputation contradicts its reality. While the church has the appearance of life, in actuality it is dead (3:1). And when it is placed on the ethical scale for assessment, it is found wanting (3:2). As contrasting metaphors to depict the ethical condition of the church of Sardis, “life” and “death” represent moral and spiritual vitality and morbidity.⁵⁰

Nevertheless, there are still a few people in Sardis (ὀλίγα ὀνόματα ἐν Σάρδεσιν) who have not soiled their clothes (ἃ οὐκ ἐμόλυναν τὰ ἱμάτια αὐτῶν). These undefiled ones receive commendation. Here, as Aune comments, “clothes” is a metaphor for an individual’s moral and spiritual condition (cf. Rev 7:13-14; 22:14), which is to be characterized by purity and cleanness.⁵¹ To these undefiled ones, the writer of the letter promises walking with him in white because they

⁵⁰ D. Aune, Revelation 1-5, p. 219.

⁵¹ D. Aune, Revelation 1-5, p. 222. A background reference for the use of this metaphor is Zech 3:1-5, where Joshua the high priest is depicted as wearing dirty clothes (a metaphor for the sins of both the priest and the people); cf. also Apocalypse of James 28:16-17, where James says to Jesus: “You walked in mud, and your garments were not soiled.”

are worthy (καὶ περιπατήσουσιν μετ' ἐμοῦ ἐν λευκοῖς, ὅτι ἄξιοί εἰσιν). Obviously, their spiritual purity qualified them for future fellowship that is marked by purity with their Lord. As Beale puts it, “their acknowledged identification with Christ in this life will lead to identification and fellowship with him in the next.”⁵² This concept of present faithfulness meeting future reward (as we shall soon see) is found as well in the later visions of the Apocalypse (cf. 21:7; 22:14). For those who have failed in their functions as a church, the mandate to repent comes with several complementary imperatives (3:2-3): 1) wake up from your slumber (γίνου γρηγορῶν); 2) strengthen what remains but is about to die (στήρισον τὰ λοιπὰ ἃ ἔμελλον ἀποθανεῖν); 3) remember what you have received and heard previously (μνημόνευε οὖν πῶς εἴληφας καὶ ἤκουσας);⁵³ 4) keep previous instructions (καὶ τήρει); and 5) repent of your deeds that are found to be imperfect (μετανόησον).

To conclude the letter to the church of Sardis, further exhortation is given to those who have ears to pay attention to the voice of the Spirit (3:6), and again several promises are extended to the ones who overcome (3:5). The overcomer will be dressed in a white robe, and his name will be acknowledged by Jesus before the father and his angels.

6. The Church of Philadelphia (3:7-13)

As in other letters (cf. 2:2, 3, 9, 13, 19; 3:1, 15) the church of Philadelphia is acknowledged for its deeds: οἶδα σου τὰ ἔργα (3:8). Reference to such deeds in the letters suggests an awareness and consequently a commendation or criticism of the action of a church.

⁵² G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation, p. 276.

⁵³ For the second time in the letters to the seven churches, the mandate to the Church to remember what was previously received and heard is explicitly stated in the context of repentance (cf. 2:5; 3:3).

This surely has ethical implications. The character and content of the deeds (τὰ ἔργα) of the church of Philadelphia are said to be that of keeping the word of the one who sends the letter and not denying his name (καὶ ἐτήρησάς μου τὸν λόγον καὶ οὐκ ἠρνήσω τὸ ὄνομά μου). And while denying the name of Christ implies the rejection of Christian faith (cf. Luke 12:9-10; Matt 10:33; 2 Tim 2:12; Mart. Pol. 9:2-3; Justin, 1 Apol. 31.6), it is certain that “denial” can be achieved through the lips as well as the life of the confessor of faith (1 Tim 5:8; Tit 1:16; 2 Pet 2:1; Jude 4; 1 Clem. 2-3).⁵⁴ For Beale, then, that the church of Philadelphia did not deny the name of Christ underscores the focus of faithfulness in this letter.⁵⁵

The content of the deeds of the church of Philadelphia is further spelt out in 3:10 as that of obeying the sender’s command to endure (ἐτήρησας τὸν λόγον τῆς ὑπομονῆς μου). Here again one sees faithfulness⁵⁶ as a form of ethical response to the command of Christ.

Though not rebuked (as was the church of Smyrna) for any unfaithfulness,⁵⁷ the church of Philadelphia is warned about the coming of Jesus Christ, and, in light of this, exhorted to remain

⁵⁴ See D. Aune, Revelation 1-5, p. 237.

⁵⁵ G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation, p. 286.

⁵⁶ Similar commendations of faithfulness are expressed about the church of Pergamum which kept the name of Jesus — κρατεῖς τὸ ὄνομα μου; and did not deny the faith of Jesus — οὐκ ἠρνήσω τὴν πίστιν μου (cf. 2:13). One observes in the Apocalypse of John that keeping the words of Jesus and not denying his name (3:8), keeping the deeds of Jesus (2:26), and also holding forth the name of Jesus and not renouncing his faith (2:13) are common expressions of faithfulness to Jesus.

⁵⁷ Out of seven churches, the churches of Smyrna and Philadelphia are the only two churches that are not rebuked for any unfaithfulness.

faithful to Jesus — ἔρχομαι ταχύ.⁵⁸ κράτει ὁ ἔχεις (3:11). Implied here is the mandate to the Church to be in state of preparedness for the coming of Jesus Christ.

The letter to the church of Philadelphia concludes as usual with the special promise of blessing to the one who overcomes (3:12) and a warning to “the one who has ears” to pay attention to the voice of the Spirit (3:13).

7. The Church of Laodicea (3:14-22)

In all the seven letters to the Asian churches, this is the second church that is given no commendation (cf. 3:1-6). Its deeds (τὰ ἔργα), simply acknowledged, are brought under serious ethical censure.

The first point of censure is that the church of Laodicea, in its conduct, has become lukewarm, neither hot nor cold (ὅτι οὔτε ψυχρὸς εἶ οὔτε ζεστός. ὄφελον ψυχρὸς ἦς ἢ ζεστός. οὕτως ὅτι χλιαρὸς εἶ. . .). The characterization of the Laodicean church as being “neither cold nor hot” but “lukewarm” has traditionally been understood simply as a general metaphor depicting the lack of wholehearted spiritual fervor and commitment to Christ.⁵⁹

However, recent interpretation has identified a possible source for the metaphor of “lukewarmness.” An important and influential work for this understanding is an article entitled

⁵⁸ See similar expressions of ἔρχομαι ταχύ of 3:11 in 1:7; 22:7, 12, 20, which signify the imminent return of Jesus and the need to be in a state of preparedness.

⁵⁹ Traditional interpretation of “lukewarmness” is assumed by R. H. Charles, The Revelation of St. John, p. 96; H. B. Swete, The Apocalypse of St. John, p. 60; M. Kiddle, The Revelation of St. John, p. 58; and G. B. Caird, A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John The Divine (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), p. 57. Most recently, G. A. Krodel, “Revelation,” in Augsburg Commentary of the New Testament (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989); and R. L. Thomas, Revelation 1-7: An Exegetical Commentary (Chicago: Moody, 1992) have renewed this traditional view.

“The Laodicean Lukewarmness,” by Rudwick and Green. The key to understanding the “lukewarmness” metaphor is the suggestion by Rudwick and Green that there is an allusion in this letter to the unusual quality of the city’s water supply. This implies a contrast to Laodicea’s neighboring cities: Hierapolis (six miles to the north) had hot spring water that was prized much for its healing properties; and Colossae (about ten miles away) had a perfectly good supply of cold water for refreshment. So the Laodicean church was providing neither refreshment for the spiritually weary nor healing for the spiritually sick.⁶⁰ Just as Laodicea’s lukewarm water was useless for either healing or refreshment, so the Laodicean church has become useless, totally ineffective in its functions and tasks.⁶¹

The second censure passed on the conduct of the Laodicean church is contained in the declaration that the church claims to be rich, resourceful and needing nothing (λέγεις ὅτι πλούσιός εἰμι καὶ πεπλούτηκα καὶ οὐδὲν χρεῖαν ἔχω). Implied in this declaration is the problem of pride and self-sufficiency which leads to the censure that the church (in actuality) is ignorant of and insensitive to its true condition. This again is an indictment for deception, as in the case of Sardis. Obviously, the self-evaluation of the Laodicean church could not have been more wrong; its censuring is, of course, intended to provoke an ethical response.

Here again is a church with a claim that does not match reality. The exhortation, in the first place, to the church of Laodicea is to turn to Jesus for the necessities that she lacks (v. 18). This is followed by a clear mandate to repent (μετανοήσον) and a complementary imperative

⁶⁰ M. J. S. Rudwick and E. M. B. Green, “The Laodicean Lukewarmness,” ExpTim 69 (1957-58), pp. 176-78.

⁶¹ Cf. C. J. Hemer, The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in Their Local Setting, p. 431; D. Aune, Revelation 1-5 p. 257; and G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation, p. 303.

that calls the church of Laodicea to be earnest (ζήλευε). Here again, we observe that the task of the Church is to repent when she has failed in her primary functions.

Once again, to the overcomer, the one who responds positively to the contents of this letter, several promises are made. Jesus promises to share fellowship with the one who opens the door to receive him anew: δειπνήσω μετ' αὐτοῦ καὶ αὐτὸς μετ' ἐμοῦ (3:20); and he also promises to share kingship with the one who overcomes: δώσω αὐτῷ καθίσαι μετ' ἐμοῦ ἐν τῷ θρόνῳ μου (3:21). One of the promises given to the Church, which is repeated here, is to share fellowship and kingship with Jesus. However, the conditions have to be met. To give a positive response of repentance is to overcome, and to overcome is to enjoy the promised blessings of Jesus. The letter to the church of Laodicea (as in the case of the other letters) concludes with a warning to the one who has ears to pay attention to the voice of the Spirit (3:22).

Chapters Four and Five

Here in chapters four and five, for the first time in the Apocalypse, there is a focus on the theme of worship. In these two chapters, the worship of the four living creatures, the twenty-four elders, the angels and every living creature provides an example of (not so much an explicit mandate to) worship, from which the Church could learn. In these two chapters, worship is offered to God and the Lamb; and it is characterized by the singing of hymns (4:8, 11; 5:9-10, 11-14), physical expressions of humility before God (4:9-10; 5:8, 14), and the offering of prayers (5:8).

In chapter five, one should not miss the functions of the Church which are implied in some of the symbolic references made to the Church: the reference made to the Church as Saints —

pure and holy people (τῶν ἁγίων in v. 8),⁶² and the designation of the Church as a kingdom and priests, to serve God (καὶ ἐποίησας αὐτοὺς τῷ θεῷ ἡμῶν βασιλείαν καὶ ἱερείῃς in v. 10). Again, one may infer the functions of the Church to maintain holiness and to serve God (in her capacity as a kingdom and priests).

Chapter Six

Here, underneath the altar, we find those who had been slain because of the word of God and the witness they maintained. From the account of these slain witnesses, there are several indications as to what it means for the Church to maintain a witness to Jesus. This witness is tied to obedience to the word of God, and it implies patient endurance of suffering and even martyrdom.

Chapter Seven

In 7:9-17, as in chapters four and five, the worship of the great multitude, the angels, the four living creatures, and the twenty-four elders provides an example for the Church. It is noteworthy, in this worship scene, that those who participate in the worship of the Lamb are those who have endured great tribulation, and who are also characterized by purity and victory: they were wearing white robes and holding palm branches in their hands (7:9, 14). It is expected of the Church not simply to worship God and the Lamb, but to maintain purity and achieve victory.

Chapter Eight

In the activity of the angel that stood at the altar offering the prayers of all the saints (8:3-

⁶² The term ἅγιος, as it is utilized in the Apocalypse of John, indicates the character and, by implication, the task of the Church to maintain purity and holiness even in the midst of perversion and persecution (cf. 5:8; 8:3; 11:18; 13:7, 10; 14:12; 16:6; 17:6; 18:20, 24; 19:8).

5), one observes one of the elements of the priestly function of the Church. Implied here is the task of the Church to offer prayers to God. This is a function similar to that which is already identified in 5:8 and 6:10.

Chapter Nine

Here at the close of a judgment narrative (9:20-21), the reader of the Apocalypse finds the tragic response of the survivors of divine judgment: failure to repent despite divine discipline. It is obvious in this passage that they failed to repent of activities against which the churches were explicitly warned in the letters to the churches (cf. 2:14-16, 20-24). The survivors in chapter nine failed to heed the warnings and be reformed by divine discipline. This negative example of a lack of repentance provides an implicit caution to the Church. Since lack of repentance leads to destruction, as indicated in the rest of the Apocalypse, the Church would do well to take her task of repentance seriously when she has failed in any of her primary functions.

Chapter Eleven

Here in this chapter, one can see the tasks of the Church to witness and also to worship, through the experience of the two witnesses (11:1-14) and the example of the body of worshipers (11:15-19). The experience of the two witnesses provides the Church with an implicit mandate to maintain faithful witness to Jesus in the context of opposition, oppression, and even martyrdom. The worship of the loud voices in heaven and the twenty-four elders provides an example for the Church to follow.

Chapter Twelve

This chapter not only provides an exposition of the dragon's program of opposition and oppression, but it also exhibits the sufferings imposed on the woman and her offspring who are

characterized by obedience to God's commandments and faithfulness to the testimony of Jesus Christ. Implied here is an understanding that the task of the Church to witness, which takes place in the context of antagonism and hardship, must be marked by obedience and faithfulness to Jesus. As further expressed in the hymnic utterance by the loud voice in heaven (12:10-12), those who encountered the opposition of the dragon overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and their faithfulness even unto death (v. 11). Here in this context, overcomers are those who experience martyrdom; faithfulness unto death is considered to be a sign of victory.

Of relevance to the task of worship in this chapter is the hymnic utterance by the loud voice in heaven (12:10-12), one of those sudden outbursts that permeate the Apocalypse of John. As a result of the hurling down of Satan from heaven to earth (12:7-9), an unidentified loud voice in heaven proclaims the triumph of God, the authority of his Christ, and the victory of the saints; it announces the arrival of the salvation, power, and kingdom of God, as well as the establishment of the authority of his Christ (12:10); it mandates heaven and its occupants to rejoice — εὐφραίνεσθε (i.e., to respond to God in worship);⁶³ and it pronounces woe on the earth and the sea. Implied in the mandate to the heavens to rejoice is an injunction to the Asian churches (the readership of the Apocalypse) to respond to God in worship.

Chapter Thirteen

Here in this chapter, the theme of worship (once again) features prominently. However, in this instance, it is the worship of the dragon and the beast (as opposed to the worship of God and

⁶³ This is probably an allusion to LXX Deut 32:43 in which the initial summons for the heavens to rejoice is connected with an appeal for the heavenly beings to respond to God in worship. εὐφραίνεσθε thus functions here as a liturgical term which mandates the heavens and the earth to worship (cf. D. Aune, Revelation 6-16, p. 703).

the Lamb) which is forcefully demanded. In contrast to the true worship spoken of in the preceding passages, this chapter provides an exposition of idolatry: worship that rightly belongs to God and his Christ is demanded by the dragon and the beast. On the one hand, those who yield to the worship of the beast escape its wrath (13:8, 12, 14). On the other hand, those who refuse to worship the beast experience its wrathful, persecuting zeal (13:7, 15-17), the threat of physical death (v.15), as well as economic sanctions (v. 17). Implied here is a challenge to the Church to worship God and the Lamb, rather than the dragon and the beast, no matter what it may cost.⁶⁴ The task of the Church is to worship God and the Lamb in the context of hostility and hardship. This is made more explicit in the challenge given to the saints to maintain “patient endurance and faithfulness” (13:10). In fact, in a similar fashion to what we find in the letters (chapters 2 and 3), the saints are hereby challenged to meet the impending persecution with steadfast endurance and an unwavering faith.

Since the background of the Apocalypse entails conflict with Caesar-worship, the allegory of Revelation 13 is rightly decoded to refer to the Roman emperors, personified in the heads, blasphemously demanding worship and persecuting those who worship the true God; the dragon is Satan who works through the two beasts that represent the emperors and the local propagandists of their cult.⁶⁵ Thus, in response to the claim of divinity by the Caesars and their demand for worship, John draws on an ancient mythological picture to caricature the role that the

⁶⁴ There are several warnings to the readership of the Apocalypse not to worship the beast/ dragon (cf. 13:11-18; 14:9-11; 16:2; 19:20; 20:4).

⁶⁵ Cf. J. Sweet, *Revelation*, p. 207. For a study of the background to this chapter, see W. Barclay, “Great Themes of the New Testament V: Revelation XIII,” *ExpTim* 70 (1958), pp. 260-64, 292-96; also see D. Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, pp. 723-30.

state and its rulers are playing.⁶⁶ The whole chapter illustrates counterfeit worship, which involves a well-developed Satanic parody: the dragon giving his power and throne to the beast (13:2) is a parody of the oneness of the Lamb on the throne with God (5:13); the inhabitants of the earth who fall prostrate before the beast, paying him homage and offering a song of praise (13:4), is a parody of the heavenly cherubim, representing the entire created order, offering worship to the Lamb (5:12); the beast with a wounded head that is healed (13:3) is a parody of the Lamb, who was slain but now is standing in the center of the throne (5:6); the mark of the beast that is required of all inhabitants of the earth (13:17) is a parody of the sealing of God's servants (7:1-8).

Different interpretations have been given to the *χάραγμα* (mark) which the beast requires of all inhabitants of the earth. Caird speaks of the ancient religious tattooing of devotees of a particular god to indicate their devotion.⁶⁷ Ford detects a Jewish background, a practice of orthodox Judaism which required the faithful to wear phylacteries (little leather boxes containing portions of the Law) on the left hand and on the forehead (Deut 6:8).⁶⁸ Ramsay points to certificates issued to those who have fulfilled the ceremonial obligations of emperor worship.⁶⁹ Whatever may have been the background, it is important to notice in the different suggestions

⁶⁶ With the exceptions of Gaius and Domitian, emperors were usually not officially regarded as gods until they were posthumously pronounced *divus*, "divine," by the Roman senate (cf. D. Aune, Revelation 6-16, p. 780).

⁶⁷ G. Caird, A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John The Divine, p. 173.

⁶⁸ J. M. Ford, Revelation (New York: Doubleday, 1975), p. 225.

⁶⁹ W. Ramsay, The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1963), pp. 110ff.

cited here that the mark appears to signify allegiance.⁷⁰ For John and his readers, then, the mark of the beast is a symbol of an unqualified allegiance to the demands of the Imperial cult. Here in the thirteenth chapter of the Apocalypse, through the reference to the “mark of the beast,” worship is portrayed as “a way of showing allegiance and praise.”⁷¹

The significance of this chapter in relation to the worship mandate for the Asian churches needs to be underscored. Even though the mode and content of worship is not explicitly stated as in other passages with worship emphasis, the worship of the dragon and the beast here and in several other places in the Apocalypse (cf. 13:8, 12, 15; 14:9, 11; 16:2; 20:4) is a warning to the Asian churches against idolatry (false worship), a call to patient endurance and faithfulness in the midst of persecution (cf. 13:10), and a challenge to choose the worship of Christ rather than that of Caesar. The whole chapter gives a vivid exposition of falsehood, deception, and satanic parody, to which the attention of the churches is called. In opposition to the explicit mandate in the Apocalypse of John to worship God (τῷ θεῷ προσκύνησον in 19:10; 22:8, 9) and the example provided for the church in several worship scenes of the Apocalypse, the worship emphasis in chapter thirteen clearly presents not only a counterfeit but a challenge to the worship of God and his Lamb.

Chapter Fourteen

In the description of the 144,000 that stood with the Lamb on Mount Zion, one observes

⁷⁰ The term χάραγμα (mark) appears seven times in the Apocalypse of John, indicating belonging and loyalty to the beast (13:16, 17; 14:9, 11; 16:2; 19:20; 20:4). On the other hand, the σφραγίς (seal) of God which suggests protection is mentioned as being placed on the servants of God in the Apocalypse (7:3-4; 9:4).

⁷¹ G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation, p. 694.

several characteristics with which the Church can identify: 1) they belong to the Lamb and his father (v.1); 2) they worship God (vv. 2-3); 3) they are marked by purity and holiness; and 4) they follow the Lamb (vv. 4, 5). The implications of these characteristics for the Church's task of worship will be discussed in the second chapter of this dissertation.

Following the victorious appearance of the 144,000 with the Lamb on the heavenly Mount Zion (14:1-5), one finds a series of three angelic proclamations (14:6-11), an editorial comment (14:12), and a heavenly benediction that are all of significance for the mandate of worship in this chapter.

The utterance of the first angel is a command to worship God,⁷² the Creator, in light of the coming judgment (14:7): φοβήθητε τὸν θεὸν καὶ δότε αὐτῷ δόξαν, ὅτι ἦλθεν ἡ ὥρα τῆς κρίσεως αὐτοῦ, καὶ προσκυνήσατε τῷ ποιήσαντι τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν καὶ θάλασσαν καὶ πηγὰς ὑδάτων. With judgment in view, this is also a command with moral significance: “ a call to repentance,”⁷³ especially on the part of those who continue to worship the beast (cf. 13:1-18).

The announcement of the second angel is a declaration of judgment which draws out more explicitly the judicial implications of not heeding the command (14:8): ἔπεσεν ἔπεσεν Βαβυλῶν ἡ μεγάλη ἣ ἐκ τοῦ οἴνου τοῦ θυμοῦ τῆς πορνείας αὐτῆς πεπότικεν πάντα τὰ ἔθνη. Babylon is judged, it is fallen, due to her illicit relationship with the nations. Such a relationship

⁷² The explicit mandate to worship God appears in the imperative mood several times in the Apocalypse (cf. 14:7; 19:5, 10; 22:8-9).

⁷³ D. Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, p. 827; that the imperative “give God glory” could be equivalent to “repent” is underscored by E. Lohmeyer, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1970), p. 124 (cf. G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 752).

here in the context of the command to worship God the Creator implies idolatry (failure to worship the true God). As in the case of Jezebel in the church of Thyatira (2:20-24) and some in the church of Pergamum (2:14-16), Babylon through her adulterous relationship caused the nations to wander away from God (i.e., to be guilty of religious infidelity).

The proclamation of the third angel is a warning that those who render worship and ultimate allegiance to the beast will suffer an everlasting judgment (14:9-11). Here again, the warning of impending judgment is meant to provoke a positive ethical response of worship on the part of the readership of the Apocalypse.

These three angelic proclamations are followed by an editorial comment which serves as a motivation for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God's commandments and remain faithful in their witness to Jesus (14:12). Through this editorial comment, John signifies to the Asian churches that the faithfulness of the saints consists, negatively, in not worshiping the beast or his image. The exhortation to the saints is to persevere through temporary sufferings, inflicted on them because of their loyalty to Christ, so that they may avoid the eternal consequences of loyalty to the beast.⁷⁴ Thus, it is implied that perseverance is expected of the saints who obey God's commandments and remain faithful to Jesus.

The vision of the three angels announcing judgment is concluded with a heavenly benediction bestowed upon those who die in the Lord (14:13a). This is followed by an affirmation from the Spirit that they will rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them (14:13b). This conclusion indicates in this vision that a positive ethical response (in the Apocalypse), which is expected of John's readership, is motivated not only by the warning of

⁷⁴ Cf. G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation, p. 795.

judgment (cf. 14:6-11), but, by way of contrast, by the promise of blessing, rest, and reward for those who persevere even to the point of death (cf. 14:13). It is obvious here too that the enjoyment of the benediction of heaven and rest from labors is based on ethical grounds: reward for appropriate deeds (τὰ γὰρ ἔργα αὐτῶν ἀκολουθεῖ μετ' αὐτῶν).⁷⁵

Chapter Fifteen

This is another chapter with an emphasis on worship. Here worship is offered to God by those who have been victorious over the beast, his image, and the number of his name (15:1-2). Obviously, in contrast to those who submitted to the worship of the beast due to persecution (cf. 13:1-18), these overcame the beast. Implied here is the understanding that the worship of God calls for a refusal to participate in idolatrous worship.

Chapter Sixteen

Relevant to our consideration of the mandate of the Church, in this chapter, is the worship rendered to God by both the angel and the altar (16:5-7). This again provides a good example for the Church to follow. However, in contrast to this (in the same chapter), there is a negative example of those who worshiped the image of the beast and the divine judgment which they incurred (16:2). It is further noted in this chapter that despite divine judgment, those who worshiped the beast were persistent in their refusal to repent and glorify God (16:8-11). Also of relevance to the task of the Church is the warning in 16:15 to be in a state of preparedness for the coming of Jesus.

⁷⁵ According to the Apocalypse of John, faithfulness to Jesus is determined and rewarded on the basis of τὰ ἔργα (cf. 2:23; 18:6; 20:12-13). In fact, throughout the letters there is a stress on the importance of good works (2:2, 5, 19, 22f., 26; 3:1f., 8, 15).

Chapters Seventeen and Eighteen

In the portrait of the woman sitting on the beast and her treatment of the saints and those who bore testimony to Jesus (in the seventeenth chapter of the Apocalypse) several functions of the Church, by implication, again emerge. First of all, in contrast to the purity which the Church is mandated to exhibit (especially in the letters to the seven churches), this woman is characterized as impure, adulterous, violent, and wicked. It is said of her that she held in her hand a golden cup filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries (17:4-5). Consequently, she is destined for terrible destruction: she will be brought to ruin, left naked, devoured, and burnt with fire (17:16). Such a negative description of this woman's character and her destiny serves as a warning to the Church to maintain purity. This warning is reinforced by an explicit mandate to the Church to disassociate herself from all that this woman practices and personifies, according to the eighteenth chapter of the Apocalypse: ἐξέλθατε ὁ λαός μου ἐξ αὐτῆς ἵνα μὴ συγκοινωνήσητε ταῖς ἀμαρτίαις αὐτῆς, καὶ ἐκ τῶν πληγῶν αὐτῆς ἵνα μὴ λάβητε (18:4).

That this woman is identified as being drunk with the blood of the saints who bore testimony to Jesus (17:6)⁷⁶ also sends a message to the Church that is called upon to bear faithful witness to Jesus. Once again, one observes a correlation between the experience of the saints and those who are identified as "faithful witnesses." One also finds here the understanding that the task of the Church is to bear witness to Jesus, even in the midst of suffering and at the risk of martyrdom. Faithful witness is sealed with the blood of the saints.

⁷⁶ One observes here in 17:6 that the fate of the saints (the pure and holy ones) is synonymous with that of those who bore faithful witness to Jesus.

Chapter Nineteen

The theme of worship is further sustained in the nineteenth chapter of the Apocalypse, with a focus on the celebration that follows the destruction of the wicked and the vindication of the saints (19:1-10). The worshipers again include the twenty-four elders, the four living creatures, and the great multitude in heaven who provide a pattern of worship for the Church to follow. This example of worship is, for the second time in the Apocalypse, accompanied by an explicit mandate to worship God (19:5, 10). Clearly it is expected of the Church, designated servants of God, to worship God.

Chapter Twenty

This chapter is noted for its emphasis on divine judgment, in terms of final punishment and reward. The dragon (identified as the devil or Satan), the nations that are in alliance with the devil, and those whose names are not written in the book of life are all thrown into the lake of fire for eternal destruction (20:1-3, 7-15). However, in the same context of judgment, others are vindicated and rewarded for their witness to Jesus (τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ). For their experience of martyrdom, as a result of their witness to Jesus, their obedience to the word of God and their refusal to worship the beast, they are resurrected, seated on the throne, and given authority to judge (20:4-6). Implied in this scene of vindication is an incentive for faithful witness — those who suffer for Jesus will reign with him.⁷⁷ It is again emphasized here that witness to Jesus is expressed in martyrdom, obedience to the word of God, and refusal to worship the beast.

⁷⁷ That the path of suffering leads to the royal throne is a significant motif in the Apocalypse of John (cf. 1:9; 20:4-6; 22:5).

Chapters Twenty-One and Twenty-Two

Several of the functions of the Church that have already been observed in previous chapters are reiterated in these closing chapters of the Apocalypse. In chapter twenty-one, the overcomers who are characterized by purity (21:7, 8, 27) finally inherit the promised blessings which are forfeited by those who are marked by any of the items listed in a catalogue of vices: cowardice, unfaithfulness, impurity, violence, fornication, idolatry, lying, and deception.⁷⁸ In chapter twenty-two, the Church is called upon again to anticipate, and even request, the coming of Jesus (22:17, 20); benediction is once again pronounced on those who give the positive response of obedience to the contents of the Apocalypse (22:7, 18-19), as well as those who maintain their purity (22:14-19). Furthermore, for the fourth time in the Apocalypse, the mandate to worship God is explicitly stated (22:8-9).

One cannot miss in chapters twenty-one and twenty-two the stress on purity and its implications for the Church. In the first instance, this is obvious as one examines the metaphors that John uses to describe the character of the new Jerusalem, which symbolizes the saints, the eschatological people of God.⁷⁹ The new Jerusalem is a city characterized by holiness (τὴν πόλιν

⁷⁸ One observes in the Apocalypse of John the exclusion of the impure and immoral from the eschatological blessings (21:8, 27; 22:15).

⁷⁹ The opinion of most scholars is that the new Jerusalem symbolizes the saints (the eschatological people of God). See R. J. McKelvey, The New Temple (Oxford: Oxford University, 1969), pp. 167-76; T. Holtz, Die Christologie der Apokalypse des Johannes. Texte und Untersuchungen 85 (Berlin: Akademie, 1971), pp. 191-95; R. H. Gundry, "The New Jerusalem: People, Not a Place," NovT 29 (1987) pp. 254-64. However, others argue that the new Jerusalem does not symbolize the saints. For instance, E. Schüssler Fiorenza, Priester für Gott. Studien zum Herrschafts und Priestermotiv in der Apokalypse (Münster: Aschendorff, 1972), pp. 348-50 argues: 1) the images of the city and the bride are not the same (cf. Rev 21:2); 2) the saints cannot inherit the city and also be the city (Rev 21:7); and 3) the city is where the saints dwell (Rev 21:24-26).

τὴν ἁγίαν)⁸⁰ and it is synonymous with the bride that is prepared and beautifully dressed for her husband (νύμφην κεκοσμημένην τῷ ἀνδρὶ αὐτῆς).⁸¹ In contrast to Babylon, the great prostitute that is full of adultery and fornication (cf. 17:4, 5; 18:1-8), the new Jerusalem is morally pure and “decked with virtues”⁸² rather than vices.

The holy character of the new Jerusalem is further conveyed by the exclusion of certain individuals from participating in it (21:7-8, 27). While the overcomer (ὁ νικῶν) who responds positively to the ethical admonitions, especially in chapters 2 and 3 (cf. 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21),⁸³ will inherit the benefits of the new Jerusalem, those characterized by ethical failures will have their place in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. Such individuals include the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters, and all liars.⁸⁴ Here we have a list of vices that will keep some individuals away from the new Jerusalem, which will be marked by freedom from any form of ethical impurity.⁸⁵

⁸⁰ Jerusalem in early Jewish literature is occasionally called “the holy city Jerusalem.” The earliest reference is found in Isaiah 52:1 and 48:12 (cf. D. Aune, Revelation 17-22, p. 1121).

⁸¹ νύμφην is used here in Rev 21:2 with regards to the Church and also in 21:9 and 22:17, but nowhere else in early Christian literature (cf. D. Aune, Revelation 17-22, p. 1121).

⁸² D. Aune, Revelation 17-22, p. 1122.

⁸³ According to G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation, p. 1059; and M. E. Boring, Revelation: Interpretation (Louisville: John Knox, 1989), p. 217, the list of vices here in Rev 21:7-8 is a summary of typical sins that John has been warning the churches against in his letters.

⁸⁴ An almost identical list of individuals with ethical lapses occurs in Rev 22:15, and a similar but abbreviated version occurs at 21:27.

⁸⁵ G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation, p. 1060, may be overstating the point of ethical purity in the new Jerusalem, by expressing the view that “the coming new world order will exist on a higher moral level than even the cosmos before the fall.”

In categorical terms, the purity and holiness of the new Jerusalem is affirmed by the absolute exclusion of impurity. As John asserts: “Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful . . .” (21:27). The term *πάν κοινόν* (anything unclean) is significant for our understanding of the ethical dimension of this assertion for the Asian churches. While it is true that it has ritual purity in its background, it also has serious implications for ethical purity in its usage in the Apocalypse of John. Those unclean (v. 27a) are identified and described as those who practice abomination and lying (v. 27b). Here as elsewhere, the language of ritual impurity, a central religious category in early Judaism (cf. Lev 10:10; 1 Macc 1:47, 62; 4 Macc 7:6) is carried over into early Christianity where it is transformed into an almost exclusively moral category (cf. Matt 15:11, 18, 20; Mark 7:2, 5, 15, 18, 20, 23; Heb 9:13; 10:29; Acts 10:14, 15, 28; 11:8, 9; 21:28; Rom 14:14).⁸⁶

That the characterization of the new Jerusalem implies an ethical imperative for the Asian churches is rightly discerned by Beale:

The rhetorical situation must be kept in mind. John’s intent in v. 27 is not merely to give information about future destinies but to warn people in the present by describing the final outcome of their choices and actions.⁸⁷

Here in the twenty-second chapter, the ethical concern to be pure and holy, which is implied in the vision of the new Jerusalem (in the twenty-first chapter) becomes an explicit instruction. The vision of holiness in the Apocalypse is “not a mere statement of fact but an

⁸⁶ Cf. D. Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, p. 1174.

⁸⁷ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 1102.

exhortation.”⁸⁸ There is an explicit exhortation to John’s audience to continue in whatever ethical state the Apocalypse finds them. John exhorts:

Let him who does wrong continue to do wrong; let him who is vile continue to be vile; let him who does right continue to do right; and let him who is holy continue to be holy (Rev 22:11).

The strangeness and difficulty of this exhortation that encourages the maintenance of a “moral status quo” rather than a positive change has been identified and wrestled with by different commentators. While some consider it a strict command, others view it as a mere prediction, thus reading the imperative mood as a future tense. Some who take it as a strict command explain that the exhortation is made in light of the impossibility of making a change, as destiny is already fixed.

Mounce, for instance, writes:

The major thrust of the verse is that since the end of time is now at hand, people are certain to reap the consequences of the kinds of lives they have led. The time arrives when change is impossible because character has already been determined by a lifetime of habitual action. The arrival of the end forecloses any possibility of alteration.⁸⁹

Such a deterministic view which leaves no room for a change of behavior is contrary to the ethical expectations of the Apocalypse, which issues warnings, makes promises, and calls for repentance (especially in the letters and some of the visions). The exhortation of Rev 22:11 is probably better understood in light of the verses that follow. Whatever ethical choice is made, it will be rewarded accordingly (v. 12). Everyone will be rewarded according to what he / she has done, whether wrong or right, impure or holy. Those who wash their robes (a metaphor for

⁸⁸ G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation, p. 1131. Beale identifies and discusses five exhortations to holiness in the closing chapter of the Apocalypse: 1) 22:6, 7; 2) 22:8-10; 3) 22:11, 12; 4) 22:13-17; and 5) 22:18-19.

⁸⁹ R. Mounce, The Book of Revelation (Michigan: Eerdmans, 1998), p. 406.

moral and spiritual cleansing)⁹⁰ will have access to the new city of Jerusalem (v. 14). On the other hand, those who continue to embrace unethical and impure practices will be excluded from the holy city (v. 15). Here again, in order to invoke a positive ethical response from his audience, and to call the attention of the churches to their task of maintaining purity, John draws a contrast between the different destinies of those who are morally pure and those who are not. It is in light of these two different destinies that ethical choices and functions are expected of John's audience.

B. Summary of Functions and Tasks

In the foregoing survey of the Apocalypse, it is evident that the Apocalypse of John contains ethical instructions for the Church, and that the mandates of the Church are found in both the letters and the visions of the Apocalypse. While some of these functions are explicit, others are implicit.

Implied in the reading of the Apocalypse is an expectation that the Church is to give a positive response of obedience to the contents of the Apocalypse: benedictions are pronounced on those who observe the information and obey the instructions given in the Apocalypse (cf. 1:3; 22:7, 18-19); there is a consistent call in both the letters and the visions of the Apocalypse to listen to the voice of the Spirit (cf. 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22; 13:9, 18); several warnings are given to encourage obedience in the recipients of the Apocalypse (cf. 2:21-23; 14:9-11; 17:16), and in several portions of the Apocalypse, obedience is commanded and commended (cf. 3:3, 10; 12:17; 14:12; 22:9). Of significance is the manner in which obedience, as a requirement of the Church, is linked with the mandate of the Church to maintain faithful witness (cf. 12:17).

In terms of character and function, the Church, designated as a kingdom and priests, is

⁹⁰ Cf. D. Aune, Revelation 17-22, p. 1219.

expected to render service unto God (cf. 1:5-6; 5:10; 20:6). Such service embraces the offering of prayers (cf. 5:8; 6:10) and worship (cf. 19:5, 10).

Several warnings regarding the imminent return of Jesus Christ, the one through and about whom the Apocalypse is sent, call the Church to be in a state of anticipation and preparedness (cf. 1:1, 7; 2:5, 16; 3:3, 11, 20; 14:1; 16:15; 22:7, 12, 17-20). It is in light of this imminent return of Christ that the church of Philadelphia, in particular, is mandated to maintain faithfulness: ἔρχομαι ταχύ· κράτει ὃ ἔχεις, ἵνα μηδεὶς λάβῃ τὸν στέφανον σου (3:11), and the readership of the Apocalypse is encouraged to give a positive response of obedience (cf. 22:7-21).

There are several hints in the Apocalypse that one of the tasks of the Church is being an overcomer. Several promises are made in the letters to the overcomers (cf. 2:7, 11, 17, 26-28; 3:5, 12, 20-21); promised blessings are inherited by the overcomers in the closing chapters of the Apocalypse (cf. 20:4-6; 21:7; 22:1-5, 12, 14). Of significance is the recognition given, in the visions of the Apocalypse, to the overcomers who maintain faithful witness to Jesus in the context of martyrdom and who are marked by purity (cf. 12:11; 21:7, 8, 27). Holiness, as a calling of the Church in the context of martyrdom, is both implied and explicit (cf. 5:8; 8:3; 11:18; 13:7, 10; 14:12; 16:6; 17:6; 18:20-24; 19:8): exhortations to purity are given in the commendations and criticisms of the letters (2:6, 14-15, 20-25; 3:4), and are implicit in the contrast between the destiny of those who are pure and that of the immoral in the visions of the Apocalypse (21:1-8; 22:10-15).

There are a number of passages in the Apocalypse which contain an implicit mandate for the Church to worship God and the Lamb (cf. 4:1-11; 5:6-14; 7:9-17; 8:1-5; 11:15-19; 12:10-12; 13:1-18; 14:1-5; 15:1-4; 16:1-7, 8-20; 18:1-24; 19:1-8). Also, in several instances the mandate to

worship God is made explicit (cf. 14:7; 19:5, 10; 22:8-9). One also observes the connection between the task of the Church to worship and the task of maintaining faithful witness to Jesus. For instance, those who remain faithful to the Lamb, as well as worshipers, are marked by purity and victory (cf. 7:9, 14; 14:4-5; 15:1-2); those who refused to worship the beast experienced martyrdom; and the readership of the Apocalypse is exhorted to maintain a “patient endurance and faithfulness” (cf. 13:1-18) that is, in part, defined as refusal to worship the beast (cf. 20:4-6).

The Apocalypse is also saturated with significant passages which call the Church, implicitly and explicitly, to maintain faithful witness to Jesus (cf. 1:5, 9, 12-13, 28; 2:1, 8-10, 12-17; 6:9-11; 11:1-14; 12:10-12; 14:1-5; 20:4-6). It is expected of the Church to maintain faithful witness in the context of persecution as well as perversion — enduring persecution with patience (cf. 2:3, 9, 13; 12:11; 14:12), and maintaining purity of teaching and lifestyle (cf. 2:14-15, 20; 3:1; 22:8-9). With connections already observed between faithful witness and other functions that are noted, one sees in the Apocalypse of John the possibility that the mandate to maintain “faithful witness to Jesus” embraces other significant functions of the Church. In one particular instance, faithful witness is expressed in the experience of martyrdom, obedience to the word of God, and the refusal to worship the beast (cf. 20:4-6).

One final function that is expected of the Church is that of repentance, notably when the Church has failed in any of its tasks. Five of the seven churches addressed in the letters are explicitly called upon to repent (cf. 2:5, 16, 20-23; 3:2-3, 19-20). And one observes how the lack of repentance shown by those who incurred divine judgment, in some of the narratives, serves as a warning to the Church (cf. 2:21-23; 9:20-21; 16:8-11).

Overall, one observes in the above survey of the Church’s tasks and functions the

prominence of the theme of worship and its mandate; they figure in at least twelve chapters of the Apocalypse (cf. 4, 5, 7, 8, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 18, 19), though not in the opening and closing chapters (1-3, 20-22); moreover, the terminology of witness and its functions receive emphasis in at least nine chapters of the Apocalypse (cf. 1, 2-3, 6, 11, 12, 14, 17, 20). One also takes note of the link between the tasks of worship and witness, as well as the connections they both have with several of the Church's other tasks and functions. These other tasks include: 1) giving obedience to the word of God (especially the contents of the Apocalypse); 2) anticipating with preparedness the return of Jesus Christ; 3) serving as a kingdom and priests unto God; 4) paying attention to the voice of the Spirit; 5) being an overcomer; 6) maintaining purity of teaching and lifestyle; 7) shunning falsehood and deception; 8) exercising patient endurance and faithfulness in the midst of hardship and even martyrdom; and 9) demonstrating repentance (especially when the Church has failed in any of its tasks and functions). While some of these tasks are related to the worship mandate, all of them are connected with the task of witness. It is in light of the above observations that an attempt will be made in the following chapters of this dissertation to study the tasks and functions of the Church in the Apocalypse of John under the main themes of worship and witness, and to discover the extent to which these functions are both comprehensive and coherent in the Apocalypse of John.

CHAPTER TWO

THEME AND MANDATE OF WORSHIP IN THE APOCALYPSE

Scholarship was once rightly criticized by Otto Piper for its lack of substantial discussion on the emphasis that the Apocalypse places on worship and related themes (e.g., hymns and prayers).¹ But since the leveling of this criticism, the nature, background, and elements of worship in the Apocalypse have been well noted by a number of scholars.² Several have confirmed that the Apocalypse of John contains liturgical elements,³ and some have observed that it was meant to be read in a liturgical assembly.⁴ Recent studies on the theme of worship in the

¹ O. Piper, "The Apocalypse of John and the Liturgy of the Ancient Church," CH 20 (1951), p. 10.

² Initial response to Piper's criticism was given in scholarly works done by L. Mowry, "Revelation 4-5 and Early Christian Liturgical Usage," JBL 71 (1952), pp. 75-84; M. Shepherd, The Paschal Liturgy and the Apocalypse (London: Lutterworth Press, 1964); J. O'Rourke, "The Hymns of the Apocalypse," CBO 30 (1968), pp. 399-409; V. Kooy, "The Apocalypse and Worship — some Preliminary Observations," RR 30 (1976), pp. 198-209.

³ The scholarly consensus that the Apocalypse contains liturgical elements is reflected in P. Prigent, Apocalypse et liturgie (Neuchâtel: Delachaux and Niestlé, 1972); and D. G. Peterson, "Worship in the Revelation to John," RTR 47 (1988), pp. 67-77.

⁴ That the Apocalypse was intended to be read in the context of worship is discussed by R. L. Jeske, "Spirit and Community in the Johannine Apocalypse," NTS 31 (1985), pp. 452-66; J. P. Ruiz, Ezekiel in the Apocalypse: The Transformation of Prophetic Language in Revelation 16:17-19:10 (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1989), pp. 184-89; U. Vanni, "Liturgical Dialogue as a Literary Form in the Book of Revelation," NTS 37 (1991), pp. 348-72, who is convinced not only that Revelation is meant for liturgical enactment, but that different parts of the book are assigned to the lector and the congregation; and D. Barr, "The Apocalypse as Oral Enactment," Int 40 (1986), pp. 243-56, who sees a eucharistic setting as the liturgical context of the Apocalypse of John. Fred B. Craddock, "Preaching the Book of Revelation," Int 40 (1986), pp. 270-282, draws the conclusion that the Book of Revelation is primarily a liturgical book which invites its readers to sing, to pray, and to praise God; he suggests that those who attempt to preach and teach its themes apart from an awareness of its liturgical setting limit its effects.

Apocalypse include the investigation of the Apocalypse's use of Jewish liturgical elements;⁵ the examination of several worship passages of the Apocalypse to discern liturgical elements;⁶ the exploration of Graeco-Roman ritual influences on the Apocalypse's liturgy;⁷ the consideration of the function of worship as determined by social-scientific models;⁸ and discussion of the historical background to the liturgical emphasis of the Apocalypse.⁹ The amount of work that has been

⁵ Notable works on Jewish liturgical elements in the Apocalypse of John include those of J. A. Drapper, "The Heavenly Feast of Tabernacles: Revelation 7:1-17," *JSNT* 19 (1983), pp. 133-47; and H. Ulfgard, *Feast and Future: Revelation 7:9-17 and the Feast of Tabernacles* (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell, 1989). That the Apocalypse of John is a liturgical book that is rooted in ancient liturgy related to the calendar of Jewish feasts is suggested by A. Farrer, *A Rebirth of Images: The Making of St. John's Apocalypse* (Westminster: Dacre, 1949).

⁶ For instance, expository articles on liturgical texts of Revelation written by P. J. Achtemeier, "Revelation 5:1-14," *Int* 40 (1986), pp. 283-88; and B. H. Kelly, "Revelation 7:9-17," *Int* 40 (1986), pp. 288-95.

⁷ Significant work on Graeco-Roman ritual influences on the liturgy of the Apocalypse has been done by D. Aune, including "The Influence of the Roman Imperial Court Ceremonial on the Revelation of John," *BR* 28 (1983), pp. 5-26 and "The Apocalypse of John and Graeco-Roman Revelatory Magic," *NTS* 33 (1987), pp. 481-501.

⁸ The attempt to determine the function of the liturgical elements of the Apocalypse through social-scientific approaches/ sociological concepts is made in significant works written by A. Y. Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984); E. S. Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgment* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985); J. A. DuRand, "Socio-Psychological View of the Effect of Language of the Apocalypse of John," *Neot* 24 (1990), pp. 351-65; and L. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

⁹ For historical background, several studies have been done on the nature and extent of the role of the Imperial Cult in the Apocalypse of John. Cf. P. J. Botha, "God, Emperor Worship and Society: Contemporary Experiences and the Book of Revelation," *Neot* 22 (1988), pp. 87-102; S. J. Scherrer, "Signs and Wonders in the Imperial Cult: A New Look at Roman Religious Institution in the Light of Rev 13:13-15," *JBL* 103 (1984), pp. 599-610; C. J. Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in their Local Setting* (*JSNTSup*, 11; Sheffield, JSOT Press, 1986); R. Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge University Press, 1993); and P. Barnett, "Revelation in its Roman Setting," *RTR* 50:2 (1991), pp. 59-68.

done serves to affirm the importance of worship in the Apocalypse and contributes as well to the discussion of the worship mandate of the Church in the Apocalypse of John. In our attempt to clarify this mandate in the Apocalypse, we begin with a consideration of the significance of the worship motif in the Apocalypse, then turn to a brief summary of scholarly discussions of both the literary and historical backgrounds to the liturgical aspects of the Apocalypse, then launch into our examination of worship passages and the liturgical materials of the Apocalypse. Through the discussions in this chapter we hope to discover the extent to which the mandate to worship is dominant in the Apocalypse of John, as well as the nature of its connection with the other tasks of the Church, especially the mandate to maintain faithful witness.

A. The Significance of the Worship Motif

The Apocalypse of John abounds with liturgical materials — hymns, prayers and anthems.

This is well noted by Piper, who writes concerning the Apocalypse:

Its visions are presented within a framework of liturgical activities, and toward the end of the book it is hardly possible to disassociate the acts of worship from the visions of the future.¹⁰

The significant presence of liturgical materials in the Apocalypse of John is further stressed by Thompson, who argues that “the language of worship plays an important role in unifying the book, that is, in making a coherent apocalypse in both form and content.”¹¹ Even the worship scenes of the Apocalypse of John, according to Thompson, are not just “interludes” or “interruptions” in the dramatic narration of the Apocalypse’s visions of “things to come.”

¹⁰ O. Piper, “The Apocalypse of John and the Liturgy of the Ancient Church,” p. 10.

¹¹ L. L. Thompson, The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire, p. 53. Also see Sophie Laws, In the Light of the Lamb (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1988), p. 70, who observes how the vision of the Apocalypse is punctuated by songs of praise or rejoicing.

Considering the relationship between the worship and the eschatology of the Apocalypse, Thompson further draws the conclusion that the heavenly worship of the Apocalypse is an eschatological celebration. He writes:

We can see more clearly the interplay in the Book of Revelation between scenes of heavenly worship and dramatic narratives of things to come; heavenly worship celebrates eschatological realities in the present; and the eschaton is portrayed as the “coming down” of heavenly realities.¹²

While one is appreciative of Thompson’s attempt to identify the Apocalypse’s worship motif and to consider it as a unifying factor in the Apocalypse of John, one should be wary of limiting the role of heavenly worship to that of eschatological celebration. As we will see in this dissertation, heavenly worship in the Apocalypse of John is both informative and instructive (as a mandate) to the Asian churches that received the Apocalypse. As is well noted by Beale in his recent commentary on the Book of Revelation, scenes of worship in the Apocalypse serve the dual purpose of teaching the Church how to worship and providing motivation for worship of the true God:

. . . the churches are to learn how to worship in their gathered meetings and to be given a zeal for worship of the true God.¹³

That the worship motif is very prominent in the visions of the Apocalypse has been observed by a number of scholars, though one may question the odd attempt to trace a precise order of worship service in the Apocalypse of John. Kooy, for instance, notes that the drama of the last days is set in the context of a worship service; and he also suggests that the pattern of the

¹² L. L. Thompson, The Book of Revelation, p. 64.

¹³ G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), p. 176.

book is that of a celestial liturgy performed by Christ and the angels.¹⁴ According to Kooy, such a pattern is suggestive of eucharistic worship as it might have been celebrated in the Asian churches on the Lord's day. Kooy's outline of eucharistic worship in the book includes items such as

the taking and unsealing of a book (5-7), the offering of incense (8), the blowing of trumpets (8-11), the opening of the heavenly temple revealing the Ark (11), the ingathering of bread and wine (14), the pouring of libations from bowls (15-16), the summons to a sacred meal (19).¹⁵

Kooy's suggestion of a eucharistic pattern of worship in the Apocalypse is carried further by Barr who classifies the Apocalypse as a liturgical book read, precisely, in a eucharistic setting.¹⁶

Minear also notes that the liturgical order followed in congregational worship may have suggested to John the sequence of events in the vision.¹⁷ And while John does not present a clearly ordered description of the baptismal rite, Danielou attempts to show that the visions contain allusions to this sacrament, and also that the Apocalypse is structured by the same.¹⁸

Indeed, the numerous allusions to liturgical elements seem to suggest that a service was probably on the mind of John as he wrote his Apocalypse. However, it has not been

¹⁴ V. Kooy, "The Apocalypse and Worship," p. 200. Interestingly, Kooy further develops the idea that worship in the Apocalypse is an eschatological celebration which announces the rule of God, the defeat of evil, the blessing of the faithful, the destruction of death, and a heavenly banquet.

¹⁵ V. Kooy, "The Apocalypse and Worship," p. 202. All these items are interpreted by Kooy in light of eucharistic worship.

¹⁶ D. Barr, "The Apocalypse as Oral Enactment," pp. 252-56.

¹⁷ P. Minear, I Saw a New Earth: An Introduction to the Visions of the Apocalypse (Washington: Corpus Books, 1988), p. 68. Minear even ventures to provide a suggestive order of a worship service.

¹⁸ J. Danielou, The Bible and the Liturgy (Notre Dame: University Press, 1956), pp. 52-58.

demonstrated (and is undemonstrable!) that John's materials are arranged in the order of a worship service. Piper rightly cautions against the mistake of looking for actual liturgies embodied in the Apocalypse, as well as the error of disregarding the liturgical significance of the Apocalypse.¹⁹

Without forcing the Apocalypse into any particular order or framework of worship service, it is proper to recognize the different aspects of Christian worship used and alluded to by John, and to consider the implications they have for the mandate of worship for the Church.

The first chapter of the Apocalypse (vv. 1-10), for instance, is full of allusions to liturgy. In the third verse, blessing is conferred upon the reader, hearer, and the doer of the message of the Apocalypse; ὁ ἀναγινώσκων καὶ οἱ ἀκούοντες are terms that indicate that the Apocalypse was intended to be read aloud by a lector to the congregation gathered for worship.²⁰ This allusion certainly indicates a liturgical context.

Furthermore, the beatitude of the third verse is followed by an introductory benediction in the fourth verse:

Ἰωάννης ταῖς ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησίαις ταῖς ἐν τῇ Ἀσίᾳ· χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη
ἀπὸ τοῦ ὄντος καὶ τοῦ ἦν καὶ τοῦ ἐρχόμενος . . .

This is a formula of introduction which is not simply epistolary but also liturgical in character.

Cullmann especially notes that such a liturgical introductory formula is usually spoken at the

¹⁹ O. Piper, "The Apocalypse of John and the Liturgy of the Ancient Church," p. 19.

²⁰ Several commentators, including P. Minear, I Saw a New Earth: An Introduction to the Visions of the Apocalypse, p. 5; R. H. Charles, The Revelation of St. John (Edinburg: T. & T. Clark, 1920), p. 7; G. Delling, Worship in the New Testament (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), p. 99; and J. Sweet, Revelation, p. 60, have noted that these terms are in reference to liturgical reading which took place at the Christian meeting (1 Tim 4:13) as in the synagogue (Acts 13:15).

beginning of a worship service.²¹ John thus appropriately opens his Apocalypse with a liturgical benediction.

The liturgical introductory formula is followed by a doxology: a song of praise and exaltation (vv. 5a and 6a), with ἀμήν at the end of the sentence (v. 6) fulfilling the role of a resounding response to the doxology. The fact that John starts off his book with these elements of worship supports the suggestion that worship is a concern for John.

Interestingly, the immediate context of the Apocalypse's visions is that of worship, as indicated by John's statement that his prophetic revelation took place on the Lord's day — τῇ κυριακῇ ἡμέρᾳ (1:10) — a term which refers to Sunday as the distinctive Christian day of worship, though it has been given other interpretations.

It has been suggested that the expression τῇ κυριακῇ ἡμέρᾳ is an equivalent of "the day of Jahweh" in the Old Testament; it is the eschatological day of judgment and consummation, into which John finds himself transported in the Spirit to witness the circumstances that surround it.²² The problem with this suggestion is that one would have expected the more usual term ἡμέρα κυρίου of 1 Thess 5:2 and 2 Pet 3:10, which traditionally refers to the eschatological day of the Lord, rather than this expression (τῇ κυριακῇ ἡμέρᾳ). As Bauckham notes, the phrase τῇ κυριακῇ ἡμέρᾳ became the common Christian term for the Christian Sunday.²³ Furthermore,

²¹ O. Cullmann, *Early Christian Worship* (London: SCM, 1953), p. 23. This observation is echoed by G. Delling, *Worship and the New Testament*, p. 49.

²² See W. Milligan, *Revelation* (Toronto: Willard Tract Depository and Bible Depot, 1889), p. 13.

²³ R. Bauckham, "The Lord's Day," in *From Sabbath to Lord's Day*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), p. 225.

there is no example of τῆ κυριακῆ ἡμέρᾳ occurring in the LXX.²⁴

Another proposal is that the term τῆ κυριακῆ ἡμέρᾳ refers to Easter. This would mean that it was at the time of the anniversary celebration of the Lord's resurrection that John found himself on the Island of Patmos, in a vision gazing into the future.²⁵ One problem with this view is that there is no explicit reference to the anniversary celebration of the Lord's resurrection in John's Apocalypse.²⁶

Certainly, a majority of scholars would concede that τῆ κυριακῆ ἡμέρᾳ refers to the Christian Sunday — the first day of the week, when Christians worshiped the resurrected Lord.²⁷ This understanding, that John received the visions of his Apocalypse on the Island of Patmos at a time of corporate worship in the churches of Asia Minor, further underscores the significance of the Apocalypse for worship on two counts. It shows John's identification with the worshipping community in Asia Minor. As Cabaniss rightly observes concerning John, "In his exile on the Island of Patmos, deprived of the inspiration of common worship with his fellow-Christians, his

²⁴ Cf. W. Stott, "A Note on the Word κυριακῆ in Rev 1:10," *NTS* 12 (1965-66), pp. 70-71.

²⁵ Proponents of this view include C. W. Dugmore, "Lord's Day and Easter," in *Neotestamentica et Patristica* (Leiden: Brill, 1962), pp. 272-81; and K. A. Strand, "Another Look at 'Lord's Day' in the Early Church and in Rev 1:10," *NTS* 13 (1966-67), pp. 174-81.

²⁶ A fine critique of the proposal that the day of the Lord of Rev 1:10 is in reference to Easter is offered by W. Stott, "A Note on the Word κυριακῆ," p. 72.

²⁷ See R. H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), p. 76; H. B. Swete, *Apocalypse of John* (London: Macmillan, 1907), p. 13; and D. Aune, *Revelation 1-5* (Waco: Word Books, 1997-98), pp. 82-85. W. Stott, "A Note on the Word κυριακῆ," pp. 72-75, notes that τῆ κυριακῆ ἡμέρᾳ gained prominence through the strong emphasis of the early Church on the lordship of Christ; on the basis of Christ's resurrection, τῆ κυριακῆ was regarded as a day belonging to Christ. R. H. Charles, *The Revelation of St. John*, p. 23, also suggests that "the Lord's Day" is in contrast to the days dedicated to the Roman emperor.

mind was inevitably drawn to the solemn service he was missing, and in spirit he was joining with his comrades in their prayers, praise and Scripture lessons.”²⁸ On a second count, the mandate comes from John through his Apocalypse to the churches of Asia Minor to continue with their worship of Christ. The emphasis on worship in the Apocalypse could be seen as a reminder to the Asian churches that their worship of Christ is shared by others including their exiled leader on the Island of Patmos, and even a myriad of angels and multitude of saints who render their homage in the heavenly vision of the Apocalypse.

B. Literary and Historical Background to the Liturgical Emphasis of the Apocalypse

1. Literary Sources

The relationship between the liturgy of the Apocalypse and that of the early Church is certainly a complicated issue that requires some attention. While it is true that most scholars would readily attest to the value of the Apocalypse for the study of worship in primitive Christianity, different attempts to appeal to later liturgies and other extant materials for discussion are perhaps questionable. These attempts include those of Cabaniss, who turns to liturgical materials found in Justin Martyr’s First Apology and the Book of Hebrews, chapters 8-9;²⁹ Thompson, who alludes to I Corinthians 12-14,³⁰ and Shepherd, who suggests the Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus as well as other texts, including the Epistle to Diognetus and Tertullian’s

²⁸ A. Cabaniss, “Liturgy - Making Factors in Primitive Christianity,” JR 23 (1943), p. 50. Also see J. Moffatt, The Revelation of St. John the Divine (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951), p. 342; and M. Kiddle, The Revelation of St. John (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1940), p. 11.

²⁹ A. Cabaniss, “Liturgy - Making Factors in Primitive Christianity,” pp. 43-58.

³⁰ L. Thompson, “Cult and Eschatology in the Apocalypse of John,” JR 49 (1969), pp. 330-350.

Against Marcion, as providing a basis for discussion on the relationship between the liturgy of the Apocalypse and worship in primitive Christianity.³¹

As to the source of the liturgical materials of the Apocalypse of John, various suggestions have been offered: Kiddle advises that the liturgy of the Apocalypse has no source but the prophet's own vivid imagination and personal experience.³² A "no source" theory of John's liturgical materials suggests that John wrote the Apocalypse in a vacuum. Numerous scholars believe that John's work is based on pre-existing liturgical materials associated with the worship of the early Church. Shepherd links the Apocalyptic liturgy to the Paschal liturgy,³³ Carrington proposes that its structure is taken from the Jerusalem temple service, perhaps the daily sacrifice,³⁴ and Niles suggests a threefold scheme of the weekly cycle, the festal year, and the daily liturgy as the source of the Apocalyptic liturgy.³⁵

Several scholars have suggested other plausible backgrounds for the liturgical materials of the Apocalypse.³⁶ Based on his studies of Graeco-Roman influence on Revelation (especially on

³¹ M. Shepherd, The Paschal Liturgy and Apocalypse, pp. 49, 56, 63.

³² M. Kiddle, The Revelation of St. John, p. 66.

³³ M. Shepherd, The Paschal Liturgy and the Apocalypse. Similarly, P. Prigent, Apocalypse et Liturgie, pp. 46-79, argues that the synagogue liturgy provided the dominant influence on the paschal liturgy of John's own church.

³⁴ P. Carrington, The Meaning of Revelation (London: SPCK, 1931).

³⁵ D. T. Niles, As Seeing the Invisible (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1961).

³⁶ See J. Sweet, Revelation, p. 41; R. J. Bauckham, "The Worship of Jesus in Apocalyptic Christianity," NTS 27, (1981), p. 331; W. G. Kümmel, Introduction to the New Testament (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1975); and D. Peterson, "Worship in the Revelation to John," RTR 47 (1988), pp. 67-77, who argues that John is not simply concerned that the churches sing the same songs as the heavenly assembly but that they reflect the same confidence in God.

the liturgy of chapters 4 and 5), Aune thinks that the liturgy of the Apocalypse is patterned after the ceremonial of the Imperial court and cult.³⁷ Bauckham notes the combination of cultic and political elements in the Apocalypse's visions and underscores the view that Rome presented its political power in cultic terms.³⁸ And Beale, with his strong emphasis on the use of the Old Testament in the Apocalypse of John, argues for an Old Testament-Jewish liturgical background.³⁹

This review of scholarship, then, leaves open a number of possibilities for the source of the Apocalypse's liturgy. In the view of most scholars, John was drawing on pre-existing liturgical materials, based on his knowledge of Roman Imperial court ceremony, and/ or aspects of Jewish and Christian liturgical traditions. In any case, he was not in any way writing in a vacuum. The heavenly worship that John portrays corresponds to earthly worship. Martin's argument that it is reasonable to expect John to resort to the use of the forms and contents of worship which were part of his own knowledge and experience makes sense.⁴⁰ How else could he have made his descriptions intelligible to his readers?

The possibility that the liturgy of the Apocalypse is a reflection of the contemporary

³⁷ D. Aune, "The Influence of Roman Imperial Court Ceremonial on the Revelation of John," *BR* 28 (1983), p. 5.

³⁸ R. Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, pp. 31-35.

³⁹ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, pp. 312-14.

⁴⁰ R. P. Martin, *Worship in the Early Church* (London: H. Revell, 1964), p. 45. Martin points out that there is a precedent for this in early Judaism, where the idea of the inter-relation of heavenly and earthly cults abounds; there are texts which speak of liturgical songs in heaven, but the language belongs to Jewish worship on earth. Also see M. M. Thompson, "Worship in the Book of Revelation," *ExAud* 8 (1992), pp. 45-54, who explores the imagery of worship to show how it is derived from the hymns and liturgy of the early Church.

liturgy of John's day may further lead one to acknowledge and appreciate the liturgical significance and worship mandate of the Apocalypse of John. In presenting the heavenly liturgy, by drawing on an earthly form of worship, John enables the churches of Asia Minor to see the parallel and unity that exist between worship in heaven and on earth. "Christian worship," then, as Piper notes, is expressly "participation in the heavenly liturgy."⁴¹ The link between heavenly liturgy and earthly worship provides the churches of Asia Minor with a divine perspective on the object, meaning, nature, and goal of Christian worship, which will be spelt out in our discussion of the liturgical passages of the Apocalypse; and it also presents them with a challenge and mandate to worship the One who is worshiped in the Apocalypse. The challenge and mandate of the heavenly worship of the Apocalypse to the earthly worship of the churches of Asia Minor is well-noted by Beale in his comments on the significance of the churches' angelic representatives:

As in chs. 1-3, the church is pictured in angelic guise to remind its members that already a dimension of their existence is heavenly, that their real home is not with the unbelieving "earth dwellers," and that they have heavenly help and protection. . . . One of the purposes of the church meeting on earth in its weekly gatherings (as in 1:3, 9) is to be reminded of its heavenly existence and identity by modeling its worship and liturgy on the angels' and the heavenly church's worship of the exalted Lamb, as vividly portrayed in chapters 4-5.⁴²

2. Historical Background

While there are many historical factors that contributed to the writing of the Apocalypse of John, one factor which is of relevance to the liturgical emphasis and the worship mandate of the

⁴¹ O. Piper, "The Apocalypse of John and the Liturgy of the Ancient Church," pp. 11, 19. It is further suggested by Piper that John through the Spirit was enabled to pierce the surface of human ordinances which had formed the Christian worship, and to discover the divine purpose and the heavenly realities lying behind them.

⁴² G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation, p. 323.

Apocalypse is the conflict between Christianity and the Imperial cult. The specific antagonism between the Church and the Imperial cult, as Hemer notes, is probably to be seen in the growth of a polemical parallelism between their titles and institutions, evidence for which is largely derived from the great cities of Asia Minor. This antagonism is reflected in the imagery of the Apocalypse.⁴³

Most scholars would support Hemer's view that in the background of the Apocalypse is the worship of Caesar and the accompanying persecution of those who refuse it. However, the degree to which persecution is reflected in the Apocalypse, and the role of the Imperial cult in the context of the Apocalypse, are debatable issues in current scholarship. For some, the historical situation of John and his audience was real and literal "poverty, banishment, violence, harassment, and assassination,"⁴⁴ during the reign of Domitian. For others, based on the argument that there is little evidence for any large-scale or organized persecution of Christians by Domitian, the crisis situation was imagined by the author of the Apocalypse.⁴⁵ Regardless of how one perceives the

⁴³ C. J. Hemer, The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in their Local Setting (JSNTSup, 11; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986). This is a major work on the historical background to the study of the Apocalypse of John, in which the author primarily relates the messages of the seven letters to the local situations to which they were addressed. It involves a careful re-appraisal of the work of William Ramsay in this field.

⁴⁴ See E. Stauffer, Christ and the Caesars (London: SCM Press, 1965), in which he provides valuable insights into the historical development and essence of Caesar-worship in the ancient world, as well as the claims and demands of Domitian during the time that the Apocalypse is believed to have been written. Also see Shüssler Fiorenza, Invitation to the Book of Revelation (New York: Image Books, 1981), who is a strong advocate of the experience of real persecution in the Apocalypse of John.

⁴⁵ Cf. A. Y. Collins, Crisis and Carthasis: The Power of the Apocalypse (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984); and L. Thompson, The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire, in which he stresses the active role of apocalypses — they seek to create a perception of crisis even when no objective crisis exists — and rejects the portrait of Domitian as a harsh ruler. Also

persecution of the Apocalypse, as real or imagined, it is apparent that one of John's major concerns was the true worship of those experiencing persecution or the threat of it. Against the background of the demands of the Imperial cult, the Apocalypse comes with a mandate to its original recipients to worship Christ rather than Caesar. In the words of Barnett, "The ritual of the Imperial cult was utilized to ascertain true loyalties. In the final analysis, worship — given and withheld — is the message of Revelation."⁴⁶

C. Worship Scenes and Liturgical Materials of the Apocalypse

Throughout the Apocalypse are scattered series of hymnic materials, petitionary statements, references to priestly activities, and worship scenes which reflect the worship mandate of the Apocalypse.⁴⁷ Following is an exposition of selected pericopes that contain these liturgical materials, to see what each contributes to our understanding of the worship mandate of the Apocalypse.

see P. Prigent, L'Apocalypse de Saint Jean (Lausanne: Delachaux et Niestlé), 1981; and F. G. Downing, "Pliny's Persecutions of Christians: Revelation and I Peter," JSNT 34 (1988), pp. 105-23.

⁴⁶ P. Barnett, "Revelation in its Roman Setting," RTR 50:2 (1991), pp. 59-68.

⁴⁷ In the Apocalypse there are about sixteen hymns or hymn-like compositions at various points in the narrative (cf. D. Aune, Revelation 1-5, pp. 314-17). The significant presence of these hymnic materials in the Apocalypse of John has led scholars such as J. Bowman, The Drama of the Book of Revelation (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1955), and M. C. Tenney, Interpreting Revelation (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), to view the Apocalypse as a drama with hymns playing a role similar to that of songs in Greek drama, providing an interlude which connects with the action that follows. A similar view is taken by M. Rissi, Time and History (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1966). However, V. Kooy, "The Apocalypse and Worship," p. 202, thinks the hymns suggest a complete worship service in the Apocalypse, while G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation, pp. 218, 323, sees the scenes of heavenly liturgy woven throughout the Apocalypse, especially in the concluding sections, as simply serving the purpose of interpretation for the preceding visionary narratives.

Scene I (4:1-11) — The Worship of God by the Twenty-four Elders and the Four Living Creatures

Through an open door⁴⁸ with a heavenly ascent,⁴⁹ John gains an entrance to behold a moving picture of the worship that takes place in the throne room of heaven (4:1). On the throne is seated a sovereign, glorious, and majestic figure (4:2-3);⁵⁰ surrounding him are twenty-four thrones on which are seated twenty-four elders, dressed in white and crowned with gold (4:4); and in the centre, also surrounding the throne, are the four living creatures who join the elders in the adoration of the One seated on the throne (4:6-11).⁵¹

This pericope identifies in a dramatic fashion the object, subjects and character of worship that takes place in the heavenly throne room; and it issues to John's audience a mandate to worship God.

The object of worship is the One seated on the throne, the Lord God Almighty (4:2, 8,

⁴⁸ In Rev 4:1, the entrance to the heavenly world is conceptualized in terms of an open door. Parallels to this in ancient literature suggest that the image of the open door in heaven is appropriate for introducing a divine revelation. (Cf. D. Aune, Revelation 1-5, p. 280.)

⁴⁹ The heavenly ascent of the seer is a common phenomenon in apocalyptic literature. It occurs frequently in both prophetic and apocalyptic literary contexts in early Judaism as well as in the later rabbinic hekalot literature. See D. Halperin, "Ascension or Invasion: Implications of the Heavenly Journey in Ancient Judaism," JR 18 (1988), pp. 47-67, who provides a discussion of the division of Jewish heavenly ascent literature and references to heavenly ascents in five categories.

⁵⁰ While it may be true that the features used to describe the One seated on the throne and his locality bear some significance, it is important to realize that the notion of splendor and majesty is primarily what John seeks to convey in this context of worship (cf. M. Kiddle, The Revelation of St. John, p. 81).

⁵¹ The setting of the liturgy of the throne room suggests the ritual of the court ceremonial to L. Mowry, "The Paschal Liturgy and the Apocalypse," pp. 76, 81. But to V. Kooy, "The Apocalypse of Worship," p. 203, it is a reflection of the architecture of the early Church. (One wonders which house church Kooy has in mind!)

11).⁵² Interestingly, the first thing which catches John's attention when he is transported from earthly misery to heavenly bliss is the throne and the One seated on it. In reference to God, the throne is a symbol of absolute power, majesty, and sovereignty which is referred to in almost every chapter of the Apocalypse of John (except chapters 2, 9, 10).⁵³ To those Asian churches (John's readers) who lived under the shadow of Caesar's throne and the demand for emperor worship, the symbol of the throne of God and the worship of the enthroned One serve as a source of encouragement as well as a challenge to worship the object of heavenly worship. The One who controls their plight and deserves their worship is not Caesar but the Lord God Almighty who occupies the heavenly throne. As Caird puts it, "The one truth that matters above all others is that there is a greater throne above."⁵⁴ This important truth John would want to communicate through the scene of worship in the throne room.

The subjects of worship are the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures, whose identification has given rise to many different proposals by scholars, none gaining universal acceptance.⁵⁵

⁵² The title "the Lord God" (4:8, 11) is probably in contrast to Domitian's blasphemous claims as "Dominus et Deus Noster" (cf. R. H. Charles, The Revelation of St. John, p. 133).

⁵³ See D. Aune, Revelation 1-5, p. 284; R. Mounce, The Book of Revelation, p. 134 and R. H. Charles, The Revelation of St. John, p. 111. The term *θρόνος* occurs about forty-seven times in the Apocalypse of John, and all but seven instances refer to the heavenly throne of God (or Christ, in 3:21). The phrase *ἐπὶ τὸν θρόνον καθήμενος* appears as a circumlocution for the name of God in the Apocalypse of John. In addition, the term *θρόνος* (by itself) appears to function as a circumlocution for the name of God (cf. 4:10; 8:3).

⁵⁴ G. B. Caird, A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John The Divine (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), p. 62.

⁵⁵ R. Charles, The Revelation of St. John, pp. 128-33 has provided a detailed survey of proposals up to 1920. An update is given by D. Aune, Revelation 1-5, pp. 288-292.

In light of the Old Testament portraits of God surrounded by His court (cf. 1 Kgs 22:19; Isa 6:1), it is not surprising when commentators identify the twenty-four elders as angels in heaven. Beasley-Murray considers them as an exalted angelic order,⁵⁶ and Kiddle suggests that they are a council of angels, a counterpart to the twenty-four star-gods worshiped by the Babylonians.⁵⁷ The major problem with this view is that apart from Isa 24:23 (possibly) there is no place in the Scriptures where angels are called elders or said to be crowned.

An attempt is made by some to limit the identification of the twenty-four elders to Old Testament worthies who already have a place in heaven. Sweet, for instance, claims that the number twenty-four stems from the twenty-four heads of priestly families (1 Chr 23:6; 24:7-18), who must all be present in the temple at the great festivals.⁵⁸ It is likely that the number twenty-four originated from the Old Testament (as suggested by Sweet); however, to limit the identity of the twenty-four elders to Old Testament worthies raises questions about whether John could have meant to exclude early Christian worthies from their number. Besides, it should be observed from reading the Apocalypse that, with the exception of carrying censers containing the prayers of the saints (5:8), the twenty-four elders of the Apocalypse are not portrayed as performing specifically priestly functions.

There has also been an attempt to identify the twenty-four elders as heavenly

⁵⁶ G. R. Beasley-Murray, The Book of Revelation, p. 114.

⁵⁷ M. Kiddle, The Revelation of St. John, p. 84.

⁵⁸ J. Sweet, Revelation, p. 118. Closely related to this is the suggestion that the twenty-four divisions of musicians, descendants of Levi, who "prophesied" with lyres, harps, and cymbals provide the ground for identifying the twenty-four elders as Old Testament worthies (cf. G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation, p. 324).

representatives of individual Christians who had sealed their faith through martyrdom, and are now in a glorified state participating in the exalted heavenly worship.⁵⁹ The major problem with this view is the limitation of heavenly rewards to those who have suffered martyrdom. Thus, to avoid this inappropriate limitation some scholars suggest that the twenty-four elders are heavenly representatives of the elect, the Church in its totality, with no preference for those who suffered martyrdom.⁶⁰

However, for those who see a continuity between Israel and the Church as a people of God, the twenty-four elders are considered as heavenly representatives of both Israel and the Church. It is often expressed that John is probably using Old Testament imagery as a symbolic representation of the people of God in its totality — a combination of the twelve patriarchs and the twelve apostles — as they worship God in heaven.⁶¹

As for the four living creatures, most scholars would consider them as symbolic rather than literal heavenly creatures.⁶² With slight modifications drawn from the visions of Ezekiel and Isaiah, they are identified as representing the entire animate creation.

No matter what one makes of the identities of both the twenty-four elders and the four

⁵⁹ Cf. A. Feuillet, "Les vingt-quatre vieillards de l'Apocalypse," *RB* 65 (1958), pp. 5-32; and H. Kraft, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, p. 97.

⁶⁰ See H. B. Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John* (London: MacMillan, 1907), pp. 68-69; and L. W. Hurtado, "Revelation 4-5 in the Light of Jewish Apocalyptic Analogies," *JSNT* 25 (1985), pp. 105-24.

⁶¹ Corporate representation of both Israel and the Church has recently been affirmed by G. A. Krodel, *Revelation* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989), p. 155; cf. G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 325.

⁶² Cf. G. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 117; and G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 330.

living creatures, it is important, for our purpose, that one does not lose sight of their function in the Apocalypse of John. As Aune rightly notes, this is far more important and certain than any speculation regarding their supposed identities.⁶³ Throughout the Apocalypse, the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures play a significant role in the worship of God. In this pericope (4:8-12), while the four living creatures give ceaseless praise, glory, honor, and thanks to the One who sits on the throne and lives forever, the twenty-four elders fall down before him and worship him by laying down their crowns before the throne and uttering a hymn of praise.

The heavenly worship scene (Rev 4:1-11) contains two hymnic utterances of significance: the trisagion (4:8) sung by the four living creatures,⁶⁴ and the ascription of praise to God the Creator intoned by the twenty-four elders (4:11). In these two utterances, cause is given for the worship of God. While the four living creatures celebrate, in the trisagion, the holiness, majesty, sovereignty and eternity of God, the elders acknowledge the glory, honor, and power due him because of his creation. This certainly provides a pattern and mandate for worship to the churches of Asia Minor that were confronted with the demand to worship Caesar.

Scene II (5:1-14) — The Worship of the Lamb

Closely connected with and parallel to the worship of God in the fourth chapter of the Apocalypse is the worship of the Lamb that follows in this passage.⁶⁵ In a dramatic fashion, this

⁶³ D. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, p. 288.

⁶⁴ The trisagion: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty . . . ,” prominent in ancient liturgy, appears in this context with slight modifications that fit the eschatological tone of the Apocalypse (cf. V. Kooy, “The Apocalypse of Worship,” p. 203).

⁶⁵ The connection between these two worship scenes indicates that the worship of the Lamb is not to be separated from the worship of God. Both the One who sits on the throne and the Lamb are objects of worship in the Apocalypse of John (cf. 5:13; 7:10; 11:15; 22:3).

passage relates the following events: the occasion that calls for the appearance of the Lamb (5:1-4); the introduction and description of the Lamb (5:5-6); the action of the Lamb (5:7); and the worship that both the appearance and action of the Lamb evoke (5:8-14). Here again (as in the preceding scene of worship) we have an entire chapter which is dominated by heavenly liturgy providing significant information and instruction for the churches of Asia Minor.

The Lamb appears on the scene in response to the sorrows expressed by John. He appears as the One who is worthy to open the scroll which is held in the right hand of the One who sits on the throne. He is the One who is ἄξιος (qualified)⁶⁶ to accomplish a task which no other could perform. From a pastoral point of view, the Lamb's appearance certainly offers comfort not only to John, but also to the churches that were no doubt concerned about their destiny, which is symbolized by the opening of the scroll.⁶⁷ However, the recognition of the worthiness of the Lamb to open the scroll leads to a celebration of the worthiness of the Lamb to receive worship in the rest of the narrative.

The Lamb is introduced as the Lion of the tribe of Judah, and the Root of David that has prevailed (ἐνίκησεν).⁶⁸ These two titles are taken from the common stock of Jewish messianism. The Lion of the tribe of Judah is a title with an obviously martial ring recalling the prophecy of

⁶⁶ It has been well observed that the term ἄξιος does not simply mean "able," but it means "qualified" in terms of having the suitable qualifications to perform the required special task (cf. D. Aune, Revelation 1-5, p. 347).

⁶⁷ The unique scroll of Rev 5:1 has been given various interpretations in terms of its form, content, meaning and function. For a summary and critique of the various interpretations and identifications of the scroll, see G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation, pp. 339-47 and D. Aune, Revelation 1-5, pp. 338-46.

⁶⁸ ἐνίκησεν points to the Lamb as completely triumphant, and the aorist tense may well indicate a once-and-for-all victory (cf. L. Morris, The Revelation of St. John, p. 96).

Gen 49:10, “a favorite Jewish messianic text, bloodthirstily embroidered in the Targums with motifs from Isa 63:1-6.”⁶⁹ The Root of David also brings to mind other messianic texts (Isa 9:6, 7; 11:1-10) which speak of the ideal King, the “branch from Jesse’s root,” who will be equipped with the Spirit of the Lord for the accomplishment of his task.

Interestingly, after hearing the introduction of the Lion of the tribe of Judah (5:5), John saw no lion, but the Lamb looking as if it had been slain and yet standing in the centre of the throne (5:6). A puzzling question that this raises is how to reconcile the symbol of the Lion with the figure of the Lamb in this vision of John.⁷⁰

In order to equate the Lamb of the Apocalypse with the horned, messianic, and triumphant Lamb of Intertestamental literature, rather than the sacrificial lamb of many Old Testament texts, Beasley-Murray considers the Lamb and the Lion as “variant symbols of one idea, the all prevailing Messiah.”⁷¹ This is probably missing the crucial point that John is communicating in his mixture of contradicting symbols. John is likely doing more in this passage than presenting variant symbols of the Messiah. For the sake of his audience, he graphically portrays a paradox or contrast between the majestic symbol of the Lion and the meek figure of the Lamb. As Sweet observes:

the purpose of the titles is not only to assert Jesus’ authority to open the Scriptures (in the face of Jewish ‘slander,’ 3:7-9) but also to set up the contrast with the master-title Lamb: conquest is through sacrificial suffering and apparent defeat. . . .

⁶⁹ J. Sweet, Revelation, p. 128.

⁷⁰ Different interpretations have been given to the Lamb metaphor in the Apocalypse of John. For an extensive discussion of its background, usage, and meaning in the Apocalypse, see D. Aune, Revelation 1-5, pp. 367-73.

⁷¹ G. Beasley-Murray, The Book of Revelation, p. 125.

Lion and Root over against Lamb is a symbolic equivalent of “we preach Christ crucified . . . the power and wisdom of God” (1 Cor 1:23f).⁷²

What John communicates in this mixture of contradicting symbols is that the victorious Lion conquers not by self-assertion, coercion or force, but rather through self-sacrifice and redemptive love. This concept of victory through sacrifice which dominates John’s presentation in the Apocalypse is certainly in contrast to the forceful and coercive efforts of the Caesars to invoke worship.

The description of the Lamb is another important aspect that evokes worship in this passage. He is envisioned as standing, even though he had been slain (i.e, alive, though with marks of slaughter upon him),⁷³ and having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent forth into all the earth. While the seven horns speak of the fullness of power, the seven eyes symbolize the fullness of wisdom.⁷⁴ This description implies that the Lamb possesses the fullness of God’s omnipotence and omniscience; he is “the power and wisdom of God” (1 Cor 1:24). Thus, the Lamb is undoubtedly invested with the attributes of deity which evoke worship in the latter part of this passage.

This passage concludes with the action of the Lamb and the worship that is evoked. The Lamb as One who is qualified (ἄξιος) comes and takes the scroll from the One who sits on the

⁷² J. Sweet, Revelation, p. 128.

⁷³ John’s use of ἐσφαγμένον in the perfect participle form expresses a present state based on a past action. For theological significance, J. Sweet, Revelation, p. 128, comments that this suggests the present and eternal reality of the historical death on the cross (cf. Rev 13:8; 1 Pet 1:18-20).

⁷⁴ Cf. R. Mounce, The Book of Revelation, p. 133, who notes that “horn” is an ancient Jewish symbol for strength or power (cf. Deut 33:17), and is also used in Rev 12:3; 13:1, 11; 17:3ff.

throne, and in response magnificent outbursts of worship resound from the twenty-four elders, the four living creatures, and the whole universe. Their response of worship in this passage begins with the twenty-four elders offering the prayers of the saints (a priestly activity)⁷⁵ followed by two hymnic utterances: the antiphonal response by the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders in praise of the Lamb as the redeemer (5:9-12); and the doxology of praise and honor with a corresponding “Amen” sung by the whole creation to the One seated on the throne and the Lamb.

In terms of the content of worship in the Apocalypse of John, there is an indication in this scene (5:1-14) that worship is not limited to the singing of hymns. The offering of the prayers of the saints by the twenty-four elders (5:8) is mentioned before the singing of hymns. The two hymns also contain some insights and instructions on worship. Concerning the person and the work of the Lamb — the one who is worshiped — the songs / hymns commence with the affirmation of the Lamb’s worthiness: ἄξιός ἐστι (the same words that introduce the hymn of worship to God the Creator in the previous chapter). This implies that the Lamb shares the worth of God and is thus qualified to receive worship.⁷⁶ The same ascription of worth is directed to the One upon the throne (4:11) and to the Lamb (5:9, 12); moreover, both of them are objects of universal worship, which is indicative of the “exalted Christology”⁷⁷ of the Apocalypse of John. In all likelihood, this is meant as a message to the churches of Asia Minor, which had to choose between the worship of Caesar and Christ, that worship is due to none other than God and the

⁷⁵ Petitionary prayer features in the Apocalypse as an element of worship. It is mentioned in reference to the prayers of the saints (5:8; 6:9-10; 8:3-4), and with regards to the threefold prayer for the parousia (22:17, 20).

⁷⁶ Cf. G. B. Caird, A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John The Divine, p. 76.

⁷⁷ R. Mounce, The Book of Revelation, p. 135.

Lamb (one of John's symbols for Christ in his Apocalypse).

As in the case of the worship of God in chapter 4, reason is also given here for the worship of the Lamb. The worthiness of the Lamb to receive worship stems from his great act of redemption and sacrifice (5:9).⁷⁸ The Lamb merits divine worship precisely because he was slain: ἄξιός ἐστι . . . ὅτι ἐσφάγης. This, according to Sweet “is tantamount to the Christian belief that it is in the cross that God discloses the essence of what it is to be God”:⁷⁹ a significant point that again emphasizes the contrast between the Caesars and Christ (the Lamb of the Apocalypse). It is not through self-assertion, coercion, or force that the Lamb becomes the divine object of worship but through self-sacrifice and suffering.⁸⁰

Scene III (7:9-17) — The Worship of God and the Lamb

In this passage, the elders, living creatures, and angels of chapters 4 and 5 are now joined by a vast multitude of redeemed people in the worship of God and the Lamb. Standing before the throne, in front of the Lamb, wearing white robes and holding palm branches, they offer their hymn of praise and adoration.⁸¹ With a loud voice they cry: “Salvation belongs to our God, who

⁷⁸ With the understanding that the Lamb qualified for worship by his great act of redemption and sacrifice, E. Fiorenza, “Redemption as Liberation: Apoc. 1:5f. and 5:9f.,” *CBO* 36 (1974), pp. 220-32, further explores the political and social-economic dimensions of the redemption of Christ.

⁷⁹ J. Sweet, *Revelation*, p. 131.

⁸⁰ Cf. J. Sweet, *Revelation*, p. 127, who comments on the significance of suffering in Christ's worthiness to receive worship and to execute judgment in the Apocalypse of John.

⁸¹ That this worship scene is an occasion for rejoicing and a celebration of victory is noted in several commentaries. The white robes of this multitude of redeemed people denote victory and holiness; and their palm branches signify joy in victory (cf. G. R. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 145; and G. Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John The Divine*, p. 101).

sits on the throne, and to the Lamb” (7:10). And in response to their jubilant cry, myriads of angels who surround the throne fall prostrate before God and offer to him a sevenfold doxology of praise and a twofold resounding “Amen.”

There have been various attempts to determine the nature of the background⁸² and identity of this large crowd of people that join the subjects of heavenly worship in the Apocalypse of John (7:9-17). While most commentators would agree that the innumerable people represent the Christian church (gathered from every nation),⁸³ there are diverse opinions on what segment of the Church they represent and their relationship with the 144,000 from the tribes of Israel who were sealed before the outpouring of the wrath of the Lamb (7:1-8). A review of scholarly discussion shows possible suggestions which include viewing them as representatives of Christian martyrs,⁸⁴ Christian Gentiles,⁸⁵ and Christians in general (including Christian Jews and Gentiles,

⁸² The “Abrahamic Promise” is usually referred to as the background to John’s multitude of people from every nation. It is asserted and extensively discussed by R. Bauckham, Climax of Prophecy, pp. 224-25, that Rev 7:9 alludes precisely to the form of the patriarchal promise occurring in Gen 17:4-6; 35:11; 48:19 (cf. G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation, pp. 429-30; and D. Aune, Revelation 6-16, pp. 466-67).

⁸³ That the innumerable multitude is explicitly described as those “who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (7:14), a vivid metaphor for belief in the atoning death of Christ, is a strong indication that the multitude consists of Christians (cf. D. Aune, Revelation 6-16, p. 446). However, a minority view is held by G. W. Buchanan, The Book of Revelation, pp. 189-92, that the innumerable multitude represents the Jews from the Diaspora.

⁸⁴ Cf. G. B. Caird, A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John The Divine, p. 95; W. J. Harrington, Apocalypse of St. John (London: G. Chapman, 1969), p. 131; and R. Bauckham, The Climax of Prophecy (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1992), pp. 210-37.

⁸⁵ Cf. H. Kraft, Die Offenbarung des Johannes, p. 126; and E. B. Allo, L’ Apocalypse de Saint Jean, p. 93.

martyrs and non-martyrs).⁸⁶ Also in contrast to earlier prevailing opinion that two distinct groups are in view in this liturgical setting,⁸⁷ the majority of scholars now contend that these two groups in 7:1-8 and 7:9-17 are the same group but described from two different perspectives.⁸⁸

Again, of interest to the discussion of the mandate to worship in this passage are issues such as the function and description of the worshipers, the content as well as the focus of their worship. The first worshipers are the innumerable multitude. By their coming out of every nation, tribe, people, and language (7:9), the theme of universal worship, which is sounded earlier in the worship of "every creature" (5:13), is reiterated in the Apocalypse; their wearing of robes which are made white in the blood of the Lamb (7:9, 14) suggests not simply an intimate relationship with the Lamb but also their purity (a significant mandate for the Church in the Apocalypse) which is made possible by the blood of the Lamb;⁸⁹ their holding of palm branches (7:9) indicates a joyful celebration of the victory which they had won by coming out of the great

⁸⁶ Cf. I. T. Beckwith, The Apocalypse of John, (New York: MacMillan, 1919), pp. 535-39; E. Lohse, Die Offenbarung des Johannes (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck and Reprecht, 1976), p. 53 and P. Prigent, L'Apocalypse de Saint Jean (Paris: Delachaux et Niestlé, 1981), pp. 121-23.

⁸⁷ While some see the first group (7:1-8) as a remnant of Israel and the second group (7:9-17) as people from every nation, others make a distinction along different lines, viewing the 144,000 as martyrs and the second group as all believers, including martyrs (cf. G. B. Caird, A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John The Divine, pp. 93-103; and A. Y. Collins, The Apocalypse, pp. 52-53, 99).

⁸⁸ That both groups represent the entire Christian Church, consisting of both Jews and Gentiles, is presently a scholarly consensus. D. Aune, Revelation 6-16, p. 447, and G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation, pp. 424-26, provide a detailed review of literature on this position.

⁸⁹ Cf. G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation, p. 437.

tribulation (7:9);⁹⁰ and their serving (λατρεύουσιν)⁹¹ God day and night in his temple (7:15) portrays ceaseless worship, like that of the four living creatures (4:8) — a priestly activity that forms part of the worship mandate of the Apocalypse.⁹²

The theme of the worship-song of the multitude in the heavenly liturgy is their salvation (σωτηρία),⁹³ which they ascribe to both God and the Lamb. This suggests an acknowledgment that “their deliverance rests on the sovereign will of God and the redemptive activity of the Lamb.”⁹⁴ Coming out of a prolonged period and an intense experience of tribulation (7:14), they celebrate the salvation which they owe to God and the Lamb.

The second group of worshipers in this worship scene of the Apocalypse is a combination of a host of angels, the twenty-four elders, and the four living creatures who worshiped

⁹⁰ See D. Aune, Revelation 6-16, pp. 467-70, and G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation, p. 428 for a discussion of the background and significance of the holding of palm branches.

⁹¹ Key worship terms which are used in the Apocalypse of John include λατρεύω, προσκυνέω, εὐφραίνω (12:12; 18:20) and φοβέομαι (cf. 11:18; 19:5). Λατρεύω indicates the observance of cultic duties and could be translated as “worship” here in Rev 7:15 and 22:3. In the LXX (except Daniel) it is the normal equivalent of עָבַד, as distinguished from the priestly שָׁרַת which is usually represented by λειτουργέω (cf. J. Sweet, Revelation, pp. 101, 153).

⁹² Ceaseless worship is a recurring theme in the Apocalypse of John. It is done in the heavenly temple by heavenly beings (4:8) and by a multitude of people (7:15); eventually the righteous who belong to the Asian churches will become participants in this unceasing worship (3:12; 22:3).

⁹³ D. Aune, Revelation 6-16, p. 470, rightly notes that “the term σωτηρία, usually translated ‘salvation’, is not exclusively a religious term but is closely associated with eschatological victory in Revelation and refers here (in 7:10) to salvation in the sense of ‘deliverance’ or ‘victory’ over persecution.” The same thought is expressed by G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation, p. 431.

⁹⁴ R. Mounce, The Book of Revelation, p. 163; also see G. B. Caird, A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John The Divine, p. 100.

(προσεκύνησαν) God by falling down on their faces as a sign of humility in worship (as in the case of only the twenty-four elders in 4:10; 5:14; 11:16, and of both the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures in 5:8; 7:11; 19:4); they also worshiped through their singing of a song of worship (7:11, 12). Their song is introduced and concluded by the word “amen,” which functions as a response to the song of victory sung by the multitude (7:10),⁹⁵ it also contains a doxology of praise in which seven significant attributes are ascribed to God.⁹⁶

As in previous worship scenes (chapters 4 and 5), God and the Lamb are the objects of worship in this heavenly liturgy. But more than that, they both exercise in this liturgical setting (7:15-17) the role of shepherding their worshipers. The shepherd metaphor is a reminder of the Old Testament picture of God as the shepherd of Israel (cf. Psalm 23; Ezek 37:27; Isa 49:10). The Lamb thus fulfills in this heavenly liturgical setting the promise of God appearing as the shepherd of his sheep, caring for those who are lost, wounded, and hungry (cf. Ezek 34:11ff.). The fact that God’s role of shepherding is ascribed to the Lamb again indicates the worthiness of the Lamb to receive the perpetual worship that the redeemed offer him in this worship scene (7:15). Implied in this is a mandate to the Church to worship the one symbolized by the Lamb imagery.

Scene IV (11:15-19) — Hymns of Celebration and Thanksgiving

Once again the outpouring of God’s wrath is introduced by a heavenly liturgy. It consists

⁹⁵ That the word ἀμήν emphatically confirmed the certainty and actual truth of the redemption wrought by God (and, implicitly, by the Lamb) is noted by G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation, p. 432. Also see D. Aune, Revelation 6-16, p. 471, who notes the appropriateness of the twofold resounding ἀμήν of Rev 7:12.

⁹⁶ Seven attributes similar to those ascribed to God in 7:12 are also given to the Lamb in 5:12; this is, again, a pointer to the exalted Christology of the Apocalypse of John.

of a “two-part responsory hymn”⁹⁷ from two complementary groups of worshipers. It commences with the worship of unidentified loud voices in heaven which declare the final triumph of the kingdom of God, and the establishment of the eternal reign and dominion of God and his Christ (11:15). This is followed by the appropriate response of the elders who fall down and worship with “a collective song of thanksgiving”⁹⁸ or “a prayer of thanksgiving”⁹⁹ (11:16-18). Then comes the outpouring of God’s wrath, as a divine response to heavenly worship (11:19).

In addition to the worshipers identified in the worship scenes already considered, John speaks here of loud voices singing the praise of God and his Christ in heaven. Several attempts have been made to identify them. While for some they are the voices of the cherubim,¹⁰⁰ for others they are those of the twenty-four elders;¹⁰¹ and for others still they are the voices of the heavenly multitude of saints in heaven (cf. 7:9; 19:1, 6).¹⁰² Rather than speculate, it is probably wise to regard these loud voices simply as anonymous.

The essence of the hymnic declaration of the heavenly “anonymous voices” is that the dominion and rule of this world (which in John’s day seemed to belong to the Caesars) have been

⁹⁷ D. Aune, Revelation 6-16, p. 635.

⁹⁸ K. Berger, Formgeschichte des Neuen Testaments (Heidelberg: Quelle & Meyer, 1984), p. 242.

⁹⁹ R. Deichgräber, Gotteshymnus und Christushymnus in der frühen Christenheit (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1967), p. 54.

¹⁰⁰ See H. B. Swete, The Apocalypse of St. John, p. 141; and R. Charles, The Revelation of St. John, vol 1, pp. 293-94.

¹⁰¹ See E. Lohmeyer, Die Offenbarung des Johannes: Handbuch zum Neuen Testament 16 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1970), p. 95; and T. Beckwith, The Apocalypse of John, p. 608.

¹⁰² See G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation, p. 611.

transferred to God and Christ, who will reign forever and ever. This announcement is certainly made as a source of encouragement to the saints who faced persecution or its threat, by undermining the rule of their persecutors.

Here again, grounds for worship are expressed. While the heavenly “anonymous voices” pay homage to the triumphant reign of God and his Christ, the elders offer thanks for the inauguration of God’s reign, and the ensuing eschatological results:¹⁰³ 1) the outpouring of God’s wrath over the raging nations; 2) the judgment of the dead; 3) the rewarding of the saints who worship God; and 4) the destruction of the destroyers of the earth.¹⁰⁴

The object of worship here again is God, the One before whom the elders once again (in the heavenly liturgy of the Apocalypse) fall on their faces and worship. In the song of the elders, he is explicitly given eternal, sovereign titles: the Lord God Almighty; the One who is and the One who was (11:17). The object of their song of worship is affirmed as the ruler and judge: the One who rewards his servants, the prophets and saints who reverence his name (i.e., worship him); and also the One who punishes the nations who are angry at him and who destroy the earth (11:18).

It is important to note that this worship scene with the “anonymous loud voices” and the twenty-four elders is animated with a spirit of optimism and assurance. Perhaps for the sake of the saints who faced persecution or its threat, the hymns are filled with an extensive use of verbs in the aorist tense (ἐγένετο, ἐβασίλευσας, ὠργίσθησαν, ἦλθεν) which convey a sense of

¹⁰³ The ὅτι clause in 11:17b-18 provides the basic reason for the song of thanksgiving. (cf. D. Aune, Revelation 6-16, p. 637).

¹⁰⁴ Obviously, the motifs in this eschatological scenario of John are not in a chronological order (cf. D. Aune, Revelation 6-16, p. 636). This is an indication that the structure and arrangement of the materials of the Apocalypse of John do not reflect the order of eschatological and predicted events.

absolute certainty about the events yet to come: victory is celebrated as if it had taken place already and the triumphant universal reign of God established once and for all. The entire worship scene, as Mounce rightly notes, “is a gracious reminder that God will faithfully carry out his covenant promises and destroy the enemies of his people.”¹⁰⁵ This, no doubt, is a challenge to choose the worship of God and his Christ rather than the worship of Caesar.

Scene V (14:1-5) — The 144,000 and the Worship of the Lamb

In contrast to the idolatrous worship of the dragon and his beast (cf. 13:1-8), the redeemed gather in this passage to offer their worship to the Lamb;¹⁰⁶ they stand triumphant in the presence of the Lamb, on Mount Zion, with the name of the Lamb and his Father written on their foreheads (14:1); and they sing a new song, an anthem of praise that resounds like the roar of a mighty waterfall and the peal of thunder (14:2).

While it is true that this worship scene is not very explicit on the identity of the worshipers — the instrumentalists and singers — the text seems to indicate the participation of the 144,000 in the worship of the Lamb.¹⁰⁷ The passage further provides a brief description of these 144,000 worshipers of the Lamb: they have the name of the Lamb and his Father on their foreheads (14:1;

¹⁰⁵ R. Mounce, The Book of Revelation, p. 228.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation, p. 731, who observes the immediate juxtaposition of the Lamb in 14:1 to the beast of chapter 13 as providing a contrast between two sides.

¹⁰⁷ Several commentators connect the sound of the instruments and song of worship (14:2, 3) with the presence and description of the 144,000 (14:1, 4, 5). That is to say that what John “hears” in verse 2 interprets what he “saw” in verse 1 (cf. G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation, p. 736). However, it is contended by some that the sound of worship in Rev 14:1-5 is not the voice of the 144,000 but the sound of an unidentified heavenly assembly (cf. H. B. Swete, The Apocalypse of St John, p. 177; and D. Aune, Revelation 6-16, p. 806).

cf. 7:3f.); they are redeemed from the earth (14:3); they are pure and have not defiled themselves with women; they are followers of the Lamb, they are first fruits purchased from among men unto God (14:4); and they are truthful and blameless (14:5).

The identity of this redeemed group of 144,000 has occasioned an extensive discussion amongst scholars. Their possible identity with the 144,000 who were sealed in 7:1-8 and their relationship to the great multitude that offered worship to God and the Lamb in 7:9-17 are issues involved in the debate. This group of 144,000 has been understood to refer to the nation of Israel.¹⁰⁸ Thus, chapter seven encompasses two groups of people: the Jews (7:1-8) and the Church (7:9-17). This view is problematic since it makes an incorrect and unnecessary division of the people of God.¹⁰⁹ Rather, the two groups should be perceived as one, but with two complementary aspects. In verses 1-8, John uses Old Testament imagery to speak of the saints as the New Israel (a common phenomenon in the Apocalypse of John), and in verses 9-17, he enlarges his picture of the saints to include all nations, by speaking of an innumerable multitude.¹¹⁰

While most commentators would consider the 144,000 in chapters seven and fourteen as the same group of people representing the saints of God, there is a tendency on the part of some to adopt a limited view of the 144,000. For instance, Kiddie perceives the 144,000 to be a portion of the Church which in the last days is marked out for martyrdom.¹¹¹ Charles considers

¹⁰⁸ Cf. J. Walvoord, The Revelation of Jesus Christ (Chicago: Moody, 1966), p. 141.

¹⁰⁹ That the group in Rev 7:1-8 represents the nation of Israel is rightly rejected by R. H. Mounce, The Book of Revelation, p. 158; and J. Sweet, Revelation, p. 151.

¹¹⁰ Cf. G. Beasley-Murray, The Book of Revelation, p. 141.

¹¹¹ M. Kiddie, The Revelation of St. John, p. 136; also see G. Caird, A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John The Divine, p. 97.

them to be a community of resurrected martyrs.¹¹² Bauckham regards them as martyrs redeemed from all the nations and offered to God as the first fruits of the harvest of all the nations, whose reaping is depicted in Rev 14:14-16.¹¹³ It must be admitted that to limit the group of 144,000 to a segment of the Church is to lose the idea of completeness which John seems to stress in his Apocalypse. The book itself is addressed to the seven Asian churches, with the number seven signifying the completeness of the Church. Furthermore, the number 144,000 is used symbolically to speak of wholeness and completeness. In keeping with the symbolic language of the Apocalypse, Mounce observes that “twelve (the number of tribes) is both squared and multiplied by a thousand — a twofold way of emphasizing the completeness.”¹¹⁴ Beale also cautions: “to limit the number to a select group of believers dilutes the figurative force of completeness connoted by the number.”¹¹⁵

There are further reasons to conclude that the number 144,000 symbolizes the whole number of the faithful who worship the Lamb in both chapters seven and fourteen: 1) the Apocalypse tends to regard the Church as the true Israel (cf. 2:9; 3:9ff.); 2) the same number is used in both chapters (seven and fourteen) for the followers of the Lamb, whose foreheads bear the seal of God; and 3) that the sealing is expressly limited to the 144,000 indicates that there is

¹¹² R. Charles, The Revelation of St. John, vol. 2, p. 4.

¹¹³ R. Bauckham, Climax of Prophecy, pp. 291-92.

¹¹⁴ R. Mounce, The Book of Revelation, p. 158.

¹¹⁵ G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation, p. 733.

no distinction to be made between the two groups.¹¹⁶

That the 144,000 are described as those who have kept themselves pure from the defilement of women has also occasioned considerable discussion. Kiddle thinks that they should be viewed literally as celibates and virgins.¹¹⁷ This view certainly leads to an exaltation of celibacy and perhaps to a denigration of marriage and sexual relationships. Charles argues that this description of the 144,000 appeared in the marginal notes of some monkish scribe and was later copied into the text by mistake.¹¹⁸ This conjecture lacks support in the manuscript tradition. Carrington, taking the words in a figurative sense, regards the 144,000 as those who have not entered into immoral relations.¹¹⁹ This elevates sexual purity as the distinctive mark of the redeemed in heaven.¹²⁰

In this dissertation, we would like to underscore the understanding that the purity of the 144,000 is a symbol of religious fidelity originating from several Old Testament texts (cf. 2 Kgs 19:21; Lam 2:13; Jer 3:6; 18:13; Amos 5:2; Hos 2:5). This then is a symbolic description of the Church kept pure from all defiling relationships with the pagan world system (a significant mandate for the Church in the Apocalypse of John). These 144,000 constitute those who in

¹¹⁶ See H. B. Swete, The Apocalypse of St. John, pp. 96f., for a more comprehensive discussion of reasons to adopt a holistic view of the 144,000.

¹¹⁷ M. Kiddle, The Revelation of St. John, p. 268. Also see A. Y. Collins, The Apocalypse (Wilmington: Glazier, 1979), pp. 99-100 and Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984), pp. 129-31.

¹¹⁸ R. H. Charles, The Revelation of St. John, pp. 9-11.

¹¹⁹ P. Carrington, The Meaning of Revelation, pp. 337-40.

¹²⁰ See R. H. Mounce, The Book of Revelation, p. 268 for an elaborate discussion and critique of these views of purity and non-defilement from women, with regards to the 144,000.

John's day resisted the seductions of the great harlot Rome with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication (17:2; cf. 13:7; 14:1-5). Furthermore, they implicitly present a mandate to those who worship the Lamb to maintain purity and holiness (as a mark of faithfulness to the Lamb).

Scene VI (15:2-4) — Worship of God by the Overcomers who Refuse to Worship the Beast

As in chapter eight (where a liturgical act precedes judgment), the last plagues of the Apocalypse are introduced here by a hymn of victory and praise, sung by those who have been victorious over the beast and his program of worship accompanied by persecution.

Worshippers in this liturgical setting (15:2-4) are explicitly identified as those who have overcome the beast and all that his image and number signify. Their worship consists of standing with God's harps (κιθάρας τοῦ θεοῦ)¹²¹ in their hands and singing the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb. There are two points worth noting here: 1) worship is here connected with the theme of victory in the Apocalypse of John: the worshipers of the Lamb are those who have overcome the beast by refusing to worship him; 2) the worship of the Lamb has several physical manifestations, among which the singing of hymns plays a significant part.

The interpretation of the phrase "the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb" has raised several controversial questions: 1) Does τὴν ᾠδὴν Μωϋσέως refer to the song about Moses (objective genitive) or the song by Moses (subjective genitive)? 2) Does τὴν ᾠδὴν τοῦ ἀρνίου refer to the song about Jesus (objective genitive) or the song by Jesus (subjective genitive)? 3) Are there two songs or one song for both Moses and the Lamb? In response, while it is true that

¹²¹ If κιθάρας τοῦ θεοῦ is taken as containing an objective genitive the reference then is to "harps for playing to God," which is analogous to expressions in Rev 5:8; 14:2 (cf. G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation, p. 791).

the syntax of the text allows for both objective and subjective genitives, the historical background includes well-known “songs” of Moses (cf. Exod 15:1-18; Deut 31:30-32:43); this would suggest a song by Moses (subjective genitive). For lack of a reference anywhere to a song sung by the Lamb, it would make more sense to regard “the song of the Lamb” as that which is about the Lamb (cf. Rev 5:9-12). Also, although it might appear that there is a reference here to two songs, the use of καί may be exegetical (i.e., “even”), and the context seems to indicate that a single hymn is recorded in 15:3-4. This will then indicate that the song sung by Moses (i.e., a song echoing Old Testament songs ascribed to Moses) is a song in reference to Jesus in the Apocalypse of John. The song that is sung in this context is “a descriptive hymn of praise”¹²² which reveals both the object of worship (his titles and attributes) and reasons for worship.

The object of worship is addressed as κύριε ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ (the Lord God Almighty)¹²³ and ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν ἐθνῶν (the king of the nations). The grounds for worship are introduced by three ὅτι clauses in response to the rhetorical question τίς οὐ μὴ φοβηθῆ, κύριε, καὶ δοξάσει τὸ ὄνομα σου (“who will not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name?”), a question that raises the issue and mandate of worship. The first reason for the worship of God is his unique holiness (ὅτι μόνος ὁσιος); the second is the fact that all nations are destined to worship God (ὅτι πάντα τὰ ἔθνη ἤξουσιν καὶ προσκυνήσουσιν ἐνώπιον σου).¹²⁴ In the

¹²² C. Westermann, The Praise of God in the Psalms (Richmond: John Knox, 1965), pp. 116-51, in his discussion of hymns to God classified this hymn as a “descriptive hymn of praise.”

¹²³ The phrase “the Lord God Almighty” appears in several of the worship scenes of the Apocalypse of John (cf. 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7; 19:6; 21:22).

¹²⁴ For some commentators, the second ὅτι clause here in Rev 15:4 does not introduce a ground clause. Thus, it is to be rendered as “so that” rather than “because” (cf. G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation, p. 797). While this is plausible, it appears to be inconsistent with the use of

third ὅτι clause (ὅτι τὰ δικαιώματα σου ἐφανερώθησαν — because your judgments have been revealed), we find the reason for which the second ground of worship is stated; nations are destined to worship God in light of the revelation of his judgments.

Scene VII (16:5-7) — God’s Righteousness, Holiness and Justice Celebrated in Worship by the Angel and the Altar

The liturgy of this passage is in part a response to the wrath of God which is poured out on those who bear the mark of the beast and who worship his image (16:1-4). It is also a prelude to further manifestations of divine wrath (16:8-21). It is a liturgy celebrated by the angel and the altar (16:5-7).¹²⁵ While the angel celebrates the righteousness and holiness of God, the altar responds with a resounding affirmation.

The liturgy here contains two complementary hymnic texts. The first hymn (16:5-6) may be described as a “judgment doxology,”¹²⁶ “a brief hymnic passage that provides general or specific justification for the judgment of God.”¹²⁷ The second hymn (16:7), with its introductory

the other two ὅτι clauses in the same text.

¹²⁵ It makes sense to regard both expressions τοῦ ἀγγέλου and τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου in 16:5, 7 as subjective genitives (i.e., utterances of worship by the angel as well as by the altar). It appears inconsistent on the part of D. Aune, Revelation 6-16, pp. 884, 888 to argue on the one hand for a subjective genitive for the angel, and on the other hand for a partitive genitive for the altar (i.e., a voice coming from someone other than the altar).

¹²⁶ See R. Deichgräber, Gotteshymnus und Christuhymnus, pp. 45, 56; H. D. Betz, “On the Problem of the Religio-Historical Understanding of Apocalypticism,” JTC 6 (1969), p. 139; and K. Berger, Formgeschichte des Neuen Testaments (Heidelberg: Quelle & Meyer, 1984), p. 238. Also see A. Y. Collins, “The History-of-Religions Approach to Apocalypticism and the ‘Angel of the Waters’ (Rev 16:4-7),” CBQ 39 (1977), pp. 368-70 who prefers the designation “eschatological vindication formula,” a sub-genre of the judgment doxology.

¹²⁷ D. Aune, Revelation 6-16, p. 885.

term *ναί* (yes) functioning as part of antiphonic style in hymnic texts, is an affirmation of the first hymn.¹²⁸

The object of worship in this context is identified and given titles and attributes that are of significance to the worship mandate of the Apocalypse. In the first hymn, he is righteous; he is the One who is and was; and he is the holy one. With the use of two *ὅτι* clauses in verses 5 and 6, reasons are provided for his designations. Here the being of God is linked with the actions of God which call for worship. Divine judgment and justice call for worship on the part of those who are vindicated by God. In the second hymn, the object of worship is identified as the Lord God Almighty, the One whose judgments are true and just.

It is significant to note the unique mention of the altar as a worshiper (16:7). While some consider the verse to refer to a voice coming from the altar (*τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου λέγοντος*),¹²⁹ others see the altar as a personification of the corporate testimony of the martyrs crying out to God in 6:9 and the prayers of the saints from the altar in 8:3-5.¹³⁰ Taking both the syntax of the text and the narrative context of the Apocalypse into consideration, there are good reasons to believe that it is the personified altar that cries out here in 16:7. The altar which has witnessed the sacrifice and martyrdom of the saints (6:9-11) now celebrates the judgment of God and the vindication of the saints (16:7; cf. 8:3-5; 9:13; 14:18). Here in this liturgical setting we see the mandate of worship linked with sacrifice, suffering, and judgment. Again, for the churches that

¹²⁸ The term *ναί* as a synonym of *ἀμήν* is used as an affirmative response four times in the Apocalypse (1:7; 14:13; 16:7; 20:22).

¹²⁹ For instance, D. Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, p. 888.

¹³⁰ The view that the altar is a personification is held by R. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 295 and G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 820.

received the Apocalypse, the saints that face persecution or its threat due to their refusal to offer false worship (cf. chapter 13) are assured that their prayers of worship at the altar of suffering and sacrifice will facilitate the process of divine justice.

Scene VIII (19:1-10) — Hallelujah Chorus to God in Heaven

In response to the invitation of heaven to rejoice (18:20), and also as a contrast to the preceding solemn dirge or lament (18:16ff.), the worshipers in heaven offer in this liturgical setting (19:1-8) a four-fold hallelujah chorus to God. The repeated “hallelujah” of this passage is certainly reminiscent of the Hallel Psalms (113-118), where the “Praise the Lord” refrain is uttered in connection with the great pilgrim festivals, especially the Passover celebration.¹³¹ In this worship scene, a great multitude in heaven joins the elders and the living creatures in praise of God for the judgment of the great harlot and the vindication of the saints (19:1-5); they join, too, in the celebration of both the kingship of God and the Lamb’s marriage supper (19:6-8).

In this “great hymnic finale”¹³² of the Apocalypse, which contains five hymnic text units, several features found in other worship scenes recur. The Lord God Almighty, the one seated on the throne, remains the object of worship. He is described as true and just, with salvation, glory, and power ascribed to him. Again with the use of the causal particle (ὅτι) several times (19:2, 6, 7), the ground for worship is given primarily as the righteous judgment of God, exhibited in his punishment of the wicked (i.e., the great prostitute who corrupted the earth), and also in his vindication of the saints (i.e., his servants whose blood had been shed).

¹³¹ See G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation, p. 930.

¹³² R. Deichgräber, Gotteshymnus und Christushymnus, p. 56; K. P. Jörns, Das hymnische Evangelium (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1971), pp. 144, 159 (cf. D. Aune, Revelation 17-22, pp. 1021-23).

In antiphony, the worshipers include again the unidentified great multitude in heaven commencing and concluding this final worship scene (19:1-3, 6-8); the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures ratifying (with a declaration of ἀμήν and repetition of ἀλληλουϊά) the confession of the unidentified great multitude by falling down and worshipping God (19:4); and an unidentified voice making an explicit call to worship God: αἰνεῖτε τῷ θεῷ ἡμῶν(19:5).¹³³

Here (as in Rev 22:8-9), there is an explicit mandate to John, who attempted to worship an angel, not to do so but to worship God. Though many scholars understand Rev 19:10 and its parallel in 22:8-9 as a polemically motivated attempt to counter the practice of angel worship or angel veneration in the churches of Asia Minor,¹³⁴ Aune rightly challenges this view on the following grounds: 1) the motif of the angel who refuses worship from a seer in the context of an angelic revelation (as in Rev 19:10 and 22:9) is a literary motif with many parallels in apocalyptic literature; 2) that the cult of angels existed in Judaism and was transported to early Christianity is a debatable issue; 3) there are numerous passages in rabbinic literature that prohibit images, sacrifices, prayer, and veneration directed toward angels; and 4) the “worship of angels” (θρησκεία τῶν ἀγγέλων) in Col 2:18, which many exegetes maintain to reflect a cult of angels purportedly Jewish in origin, may also mean “angelic worship of God.”¹³⁵ Beale suggests that John simply mistook the angel for the divine figure from heaven (cf. 1:13ff.; 10:1ff.), who is

¹³³ αἰνεῖν (to praise), which occurs only here in 19:5, is part of the rich liturgical terminology of the Apocalypse.

¹³⁴ H. B. Swete, The Apocalypse of John, pp. 248, 304; M. E. Boring, Revelation (Louisville: John Knox, 1989), p. 194; J. Sweet, Revelation, p. 280; and J. Roloff, The Revelation of John (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), p. 213.

¹³⁵ D. Aune, Revelation 17-22, p. 1036.

worthy of worship. The prohibition and command here then serve as a warning to the churches not merely against the worship of angels, in particular, but against idolatry of any form, which was a problem among some of the churches (cf. 2:14-15, 20-21; 9:20).¹³⁶ It is certain that the Apocalypse warns against false worship and encourages the true worship of God.

Conclusion

An examination of the liturgical character of the Apocalypse and its historical background leads one to a deeper appreciation of the worship mandate that the Apocalypse contains. The Apocalypse is written in the context and framework of worship, and it is filled with liturgical materials that are carefully woven together by John to address an underlying issue of worship.

In each of the heavenly worship scenes John delineates the object, subjects and grounds of worship: God and the Lamb are constantly held as the proper objects of worship (the worship of any other being thus constitutes blatant idolatry); the redeemed through their symbolic equivalents (e.g., the altar, the 144,000, and multitudes in heaven) participate in a joint heavenly cultus with the angels, living creatures, and elders (thus blending earthly liturgy with heavenly worship); and honor is rendered both to God and the Lamb because of their creative, redemptive, and retributive acts, especially in the vindication of the saints and the punishment of the wicked.

The heavenly worship of Christ who is given the title of the Lamb is significant for the worship mandate of the Apocalypse on a number of points: 1) as a contrast to the worship of Caesar (the beast), it cautions the churches of Asia Minor against idolatry; 2) as a complement to the earthly worship of Christ, it makes the earthly worshiping saints realize both the heavenly resemblance and eternal significance of Christian worship; 3) as a prelude to the judgment

¹³⁶ G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation, p. 946.

narratives, it reminds the churches that Christian worship facilitates the process of divine justice; 4) as a celebration of God's victory, salvation, triumph, righteous judgment and eternal reign, it offers comfort, assurance and encouragement to the saints who in the context of persecution or its threat made a choice to worship Christ, even at the expense of their lives.

Beyond what Thompson has done, in terms of identifying the motif of worship as the unifying factor for the Apocalypse,¹³⁷ we have discovered here in this chapter the mandate that flows from the motif of worship and the extent of its relationship to the other tasks and functions of the Church in the Apocalypse.

The study of the texts of the Apocalypse which reflect the worship mandate leads one to underscore the comprehensive character of the mandate of the Church in the Apocalypse of John. The worship mandate is expressed through the offering of prayers, rendering perpetual service to God, fearing or showing reverence to the name of God, and singing hymns and songs of praise that celebrate the attributes and activities of both God and the Lamb. Worship, on the part of the worshipers, is also to be marked by purity, humility, victory, allegiance and devotion to the object of worship – an indication that worship involves both the lips and life of the worshiper. Thus it is indicated that the worship mandate of the Apocalypse embraces other related tasks and functions of the Church, including being an overcomer (as confessed and celebrated in several of the hymns of the Apocalypse), maintaining purity and holiness (as demonstrated by the worshipers of the Lamb), shunning falsehood and deception (as exemplified in the worship of the beast and its consequences), and exercising patient endurance and faithfulness in the midst of persecution and perversion (as testified in the prayers and hymns of the Apocalypse, and also experienced by those

¹³⁷ L. Thompson, The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire, pp. 53-73.

who refused to receive the mark or worship the image of the beast). However, one also observes the inability of the worship mandate to contain all the tasks and functions of the Church listed in the first chapter of this dissertation.

In terms of the cohesive nature of all the mandates of the Apocalypse of John, and especially the relationship between the worship mandate and the primary task of maintaining faithful witness to Jesus, one can find some connections here in this chapter. Of significance is the manner in which the theme of worship, in several liturgical settings of the Apocalypse, is interwoven with the concepts of faithfulness, purity, sacrifice, suffering and vindication. As we will discover in the next chapter, these are concepts that also characterize those who maintain the witness of Jesus in the Apocalypse of John. Furthermore, the worship scenes serve as either a prelude or postlude to the judgment narratives, as well as a celebration of divine justice: the wicked are punished and the saints are vindicated for maintaining the witness of Jesus. Christian worship, as mandated in the Apocalypse of John (through symbolic figures and actions, and hymnic materials of worship) validates and also provokes faithful witness on the part of the saints. The points at which the themes of worship and witness intersect are worth noting in our exploration of the cohesive character of the mandates to the Church in the Apocalypse of John. Those who maintained their witness to Jesus are known for their refusal to worship the beast and its image (cf. 20:4).

As we turn to the witness mandate in the next chapter of this dissertation, we hope to discover the capacity that the witness mandate has to embrace more functions of the Church than those contained by the worship mandate.

CHAPTER THREE

TERMINOLOGY AND FUNCTION OF WITNESS IN THE APOCALYPSE

The witness motif is very prominent in the Apocalypse of John. Considering the historical setting of the Apocalypse (involving both the persecution, threatened or actual, and the perversion of Christian faith), it is not surprising to find an emphasis placed on both the nature and necessity of faithful witness. To the churches of Asia Minor, the Apocalypse comes with a two-fold purpose of comforting them in their distress and challenging them to maintain a faithful witness in their own particular context. The latter purpose is noted by Sweet who writes:

the apocalyptic part [for the Apocalypse] is not so much an attack on the world to encourage the Church, as an attack on the Church, which is embracing the world -- to its own deadly danger, and in betrayal of its true role of convicting the world by its witness, for the world's salvation.¹

The sense in which the witness terminology is used in the Apocalypse of John has been a controversial issue. While for some, the witness terminology is simply a juridical metaphor that has been borrowed from the language of the lawcourt by the teachers and writers of both ancient Israel and the early Church,² for others "witness" (μαρτυρία) is a martyrological term that implies

¹ J. Sweet, "Maintaining the Testimony of Jesus," in Suffering and Martyrdom in the New Testament (ed. W. Horbury and B. McNeil, Cambridge: University Press, 1981), pp. 102ff.

² For instance, G. B. Caird, A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), p. 17f., who provides a description of the "courtroom" context within which the "witness terms" are used in the Apocalypse; A. Trites, The New Testament Concept of Witness (London: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p.170f., who draws attention to various legal scenes in the Apocalypse (cf. 12:1-17; 18:20-19:4; 19:11-12; 20:11-12); and R. Bauckham, The Theology of the Book of Revelation (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p.73, for whom the apocalypse contains a "judicial contest" in which Jesus and his followers bear witness to the truth. Finding a connection between the theme of witness and the Apocalypse's dominant concern with truth and falsehood, Bauckham observes that the world is a kind of court-room in which the issue of who is the true God is being decided.

the sentence of death.³ The purpose of this chapter is to determine the manner in which and the extent to which the witness terminology is used in the Apocalypse of John, and what it implies about the mandate of the Church. To accomplish this purpose, attention will be given to key phrases, passages and metaphors that are relevant to our understanding of the witness motif in the Apocalypse of John. We will begin with a discussion of two significant “witness phrases”: a) “the faithful witness” (ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστός); and b) “the witness / testimony of Jesus Christ” (ἡ μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ). This discussion will then be followed by a study of several selected passages in which the witness motif features significantly: a) 1:2, 9; b) 6:9-11; c) 11:1-14; d) 12:10-12; and e) 20:4-6. We will conclude with an examination of key metaphors: a) the lampstands; b) the temple; and c) the “open door.” An examination of these items is aimed at discerning the meaning of witness as well as illuminating the mandate of the Apocalypse to the churches to maintain faithful witness.

A. Witness Phrases

In terms of the theme of witness, the Apocalypse of John makes use of two important phrases that deserve careful examination: “the faithful witness” (ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστός); and “the witness / testimony of Jesus Christ” (ἡ μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ). Following is a study of these two phrases to see what they contribute to our understanding of the mandate to witness in the Apocalypse of John.

³ The tendency on the part of some is to make “witness” synonymous with “martyrdom” in the Apocalypse of John (e.g., N. Brox, Zeuge und Märtyrer: Studien zum Alten und Neuen Testament 5 [Munich: Kösel, 1961]; and P. Ellingworth, “The Marturia Debate,” BT 41 [1990], pp. 138-39).

1. The Faithful Witness

This title appears three times in the Apocalypse: twice in reference to Christ (1:5; 3:14); and once in reference to Antipas, who died for his faith and testimony (2:13).

In Rev 1:5, the words ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστός, “the faithful witness,” represent an irregular use of the nominative of apposition modifying “Jesus Christ” in the genitive.⁴ However, the phrase could simply be taken as an “indeclinable title.” In the introductory section of the Apocalypse (1:1-6), the title “faithful witness,” used of Jesus Christ, attests to the reliability of the Apocalypse itself, sent, with his greetings (1:4-5), as his “revelation” (1:1-2).⁵ However, in light of the overall purpose and historical context of the Apocalypse, it seems probable that John is also referring to the larger purpose of Christ’s life “as the one who bore witness to the truth from God (cf. John 3:32; 18:37), with special emphasis on his death that followed as a result.”⁶ For it is by dying that Christ showed himself faithful to his calling (cf. John 18:20; 1 Pet 2:21). This may partly explain why the “faithful witness” is also referred to as the “firstborn from the dead” in the same sentence (1:5).

That “faithful witness” has a martyrological nuance seems to be suggested here in the

⁴ Cf. D. Aune, Revelation 1-5, p. 25. This irregular use of the nominative is a common phenomenon in the Apocalypse (cf. 2:13; 2:20; 3:12; 7:9; 8:9; 9:13; 14:12, 14; 20:2; 21:12).

⁵ Cf. B. Dehandschutter, “Witness in the Apocalypse,” in L’Apocalypse johannique et l’apocalyptique dans le Nouveau Testament, ed. J. Lambrecht, p. 285, who considers the contents of the Apocalypse as what Jesus testifies; and R. H. Charles, The Revelation of St. John (Vol. 1), p. 14, who considers Christ as “the true witness of every divine revelation.”

⁶ R. H. Mounce, The Book of Revelation, p. 48. Also see A. Trites, “Μάρτυς and Martyrdom in the Apocalypse,” NovT 15 (1973), p. 79f., who notes that the reference to the death of Christ (1:5) seems to suggest that “witness” implies death — a point also intimated by some of the other references to τὸ ἀρνίον (cf. 5:6, 12; 12:11).

introductory section.⁷ In the rest of the Apocalypse, the witness motif is repeatedly associated with martyrdom (cf. 2:13; 6:9; 11:7-8; 12:11, 17; 17:6; 20:4); the church in Smyrna is admonished to remain faithful even unto death (cf. 2:10); and it is noted that the woman on the beast “was drunk with the blood of the saints and the witnesses of Jesus” (17:6).⁸

In Rev 2:13, the martyrological nuance of the title “faithful witness” is further indicated in the reference to Antipas,⁹ who as the “faithful witness” of Jesus (Ἰαντιπᾶς ὁ μάρτυς μου ὁ πιστός μου) did not renounce his faith in Jesus and, thus, was put to death in the city of Pergamum. It is in light of this martyrological nuance that some commentators observe that a text such as Rev 2:13 marks the beginning of the transition of the meaning of Greek μάρτυς from “witness” to “martyr,”¹⁰ a semantic development that requires careful tracing.

In Rev 3:14, the introductory part of the letter to the church of Laodicea, one finds an additional designation inserted in a reference to a “faithful witness.” The “faithful witness” is described as the “faithful and true witness” (ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστός καὶ ἀληθινός). Obviously, in

⁷ However, to the contrary, F. Mazzaferri (“Martyria Iesou Revisited,” *BT* 39 [1988], p. 116) argues that the paramount stress of μάρτυς in Rev 1:5 and 3:14 is prophetic rather than martyrological, despite the prominence of the latter emphasis in the Apocalypse.

⁸ This is not to treat the words “witness” and “martyr” as synonymous. However, that “witness” leads to martyrdom is a significant feature in the Apocalypse’s witness motif; faithful witness invites opposition and may lead to death (cf. 2:13; 11:7; 12:17).

⁹ While little is known about Antipas apart from the reference in the Apocalypse of John, attempts have been made to cite historical references to Antipas in other ancient writings (cf. R. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 80).

¹⁰ Cf. F. F. Bruce, *The Revelation to John*, p. 638; J. Swete, *Revelation*, p. 88; and especially A. A. Trites, “Μάρτυς and Martyrdom in the Apocalypse: A Semantic Study,” *NovT* 15 (1973), pp. 73-80, who goes to the point of suggesting a five-stage process whereby μάρτυς was transformed from “witness” to “martyr.”

the witness motif of the Apocalypse, there is a combination of faithfulness and truthfulness. This combination is repeated in Rev 19:11, where the rider on the white horse, who “judges and makes war,” is designated as “faithful and true” (πιστὸς καὶ ἀληθινός). To confirm the truthfulness of the contents of the Apocalypse which are mediated by Jesus Christ (cf. 1:1), the affirmation comes at the close of the Apocalypse (22:20) that Jesus Christ is “the one who testifies to these things” (ὁ μαρτυρῶν ταῦτα).¹¹ As Ellingworth rightly observes in the framework of the Apocalypse (1:1-3; 22:6-21), the witness motif is tied up with the question of the legitimacy and authenticity of the prophetic book.¹² However, “witness” in reference to Jesus Christ implies not only the qualities of faithfulness and truthfulness, but also death (1:5; cf. 5:6, 12; 12:11).

While interpreters of the Apocalypse would agree that the phrase “the faithful witness” is used primarily in reference to Jesus Christ (1:5),¹³ they differ on how to view him as the faithful witness. The question arises: Does Jesus Christ as ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστός refer to the historical Jesus who through his life and death was faithful to his task of testifying to the truth (cf. Jn 3:32; 18:37) or to the exalted Jesus who guarantees the truth of the revelation mediated through John?

Putting a heavy accent on the texts of the Apocalypse that make reference to the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus, and also considering faithful witness as a Christological designation, Aune is of the opinion that reference to the exalted Jesus as the faithful witness is

¹¹ The prophetic messages of the Apocalypse themselves are considered faithful and true (οἱ λόγοι πιστοὶ καὶ ἀληθινοί) (21:5; 22:6).

¹² P. Ellingworth, “The Martyria Debate,” *BT* 41:1 (1990), p. 139.

¹³ An exception is the reference to Antipas as the “faithful witness” of Jesus (2:13).

more probable (cf. 1:5; 3:14; 11:8; 17:14; 19:16; 22:20, 21).¹⁴ Bauckham, on the other hand, with a strong emphasis on the texts that speak of the suffering and death of Jesus, argues that the faithful witness of Jesus is a reference to the humanity of Jesus and his historical witness. Thus Bauckham writes concerning the title “witness” in reference to Jesus:

The title refers primarily to the witness which he bore to God during his life on earth and to his faithfulness in maintaining his witness even at the cost of his life.¹⁵

Both Aune and Bauckham appear to be contrasting two sides of the same coin. Reference to Jesus Christ as the faithful witness in the Apocalypse of John entails both his human suffering and death as well as his resurrection and exaltation. The faithful witness is not only “the first-born from the dead” and “the ruler of the kings of the earth,” but also “the one who has freed us from our sins by his blood” (1:5); the faithful witness who is worthy to receive worship and execute divine judgments is not only portrayed in the Apocalypse as “the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David who has triumphed” (5:5), but also as “a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne” (5:6); a faithful witness is not only one who has triumphed, but also one who maintains his witness even unto death (2:13; 11:3; 12:11; 17:6). This multifaceted view of Jesus Christ as the faithful witness is well expressed by Beale, who writes:

The description is a summary of Christ’s role: he persevered as a faithful witness to the father in the face of persecution even to death, which he conquered, and then he became the cosmic ruler.¹⁶

While it is beneficial to trace the meaning of ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστός, it is equally important

¹⁴ D. Aune, Revelation 1-5, pp. 37-40, 254-57.

¹⁵ R. Bauckham, The Theology of the Book of Revelation (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 72.

¹⁶ G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation, p. 190.

to understand its significance as part of the witness mandate to the churches of Asia Minor. Discerning the pastoral implication of this title, Kiddle notes that John presents Christ to the churches as the one whose example was before them in adversity and whose unfolding of God's purpose must be true in view of the resolute constancy which led to his crucifixion.¹⁷ Aune observes that "the principal reason for applying this adjective (πιστός) to Jesus lies in the connection with his faithfulness unto death in which he (Jesus) sets the pattern for his followers to emulate."¹⁸ Other commentators observe the mandate for witness in the pertinence of the cluster of titles that are ascribed to Christ in Rev 1:5. Caird, for instance, writes:

His friends (i.e., John's) are called to bear the costly witness of martyrdom, trusting that in his death Christ has been a faithful witness to God's way of overcoming evil; to look into the open jaws of death, remembering that he has risen as the firstborn of many brothers; to defy the authority of Imperial Rome in the name of a ruler to whom Caesar himself must bow.¹⁹

In its usage, then, the title "faithful witness" in reference to Jesus Christ (in the Apocalypse) expresses the authenticity and truthfulness of his testimony. In reference to both Jesus Christ and Antipas, it has a martyrological nuance which implies faithfulness unto death for the bearer of witness; and by portraying both Jesus Christ and Antipas as examples of faithful witness, John provides the Asian churches with illustrative materials for their task of bearing witness to Jesus. In their witness, the Asian churches are to maintain authenticity, truthfulness,

¹⁷ M. Kiddle, The Revelation of St. John, p. 8.

¹⁸ D. Aune, "The Church in the Apocalypse," EvQ 38 (1966), p. 139.

¹⁹ G. B. Caird, A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John The Divine, p. 16 (cf. G. R. Beasley-Murray, The Book of Revelation, p. 56). Commenting on the Christological titles in Rev 1:8, R. H. Mounce, The Book of Revelation, p. 52, notes that "God is not revealing his eternity for the theological edification of the believers, but for the encouragement of the Asian churches about to suffer persecution for their faith."

and faithfulness (even unto death).

2. The Witness of and to Jesus Christ

The phrase ἡ μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ is quite prominent in the Apocalypse (1:2, 9; 12:17; 19:10; 20:4; cf. 6:9; 11:7; 12:11).²⁰ Its usage in the Apocalypse raises a number of issues for our understanding of the Apocalypse's witness motif: its grammatical force, meaning, and implication for the Asian churches.

The grammatical question that ἡ μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ raises has to do with whether its genitive is subjective or objective. Is the witness that which Christ bears, or the witness which is given or expressed concerning him? This is a question that both translators and exegetes of the Apocalypse have wrestled with, especially in the so-called "Μαρτυρία Debate."²¹

In Rev 1:2 (in particular), the genitive of ἡ μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ seems subjective.²²

²⁰ Cf. A. Trites, The New Testament Concept of Witness, p. 156.

²¹ A number of related articles have appeared in the Bible Translator, one of which is a revision of a paper written by one of the translators of the modern Greek common language New Testament, presented to the UBS Translation Workshop in May 1984: P. Vassiliadis, "The Translation of Martyria Iesou in Revelation," BT 36:1 (1985), pp. 129-134. Other articles in which the debate features include F. Mazzaferri, "Martyria Iesou Revisited," BT 39:1 (1988), pp. 114-122; P. Ellingworth, "The Martyria Debate," BT 41:1 (1990), pp. 138-39; B. Dehandschutter, "The Meaning of Witness in the Apocalypse," in L'Apocalypse johannique et l'Apocalyptique dans le Nouveau Testament (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1980), pp. 283-288; G. W. H. Lampe, "The Testimony of Jesus is the Spirit of Prophecy (Rev.19:10)," in The New Testament Age: Essays in Honour of Bo Reicke, Vol. I ed. William C. Weinrich (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1984), pp. 245-258; M. C. Tenney, "The Meaning of "Witness" in John," BSac 132 (1975), pp. 229-41; A. A. Trites, "Μαρτυς and Martyrdom in the Apocalypse: A Semantic Study," NovT 15 (1973), pp. 72-82; and N. Brox, "Zeuge und Märtyrer," in Studien Zum Alten und Neuen Testament 5 (Munich: Kösel, 1961).

²² Cf. M. C. Tenney, Interpreting Revelation (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), p. 44; and A. A. Trites, The New Testament Concept of Witness, p. 157. They both strongly maintain that "the witness of Jesus" in the Apocalypse means not "witness to Jesus," but "the witness which Jesus himself bore."

As observed by different exegetes, there is a similar grammatical construction between the genitive of ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ and that of ἡ μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ; also the epexegetical καί that connects both phrases means that “the word of God” is further defined as “the witness of Jesus.”²³ Moreover, in the Apocalypse, a subjective genitive follows ἡ μαρτυρία in several texts, including 11:7; 12:11; 20:4.²⁴

However, that the genitive of ἡ μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ could also be taken as objective has been well argued. After reminding his reader of Turner’s caution that the “attempt to define too narrowly the various types of genitive is vain,”²⁵ Vassiliadis argues convincingly the possibility of rendering ἡ μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ as an objective genitive in several texts of the Apocalypse.²⁶ Examining several instances of this phrase in the Apocalypse, Aune also notes that even though a genitive dependent on μαρτυρία should sometimes be construed as subjective (cf. 1:2; 11:7; 12:11), there are other instances in which it seems contextually appropriate to construe the genitive as objective (cf. 12:17; 14:12; 17:6; 19:10; 20:4).²⁷ The implication of this, then, is that ἡ μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ can be read as involving either a subjective or

²³ Cf. D. Aune, Revelation 1-5, p. 19.

²⁴ Cf. H. Strathmann, “Μαρτυς κτλ.,” in Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, vol. IV, ed. G. Kittel (Michigan: Eerdmans, 1967), p. 500; and A. A. Trites, The New Testament Concept of Witness, pp. 156-58.

²⁵ N. Turner, A Grammar of New Testament Greek, Vol. III, Syntax (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1963), p. 212.

²⁶ P. Vassiliadis, “Translation of Martyria Iesou,” p. 132.

²⁷ D. Aune, Revelation 1-5, p. 81.

objective genitive depending on the context in the Apocalypse.²⁸ As Turner comments, “in Greek the distinction between objective and subjective genitive is a question entirely of exegesis.”²⁹

As to what is meant by the phrase ἡ μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, exegetes have attempted to determine whether or not the witness implies martyrdom. Tenney expresses a comprehensive view that brings the total work of Jesus Christ into focus. He claims that the phrase implies Christ’s preincarnate purpose, earthly ministry of teaching, death, resurrection, present work of intercession, future reign and judgments.³⁰

Rightly noting the vagueness of Tenney’s view and the tendency to lose sight of the forensic nature of Christ’s witness which is strongly emphasized in the Apocalypse, Strathmann suggests that ἡ μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ in a fashion similar to ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστὸς is reminiscent of the passion of Christ.³¹ Concerning the martyrological nuance of “the witness of Jesus Christ,” Sweet writes:

the death of Christ . . . is to be taken as shorthand for his whole attestation of God in word and deed, which was consummated on the cross. Jesus’ ὁμολογία or μαρτυρία is both his verbal witness to his father, summed up at his trial, and his

²⁸ Cf. G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation, p. 183f., who comments that “it is perhaps best to see an intentional ambiguity and therefore a ‘general’ genitive which includes both subjective and objective aspects.” Grammatical support of this “ambiguity” from other New Testament texts is given by M. Zerwick, Biblical Greek (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1963), pp. 13-14.

²⁹ N. Turner, A Grammar of New Testament Greek, p. 207.

³⁰ M. C. Tenney, Interpreting Revelation, p. 44.

³¹ H. Strathmann, “Μάρτυς κτλ.,” p. 502; that Christ’s witness has a martyrological nuance is argued on the basis of the titles ascribed to him in Rev 1:5 (cf. T. F. Torrance, “A Study of NT Communication,” SJT 3 (1950), p. 308; and A. Trites, The New Testament Concept of Witness, p. 158f.).

obedience to his father summed up in Gethsemane and on the cross.³²

Further support for setting “the witness of Jesus” against the background of his death comes from the repeated appearance of this phrase in the context of suffering, death or (specifically) martyrdom in the Apocalypse (cf. 6:9; 11:7; 12:11, 17; 20:4).³³ However, in recent scholarship it has also been demonstrated that there is much more to “the witness of Jesus” (in the Apocalypse of John) than the martyrological emphasis. In response to the martyrological interpretation, some exegetes have argued that ἡ μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ contains a “prophetic nuance,” in which “the witness” mediates prophecy. Noting that ἡ μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ is equated with τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς προφητείας in Rev 19:10 (a rather perplexing verse), and examining other related texts in the Apocalypse (cf. 1:5; 3:14; 22:16), Mazzaferri argues persuasively for the “prophetic nuance” of ἡ μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.³⁴ For Mazzaferri, Rev 3:14 and 1:5 show that, even when applied to Christ, μάρτυς has a clear “prophetic nuance”;³⁵ Jesus’ role in mediating prophecy as a “witness” is certainly in view in Rev 1:5; 3:14; 19:10;

³² J. Sweet, “Maintaining the Testimony of Jesus,” p. 104.

³³ The martyrological context for “the witness of Jesus” in the texts of the Apocalypse is emphasized by A. A. Trites, “Μάρτυς and Martyrdom in the Apocalypse,” p. 76.

³⁴ F. Mazzaferri, “Martyria Iesou Revisited,” pp. 114-122; Mazzaferri’s view is certainly contrary to the claim that the witness of Jesus is primarily martyrological, as is strongly argued by P. Vassiliadis, “The Translation of Martyria Iesou in Revelation,” pp. 129-134, who construes Rev 19:10 to read: “what inspires the prophets is that they can witness (even unto death) to Jesus”; and also G. W. Lampe, “The Testimony of Jesus is the Spirit of Prophecy,” pp. 245-58.

³⁵ F. Mazzaferri, “Martyria Iesou Revisited,” p. 114.

22:9;³⁶ the consistent nuance of related “witness terms” is prophetic,³⁷ and in particular, μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ, in apposition to λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ, signifies John’s entire prophetic book.³⁸

Mazzaferrri is certainly not alone in his attempt to find a prophetic nuance in the phrase ἡ μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. The text of the Apocalypse itself (19:10) explicitly equates “the witness of Jesus” with “the spirit of prophecy.” In the light of this equation, Aune observes that “since true prophecy witnesses to Jesus, any witness to Jesus can be identified as prophecy.”³⁹ Noticing the association of the term “witness” with the “word of God” in several texts of the Apocalypse (1:2, 9; 6:9; 12:11; 20:4), Bauckham considers “verbal witness to the truth of God” to be implied whenever witness terminology occurs in the Apocalypse.⁴⁰ Also commenting further on the character of “witness” and its relation to “prophecy” in Rev 11:2f. and 19:10, Bauckham notes that “when the Spirit inspires prophecy, its content is the witness of Jesus.”⁴¹

Obviously, just as there are instances in the Apocalypse where the “witness of Jesus” (i.e., subjective genitive) or the “witness to Jesus” (i.e., objective genitive) implies martyrdom (i.e., a martyrological term), there are also occasions where it bears the character of prophetic mediation. The Asian churches are to follow Jesus’ example of witness in his suffering, sacrifice and death, as well as his role in mediating prophecies, particularly those contained in the

³⁶ F. Mazzaferrri, “Martyria Iesou Revisted,” p. 117.

³⁷ F. Mazzaferrri, “Martyria Iesou Revisted,” p. 121.

³⁸ F. Mazzaferrri, “Martyria Iesou Revisted,” p. 121.

³⁹ D. Aune, Revelation 17-22, p. 1039.

⁴⁰ R. Bauckham, The Theology of the Book of Revelation, p. 72.

⁴¹ R. Bauckham, The Theology of the Book of Revelation, p. 119.

Apocalypse of John (cf. 1:2, 9; 10:10; 11:3; 19:10; as well as 6:9; 11:7; 12:11, 17; 20:4). The phrase ἡ μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, in concurrence with the title ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστός, suggests that Jesus' "witness" is paradigmatic for the Asian churches. They themselves are to maintain the "witness of Jesus" in the context of hostility, opposition, suffering and death, but also with a commitment to mediating the truth of God's word. The witness motif in the Apocalypse has both martyrological and prophetic nuances.

That ἡ μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ also implies obedience to the commandments of God is indicated in some of the texts of the Apocalypse. In Rev 11:7, the two witnesses were attacked and killed by the beast when they finished their witness (ὅταν τελέσωσιν τὴν μαρτυρίαν αὐτῶν), to which they were commissioned by God (cf. 11:3). In Rev 12:17, war is declared by the beast on those who keep the commandments of God (τῶν τηρούντων τὰς ἐντολὰς τοῦ θεοῦ) and maintain the witness of Jesus (καὶ ἔχόντων τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ). If the καὶ here is exegetical, maintaining the witness of Jesus implies obedience to the commandments of God.⁴²

The understanding that one gets from our study of the phrase ἡ μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ in the Apocalypse is that the witness terminology means much more than martyrdom; it involves mediation of prophecy as well as obedience to God's commandments. The call to the churches, then, to maintain faithful witness means willingness to suffer martyrdom (in the case of persecution), mediating the truths of prophecy (especially as contained in the Apocalypse), and giving obedience to the commandments of God.

⁴² See R. Bauckham, The Theology of the Book of Revelation, p. 72, who associates the witness terminology of the Apocalypse with obedience to God's commandments.

B. Witness Passages

The Apocalypse of John contains a number of passages in which the witness motif figures significantly. Following is a study of each passage to see what they contribute to our understanding of the mandate to witness in the Apocalypse.

1. John's Witness (1:2, 9)

In Rev 1:2, John identifies himself as one who bears witness (ἐμαρτύρησει)⁴³ to everything that he saw (i.e., τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ). The reference here, as Mounce rightly notes, “is probably to the revelation given by God and testified to by Christ.”⁴⁴ All that John saw and witnessed then consisted of the message of God which was attested by Jesus Christ.⁴⁵ And thus, John appropriately connects his own witness with that of the one he designates as ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστός (cf. 1:5; 3:14). In the case of John's witness, as well as Jesus' witness, the witness terminology here has a prophetic nuance, implying mediation of the prophecies of the Apocalypse. It is, then, as a witness of Jesus (1:2) that John is commissioned to prophesy about the nations in one of his visions (10:11). It is also noteworthy that the “two witnesses” are explicitly commissioned to prophesy (11:3).

John further describes himself as a brother and companion of his readers (ὁ ἀδελφός

⁴³ Ἐμαρτύρησειν is an epistolary aorist which transports John to his readers' standpoint; thus it is translated in the present tense (cf. R. H. Charles, The Revelation of St. John, p. 7; and H. B. Swete, The Apocalypse of St. John, p. 3).

⁴⁴ R. H. Mounce, The Book of Revelation, p. 42.

⁴⁵ I. T. Beckwith, The Apocalypse of John, p. 421, comments that John makes a general term (“word of God”) more specific by adding another phrase (“testimony of Jesus Christ”) for clarification. Other commentators point to the use of the exegetical καί which allows one phrase to be defined in the next phrase (cf. D. Aune, Revelation 1-5, p. 19; and G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation, p. 183f).

ὑμῶν καὶ συγκοινωνός); he considers himself as one who shares with them in the experience of suffering, the inheritance of the kingdom, and the experience of patient endurance in Jesus (ἐν τῇ θλίψει καὶ βασιλείᾳ καὶ ὑπομονῇ ἐν Ἰησοῦ).⁴⁶ He also indicates that his presence on the Island of Patmos, where he received the visions of his Apocalypse, was brought about on account of “the word of God” and “the testimony of Jesus Christ” (ἐγένετο ἐν τῇ νήσῳ τῇ καλουμένῃ Πάτμῳ διὰ τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ).

In several ways, commentators have explained John’s presence on the Island of Patmos. Based on the use of διὰ with the accusative, which can express both cause (i.e., “because of” or “on account of”) and purpose (“for”), three possible suggestions have been made. Aune provides a summary of these suggestions: 1) John was exiled to the Island of Patmos by the Roman authorities because of his witness to Jesus; 2) John went to the Island for the purpose of proclaiming the word of God; 3) John went to Patmos to receive the visions of the Apocalypse. However, parallel phrases elsewhere in the Apocalypse in a martyrological context (cf. 6:9; 20:4) suggest that John was on the Island of Patmos as a result of punishment inflicted on him by the Roman authorities for his faithful witness.⁴⁷ For John, then, from his own personal experience (1:9), the “witness of Jesus” entails the endurance of hardship. This serves as a reminder as well as a confirmation to the Asian churches that the witness vocation calls for patient endurance of difficult circumstances.

⁴⁶ Κοινωνία in suffering belongs to the stock of primitive Christian ideas, as expressed in 2 Cor 1:7; 1 Pet 4:13; Phil 3:10; 4:14 (cf. H. B. Swete, The Apocalypse of John, p. 11).

⁴⁷ D. Aune, Revelation 1-5, p.82. However, the “early tradition,” documented by several commentators, that John was exiled on the Island of Patmos may simply be a tradition based on Rev 1:9. For such documentation, see I. T. Beckwith, The Apocalypse of John, pp. 434-35, and D. Aune, Revelation 1-5, pp. 81f. who cite both Tertullian and Eusebius.

2. The Slain Witnesses (6:9-11)

Beneath the heavenly altar John sees the souls of those who had been slaughtered (τὰς ψυχὰς τῶν ἐσφαγμένων) for the word of God and the witness they maintained. To the one they address as “Sovereign Lord, Holy and True,” they cry out with a loud voice for justice: ἕως πότε, ὁ δεσπότης ὁ ἅγιος καὶ ἀληθινός, οὐ κρίνεις καὶ ἐκδικεῖς τὸ αἷμα ἡμῶν ἐκ τῶν κατοικούντων ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς; In response they are each rewarded with a white robe and admonished to exercise patient endurance.

Again, it is apparent in this context (6:9-11) that witness terminology in the Apocalypse is linked with martyrdom. The consequence of faithful witness was death for those found beneath the altar of sacrifice.⁴⁸ The reason for their martyrdom is found in the phrase διὰ τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ διὰ τὴν μαρτυρίαν ἣν εἶχον. They were slain because of the word of God, and the testimony which they bore. Obviously, with the use of the exegetical καί, the word of God which they kept is defined by the witness they maintained. However, their “witness” is not further specified in this passage; it could refer to the “witness” of Jesus that they had received and preserved,⁴⁹ or to the “witness” they themselves bore to Jesus.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ The noun θυσιαστηρίου, “altar,” which is cognate with the verb θυσιάζειν, “to sacrifice,” appears eight times in the Apocalypse of John (cf. 6:9; 8:3 [2x]; 8:5; 9:13; 11:1; 14:18; 16:7). In Rev 6:9 and 16:7 the noun indicates the place where sacrifice is made, i.e., the altar (cf. D. Aune, Revelation 6-16, p. 405). However, in other instances, it refers to the altar of incense (8:3, 5; 9:13), or the place of worship (11:1; 14:18).

⁴⁹ Even though τὴν μαρτυρίαν is used here in Rev 6:9 without the genitive Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, some exegetes argue that τὴν μαρτυρίαν ἣν εἶχον refers to the “witness” of Jesus, received and retained by these who were slain like Jesus (cf. I. T. Beckwith, The Apocalypse of John, p. 526; and D. Aune, Revelation 6-16, p. 406).

⁵⁰ Several other exegetes argue that τὴν μαρτυρίαν ἣν εἶχον is a reference to the witness borne to Jesus (cf. G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation, p. 390; and G. W. Lampe, “The

The appropriateness of the cry of the slain witnesses to the Sovereign Lord to avenge (ἐκδικεῖν)⁵¹ their blood has received considerable attention from commentators. Some, condemning this prayer, see in it an emphasis on vengeance rather than forgiveness of their enemies, which is in marked contrast with the attitude of other slain witnesses, such as Stephen (the early Christian martyr in Acts 7:60), and especially Jesus Christ (the model for Christian witness in Luke 23:24).⁵² Others, in their attempt to justify this prayer (and perhaps to defend the Apocalypse), provide reasons that try to explain, without changing, the vindictive character of the prayer of the slain witnesses.⁵³

That the prayer of the slain witnesses is for vengeance can hardly be contested. Thus in response to this prayer for divine vindication, John notes that each slain witness is given a white robe, which is a symbol of blessedness, victory, justification and purity (cf. 6:11; 7:13-14;

Testimony of Jesus in the Spirit of Prophecy,” p. 253).

⁵¹ The verb ἐκδικεῖν, “to avenge,” appears twice in the Apocalypse (6:10; 19:2), where prayers for vengeance receive positive divine responses.

⁵² For instance, see T. F. Glasson, The Revelation of John (Cambridge: University Press, 1965), p. 49, who even goes to the point of passing the judgment that “this is not a Christian prayer.”

⁵³ Various attempts to justify the prayer of the slain witnesses have been made: cf. G. B. Caird, A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John The Divine, p. 85; G. R. Beasley-Murray, The Book of Revelation, p. 134, who notes that the cry of the slain witnesses is not strange since it is steeped in Jewish thought; G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation, p. 392, who comments that “God is being asked to demonstrate his holiness and standard of truth by bringing wrong doers to justice”; G. E. Ladd, A Commentary on the Revelation of John, pp. 105f., who notes that the cry comes from the blood of the martyrs (underneath the altar) rather than the martyrs themselves; L. Morris, The Revelation of St. John, p. 109, who comments that the cry is intelligible only on the understanding that the supreme power in the world is God’s power, and that he exercises it in a moral way.

22:14),⁵⁴ and they are also admonished to patiently await divine vindication which would be effected when the tally of those destined for martyrdom is completed. There is an indication here that witnesses who are slain for their witness are due for a reward. In further response to the prayer of the slain witnesses (6:10), the Apocalypse narrates the judgment dispensed by the Lamb, renewed and intensified with the opening of the sixth seal (6:12). Records of judgment permeate the Apocalypse until the last three chapters (Rev 20-22), where the vindication and reward of the slain witnesses receive greater attention.⁵⁵

3. The Two Witnesses (11:1-14)

John speaks not only of the witness of Jesus, who is given the title ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστός, but also of the experiences of several individuals who in his Apocalypse are designated as witness(es) of Jesus. So, in addition to John, who referred to himself as a “witness” (1:2, 9), Antipas who is classified as a “faithful witness” of Jesus (2:13), and those underneath the altar who are slain for their witness (6:9-11; cf. 20:4), we have the reference to those who are designated the “two witnesses” (11:1-14). The identity and character of these two witnesses are of significance for our examination of the witness motif and the mandate of the Church to perform the task of bearing witness in the Apocalypse of John.

⁵⁴ Cf. R. H. Mounce, The Book of Revelation, p. 149; also G. R. Beasley-Murray, The Book of Revelation, p. 136, who observes the contrast between the vindication of the martyrs and their condemnation by the world. The white robe is further identified as “a garment of resurrection or glorified body” (a view that seems premature) by R. H. Charles, The Revelation of St. John, pp. 176, 184-88; and G. B. Caird, A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John The Divine, p. 86.

⁵⁵ Close parallels to the prayer for vengeance by the slain witnesses and the divine response of Rev 6:9-11 are found in 1 Enoch 47:4; 4 Ezra 4:35-37; and especially 1 Enoch 8:4-11:2, where God responds by revealing that the wicked will be punished in several stages and the righteous will ultimately flourish on earth (cf. D. Aune, Revelation 6-16, p. 408).

Who are these two witnesses? This is a question that has been answered with various options that fall under the categories of literal and symbolic approaches. Some are of the opinion that the materials of the eleventh chapter of the Apocalypse are to be taken in a straightforward and literal manner.⁵⁶ Against this interpretation, it must be noted that the description of these two witnesses suggests a larger group of people than just two individuals.⁵⁷ Furthermore, the attempt to take the details of the Apocalypse's visions as literal references contradicts the general atmosphere of the Apocalypse, or of apocalyptic literature in general, which is full of symbols and images. As Kiddle rightly comments, to regard the two witnesses as specific individuals is to throw John's message into a meaningless confusion.⁵⁸

Several exegetes in different ways have opted for a symbolic interpretation of the two witnesses. Feuillet was of the opinion that the two witnesses represent the true spiritual value of the Israelite religion preserved intact in Christianity;⁵⁹ Strand explained the two witnesses as the Old Testament prophetic message and the New Testament apostolic witness, with the argument

⁵⁶ See I. T. Beckwith, The Apocalypse of John, p. 595, who suggests that the two witnesses are two great prophets of the last days who will come in the spirit of Elijah and Moses to preach repentance to Israel.

⁵⁷ Several considerations that warrant corporate identification of the two witnesses are listed by G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation, pp. 574f. These include: 1) the designation of the witnesses as "lampstands," a symbol for the churches (cf. 1:20; 5:10); 2) the powers of both Moses and Elijah are attributed to both the two witnesses equally, and not divided among them; and 3) the two witnesses prophesy for three and a half years, the same length of time that "the holy city," "the woman," and "those tabernacling in heaven" are to be "oppressed" (cf. 11:2; 12:6, 14; 13:6).

⁵⁸ M. Kiddle, The Revelation of St. John, pp. 180f.

⁵⁹ A. Feuillet, "Essai d'interpretation du chapitre 11 de l'Apocalypse," NTS 4 (1957-58), pp. 183-200.

that the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ are regarded as the two witnesses in the Apocalypse;⁶⁰ Lacy suggested that the two witnesses are the witness of men and the witness of the Spirit;⁶¹ while Considine thought that they represent the entire body of Christian preachers and teachers whose mission is to combat the enemies of Christ and his Church.⁶² However, the majority of commentators who endeavor to relate the experience of the two witnesses to the historical context of the Apocalypse consider them as a symbolic representation of the prophetic witness of the Church.⁶³ It is here in this passage (11:1-14) that we see the “Church in her function of witness-bearing.”⁶⁴ However, whether the whole Church or part of the Church (e.g., the martyrs only) is symbolized is another issue that calls for attention.

That the two witnesses represent part of the Church, in their faithful witness which involves martyrdom, has been championed by commentators such as Kiddle,⁶⁵ Caird,⁶⁶ and

⁶⁰ K. Strand, “The Two Witnesses of Revelation,” *AUSS*, 19 (1981), pp. 127-35. Other allegorical suggestions include: the Law and the Prophets; the Law and the Gospel; Israel and the Church; Israel and the Word of God; the churches of Smyrna and Philadelphia. For a list of these conjectures, see J. M. Ford, *Revelation*, pp. 177ff., and R. H. Charles, *The Revelation of St. John*, pp. 282ff.

⁶¹ T. A. Lacy, “The Two Witnesses,” *JTS* 11 (1910), pp. 55-60.

⁶² J. S. Considine, “The Two Witnesses: Apoc. 11:3-13,” *CBQ* 8 (1946), pp. 377-92.

⁶³ Cf. H. B. Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, p. 134; E. B. Allo, *L’Apocalypse de Saint Jean* (Paris: Gabalda, 1933), pp. 160-61; E. Cothenet, “Le symbolisme du culte dans l’Apocalypse,” in *Le symbolisme dans le culte des grandes religions*, ed. J. Ries (Louvain-la-Neuve: Centre d’Histoire des Religions, 1985), pp. 223-38; G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 573; D. Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, pp. 602-3; and R. Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, p. 85.

⁶⁴ H. B. Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, p. 134. Also see G. R. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 178.

⁶⁵ M. Kiddle, *The Revelation of St. John*, pp. 174-88.

⁶⁶ G. Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John The Divine*, p. 134.

Morris.⁶⁷ They reason that the restriction of the lampstands to two in number, as against seven (which represents the whole Church), indicates that the part of the Church which corresponds to “the two faithful churches” of the seven (i.e., Smyrna and Philadelphia) or “the faithful martyrs” of the churches, is in view.⁶⁸

A view of the Church’s task of witness that limits “faithful witness” to “the two faithful churches” or “the slain witnesses” (i.e., the martyrs) fails to recognize commendation for faithfulness in some of the other churches (cf. 2:2-3, 13, 19; 3:4-5); it also limits faithful witness to the experience of martyrdom and is inconsistent with the broad view of the Church which John demonstrates in his book. For instance, the Apocalypse is sent not to two but seven churches, which represent the whole church; and its purpose is to encourage “faithful witness” in ways other than the experience of martyrdom (cf. 2:13-15, 19-25). The whole Church ought to be held in view. The fate of the two witnesses (i.e., martyrdom) is strongly presented in the entire Apocalypse as an example to the whole Church that is called upon to maintain “faithful witness to Jesus.” This, then, is a part representing the whole. The whole Church is mirrored in the ministry, experience, and destiny of the two witnesses. In reality only a part of the Church suffers martyrdom, but its example of “faithful witness” is a challenge to the rest of the Church that shares in the task of witness. As observed by Beasley-Murray, “It is doubtful that the Book of Revelation teaches that the whole Church is called to martyrdom, and there is no evidence at all to

⁶⁷ L. Morris, The Revelation of St. John, p. 148.

⁶⁸ Other suggestions that see “the two witnesses” representing part of the Church propose a reference to prophets or Jewish Christians (cf. W. J. Harrington, The Apocalypse of St. John [London: Chapman, 1969], pp. 153-7).

suggest that a section only of the Church is called to bear witness to the world.”⁶⁹

The symbol of “two witnesses” (in number) is possibly chosen by John for the sake of meeting the traditional Jewish legal requirement for a valid testimony (cf. Num 35:30; Deut 17:6, 19:15).⁷⁰ As Aune opines, “These two witnesses may therefore be construed as symbolizing the truth of the Christian testimony.”⁷¹ Here again, we find juridical implications linked with the witness motif in the Apocalypse of John. Beale underscores this nuance of the witness terminology with pertinent insight into its usage in the Apocalypse:

This legal atmosphere is enhanced by the use of μαρτυρία (“witness”), which we have seen refers to a legal witness. This nuance is borne out by observing that in at least six of the nine uses of the word in the Apocalypse it refers to a witness that is rejected by the world’s legal system and that results in penal consequences (so 1:9; 6:9; 12:11, 17; 20:4). This is clearly the case with μάρτυς in 11:3 and μαρτυρία in 11:7. In fact, rejection of the Christians’ witness in the world court here becomes a basis for judgment of the persecutors in the heavenly court.⁷²

John’s choice of two witnesses (in number), though not to be taken literally, may have fulfilled a legal purpose. However, the narrative itself (11:1-14) is illustrative of the Church’s task and the consequences of maintaining the witness of Jesus. The witness of these “two witnesses” includes the following elements which shed more light on our understanding of the Apocalypse’s witness motif and mandate.

⁶⁹ G. R. Beasley-Murray, The Book of Revelation, p. 179.

⁷⁰ G. R. Beasley-Murray, The Book of Revelation, p. 184. Also see G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation, p. 575.

⁷¹ D. Aune, Revelation 6-16, p. 602.

⁷² G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation, p. 575.

(i) Context of Witness

Rev 11:1-14 is a coherent literary unit consisting of two major subunits, verses 1-3 and verses 4-13, with verse 14 functioning both as a conclusion to 11:1-13 and as an introduction to 11:15-18.⁷³ Despite the several difficult compositional and interpretive problems which the analysis of the composition of 11:1-13 presents,⁷⁴ the attempt must be made to establish a connection between the command to measure the temple (vs. 1-2) and the careers of the two witnesses (vs. 3-13). The possibility that the divine speech which begins in 11:1 ends with verse 3, and that verses 4-6 form the beginning of the narrative description of the two witnesses is suggested by Aune, as one of several formal ways of linking verses 1-2 with verses 3-13.⁷⁵ Poucouta, rightly observing the use of the *καί* which links verses 2 and 3 as an adversative conjunction, goes further to argue that the Temple (vs. 1-2) serves as the setting for the vision of the two witnesses. She writes:

Nous avons très probablement ici un exposé indépendant sur le Temple, mais qui sert de cadre à la vision des deux témoins (11:3-13).⁷⁶

According to Rev 11:1-2, the context in which the two witnesses are commissioned is that of the measuring of the Temple of God and the altar, including the worshipers, but excluding the outer court, which is given to the Gentiles who will trample the holy city for forty-two months.

⁷³ D. Aune, Revelation 6-16, p. 585.

⁷⁴ Several of these are listed and discussed effectively by D. Aune, Revelation 6-16, pp. 585-88.

⁷⁵ D. Aune, Revelation 6-16, p. 586.

⁷⁶ P. Poucouta, "La mission prophétique de l'Église dans l'Apocalypse johannique," p. 41. Also see G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation, p. 572, who comments that the primary purpose of the measuring in verses 1-2 is explained in verses 3-6 of Revelation 11.

The symbolic act of “measuring” (μετρέω) in biblical tradition is commonly associated with impending destruction (cf. 2 Sam 8:2b; 2 Kgs 21:13; Amos 7:7-9; Isa 34:11; Lam 2:8), as well as with preservation (cf. 2 Sam 8:2b; Ezek 40:1-6; 42:20; Zech 2:5), though the latter is more likely intended here.⁷⁷ The exclusion of the outer court coupled with the permission granted to the Gentiles to trample the holy city certainly represents opposition, persecution and suffering.⁷⁸ The background for this expression is commonly identified as the prophecy in Daniel concerning Antiochus Epiphanes, according to which the sanctuary is to be trodden underfoot by the “little horn” for 2300 days (cf. Dan 8:9-14).⁷⁹ But for John, in his reworking, adaptation, and application of this prophecy, the imagery of the “holy city” now signifies the Church (cf. Rev 21:2f.), and the trampling of the Jews in Daniel is now that of the Church by her enemies.⁸⁰ Parallel to the experience (real or imagined) of the churches that received the Apocalypse is the career of these “two witnesses” which takes place in the context of hostility, persecution, and even martyrdom, as well as divine preservation which enables them to persevere and overcome. As Beale notes, “Though God will authorize that his people ‘be given (ἐδόθη) to the Gentiles’ to suffer under their earthly jurisdiction (v.2), yet he will ‘give’ the saints strength to persevere in faith.”⁸¹

⁷⁷ Cf. D. Aune, Revelation 6-16, p. 604.

⁷⁸ Cf. I. T. Beckwith, The Apocalypse of John, p. 599, who takes the passage to speak literally of permission granted to the Gentiles to conquer the holy city; for forty-two months the holy city is to be under foreign rule.

⁷⁹ Cf. R. Mounce, The Book of Revelation, p. 215.

⁸⁰ Cf. R. Mounce, The Book of Revelation, p. 215; and J. Sweet, Revelation, p. 184.

⁸¹ G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation, p. 572.

Prior to the commissioning of the “two witnesses,” the vision unfolds with the measuring of an institution of worship (the Temple and the Altar), the counting of the worshipers, and the exclusion of the outer court for trampling by the Gentiles. It is in this context of both the preservation and desecration of worship (11:1-2) that the “two witnesses” are commissioned as witnesses to prophecy (καὶ δώσω τοῖς δυὸν μάρτυσιν μου καὶ προφητεύσουσιν). This indication is important for our understanding of the connection between worship and witness in the Apocalypse of John. Interestingly, the prophetic ministry, suffering and death of the two witnesses, followed by vindication (in terms of the resurrection of the “two witnesses” and the destruction of their enemies), culminates in worship, with glory given to the God of heaven (11:7-13). Moreover, in the vision subsequent to that of the “two witnesses,” the emphasis on worship continues, now rendered by “loud voices in heaven” (11:15) and also by “the twenty-four elders” (11:16-18). With the Asian churches and the demand to worship Caesar in the historical background, it is indicated here that the Church’s task of witness culminates in the worship of God.

(ii) Commission to Witness

As the task of witness which involves mediation of prophecy takes place under difficult circumstances, God grants his “two witnesses” miraculous power (11:3, 5-6). So, just as it was given to the Gentiles to trample the holy city for forty-two months, it was also given to “the two witnesses” to prophesy for forty-two months (11:3). Sweet notes the intentionality of this parallelism, as he observes that “the being trampled which is allowed by God and the witnessing commissioned by God are two sides of one coin.”⁸² Both the context and the task of witness are

⁸² J. Sweet, Revelation, p. 184.

under the control of God and not in the hands of the persecutors of the witnesses.⁸³

John also describes the nature and effect of the miraculous power that God gives to his “two witnesses” (11:5-6). It is this miraculous power that enables the “two witnesses” to be invulnerable and successful in a hostile environment. While some consider it “unnecessary to identify any specific historical figures who might have served as models for the two witnesses,”⁸⁴ a long list of possibilities has been suggested.⁸⁵ Nevertheless, the scholarly consensus is that the miraculous ministry of the “two witnesses” is modeled after the prophetic ministries of Elijah (cf. 1 Kgs 17:1; 2 Kgs 1:10ff.) and Moses (cf. Exod 7:20; 8:12).⁸⁶

(iii) Character of Witness

In several ways the tasks of the two witnesses are stated in verses 3-4. The first task is that of prophesying. It is granted to them to prophesy for 1260 days, clothed in sackcloth (11:3). Here again the task of witnessing is explicitly linked with prophetic ministry. In this sense the

⁸³ That the use of the future tense (δώσω) probably emphasizes divine determination rather than future time, just as the aorist passive ἐδόθη in v.2 has the same sense and does not refer primarily to past time, is observed by G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation, p. 572.

⁸⁴ D. Aune, Revelation 6-16, p. 603.

⁸⁵ The major options for traditional Jewish eschatological figures that could have served as models for the “two witnesses” include Enoch and Elijah, Moses and Elijah, and Elijah and Jeremiah. Other proposed historical figures include Peter and Paul, Stephen and James the Just, John the Baptist and Jesus, James the Just and James the son of Zebedee, and the high priests Ananus and Joshua (cf. D. Aune, Revelation 6-16, pp. 599-602).

⁸⁶ See especially G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation, pp. 582-85, who cites Mark 9:4-7 to show that “my two witnesses” in Rev 11:3 likely has Elijah and Moses in mind; both of them appear on the Mount of Transfiguration in order to witness to God’s declaration that Jesus is God’s Son.

term “witness” probably has the connotation “prophet.”⁸⁷ In support of this view, one observes the parallelism between the phrases τοῖς δυσὶν μάρτυσιν (v.3) and οἱ δύο προφῆται (v.10), as well as the references to the task of the “two witnesses” as bearing “witness” (μαρτυρίαν, v.7) and as involving “prophecy” (προφητεία, v.6). In terms of function and identity, “the two witnesses” are regarded as “two prophets.” As John was commissioned in Rev 10:11, so the “two witnesses” are here commissioned to prophesy, though the contents of their prophecy are not spelled out.

The expression “clothed in sackcloth” (περιβεβλημένοι σάκκουσ) indicates another dimension of the task of witness. While most commentators would agree that this expression is a sign of repentance,⁸⁸ difficulty occurs with the ambiguity of whose repentance is symbolized by the “two witnesses.” Beale is of the opinion that the “two witnesses” being clothed in sackcloth suggests “mourning over the judgment that their message will result in, possibly with the hope that some may repent.”⁸⁹ Bauckham suggests that the call to repentance is the message embedded in the wearing of sackcloth by the “two witnesses.”⁹⁰ Obviously, Beale and Bauckham have

⁸⁷ Cf. D. Aune, Revelation 6-16, p. 610.

⁸⁸ Sackcloth stands for the garment of mourning and penitence in 2 Kgs 1:8; Mark 1:6; Matt 11:22; and John 3:6-8 (cf. R. Mounce, The Book of Revelation, p. 224). As in Isa 20:2, prophets are often depicted as wearing sackcloth or something similar, probably to exemplify the need for repentance and humility before God (cf. D. Aune, Revelation 6-16, p. 611).

⁸⁹ G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation, p. 576. Beale’s opinion is linked to the perspective expressed by G. Stählin, “σάκκος,” in Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, vol. VII, ed. G. Kittel, p. 63, that sackcloth connotes the task of preaching and threatening punishment, as in the case of John the Baptist (Mark 1:6).

⁹⁰ R. Bauckham, “The Conversion of the Nations,” in The Climax of Prophecy: Studies in the Book of Revelation, (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1993), p. 278, and The Theology of the Book of Revelation, p. 85.

shifted the focus of repentance from the two witnesses / prophets themselves to their audience.

While it is true that the Apocalypse contains a command to repent, that command is first and foremost issued to some of the recipients of the Apocalypse,⁹¹ the Asian churches which are called upon to maintain “faithful witness” to Jesus (2:5, 16, 21-22; 3:3, 19). The wearing of sackcloth depicts the character of penitence and repentance primarily on the part of the “two witnesses” — the heralds of repentance. By using this imagery of sackcloth, John communicates an important message to the witnessing churches that the Church’s witness is powerful and effective when she herself is penitent.⁹²

The character of the “two witnesses” is further signified by the “witnessing metaphors” with which they are designated in Rev 11:4: αἱ δύο ἐλαῖαι καὶ αἱ δύο λυχνῖαι αἱ ἐνώπιον τοῦ κυρίου τῆς γῆς ἐστῶτες. Commentators are in agreement that these two metaphors, “the two olive trees” and “the two lampstands,” have their origin in Zechariah 4 and that they both signify the witnessing task of the Church in the Apocalypse.⁹³ The “two olive trees” suggest the anointing, commissioning and empowering of the two prophets for their task of witness.⁹⁴ The “two lampstands” are reminiscent of the task of the witnesses to reflect the light.⁹⁵ And the

⁹¹ The observation that the command to repent is issued primarily to the recipients of the Apocalypse by no means limits the command to the seven churches. Several characters in the visions are also expected to repent (cf. 9:20-21; 14:7; 16:11).

⁹² Cf. J. Sweet, Revelation, p. 184.

⁹³ Cf. R. Mounce, The Book of Revelation, p. 218; M. Kiddle, The Revelation of St. John, p. 181; and G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation, p. 577.

⁹⁴ Cf. H. Kraft, Die Offenbarung des Johannes (Tübingen: Mohr, 1974), p. 157; and G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation, p. 576.

⁹⁵ Cf. D. Aune, Revelation 6-16, p. 612.

indication that they stand before the Lord of the earth intimates their direct divine inspiration and commission.⁹⁶

Attempts have been made by some exegetes to see some further point in the proximity of “the olive trees” and the “two lampstands” to the Lord of the earth. Beale comments that the legal nature of the testimony of the “two witnesses” is intensified by the position of the “two olive trees” and the “two lampstands” in the presence of the Lord of the earth: they bear witness in an unseen courtroom.⁹⁷ The problem with this view is that nothing in the description of the career of the two witnesses suggests legal activity or a lawsuit (cf. 11:3, 5-6). Moreover, it is explicitly stated in the vision that their witness / prophetic ministry is a public affair, which invited opposition from “the beast” and “the inhabitants of the earth” (cf. 11:5-10). For Aune, the idiom “standing in the presence of God” is suggestive of the priestly or levitical function of the “two witnesses,” as servants of God.⁹⁸ It is obvious in the career of the “two witnesses” that they are commissioned to render service unto God, and that their service is that of prophesying, even though the content of their prophecy is not stated (11:3, 6). However, from the description of their service, there is no indication of any priestly or levitical service being rendered by them (11:5, 6).

(iv) The Consequence of Witness

That a faithful witness must pay a price is one of the emphases of the Apocalypse. In the case of these two witnesses, the price is death, shame, contempt and seeming defeat (11:7-10).

⁹⁶ Cf. G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation, p. 576; and D. Aune, Revelation 6-16, p. 613.

⁹⁷ G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation, p. 576.

⁹⁸ D. Aune, Revelation 6-16, p. 613.

Boring's comment is very appropriate: "faithfulness does not deliver them (i.e., the "two witnesses") from death but causes it."⁹⁹ When the "two witnesses" finish their witness (ὅταν τελέσωσιν τὴν μαρτυρίαν αὐτῶν)¹⁰⁰ they are attacked, overpowered and killed by the beast (v.7). But not only that, their bodies are left lying on the street (v.8); they are refused burial for three and a half days, while people gaze at their bodies (v.9);¹⁰¹ and the inhabitants of the earth gloat and rejoice over their dead bodies, with merrymaking and the exchange of gifts to celebrate their victory over the "two witnesses" (v.10).

Here in this passage (11:7-10), "the beast" (τὸ θηρίον) and "the inhabitants of the earth" (οἱ κατοικοῦντες ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς) constitute the opposition to the task of the two witnesses. The figure of the beast, which is introduced here unexpectedly and for the first time in the Apocalypse, is often seen as a counterfeit of, and in opposition to, all that the Lamb, "the faithful witness," stands for in the Apocalypse (cf. 13:1-8, 11-17; 17:3-14; 19:19-21). It is significant to note that the beast who opposes the "two witnesses" is known in the Apocalypse for demanding worship and also for persecuting the saints who refused to bear his mark and worship his image (cf. 13:7-10, 14-18). The inhabitants of the earth, in contrast to the saints, are presented as joining camp

⁹⁹ M. E. Boring, Revelation (Louisville: John Knox, 1989), p. 147.

¹⁰⁰ The Greek word τελειόω as it is used in this context is more than temporal; it carries the idea of accomplishing a goal (cf. R. H. Mounce, The Book of Revelation, p. 219). So, for the two witnesses, they were not killed until the time and the goal set (in 11:3) for their task of witness is accomplished (cf. D. Aune, Revelation 6-16, p. 616). It should be observed here in Rev 11:7 that μαρτυρία leads to death, but it is by no means synonymous with martyrdom.

¹⁰¹ According to R. H. Mounce, The Book of Revelation, p. 220, "to be deprived of burial was an act of great indignity." Such an act is considered "the limit of outrage and indignity that can be accorded to the dead" (cf. G. R. Beasley-Murray, The Book of Revelation, p. 186; and D. Aune, Revelation 6-16, p. 622).

with the beast in the Apocalypse: they gloat over the “two witnesses” who are destroyed by the beast (11:7); they worship the beast (13:8, 12); they are deceived by the beast (13:14); they are intoxicated with the wine of the adulteries of the great prostitute that rides on the beast (17:2, 3); the eternal gospel is proclaimed to them, but there is no indication that they give a positive response (14:6); their names are not found in the Lamb’s book of life (13:8; 17:8); and they are thrown into the lake of fire, like the beast (19:20; 20:15).

The fate of these “two witnesses” echoes that of their Lord (cf. 11:8), “the faithful witness,” who was also crucified in the great city on whose streets the dead bodies of the two witnesses are left without burial for three and a half days.¹⁰² One observes that the experience of the “two witnesses” indicates to the churches that receive the Apocalypse the need to maintain faithful witness even unto death. Thus to the Smyranean church, in its witness, John writes: “Be faithful, even unto the point of death” (Rev 2:10).

(v) Triumph of Witness

The death inflicted by the beast and the ridiculing and rejoicing of “the inhabitants of the earth” did not mark the end of the “two witnesses.” After three and a half days, they were

¹⁰² The majority of commentators take “the great city” in which both the “two witnesses” and their Lord are killed to be Jerusalem, even though in the other references in the Apocalypse (cf. 16:19; 17:18; 18:10, 16, 18, 19, 21) it consistently refers to Rome (see J. Swete, The Apocalypse of St. John, pp. 137-38; W. Bousset, Die Offenbarung Johannis Göttingen: Vandenkoeck und Ruprecht, 1906, p. 312; E. Lohmeyer, Die Offenbarung des Johannes Tübingen: Mohr, 1970, p. 93; H. Kraft, Die Offenbarung des Johannes, p. 158). This position is primarily based on the phrase ὅπου καὶ ὁ κύριος αὐτῶν ἐσταυρώθη (11:8) (cf. G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation, p. 592). However, a few scholars, for the sake of consistent identification, maintain that “the great city” refers to Rome in the whole of the Apocalypse (cf. J. Wellhausen, Analyse der Offenbarung Johannis (Berlin: Weidmann, 1907), p. 16; J. Munck, Petrus und Paulus in der Offenbarung Johannes (Copenhagen: Rosenskilde og Bagger, 1950), pp. 30-35; and G. B. Caird, The Apostolic Age (London: Duckworth, 1955), pp. 179-80).

resurrected¹⁰³ and taken up into heaven;¹⁰⁴ judgment fell upon their enemies,¹⁰⁵ and glory was given to the God of heaven (11:11-13). Events take a sharp turn as “the reveling is cut short, and terror strikes the inhabitants of the earth.”¹⁰⁶ That God compensates faithful witness is an important message that John communicates to the Asian churches through this record of divine intervention. In the historical background of the Apocalypse, the churches which were confronted with imperial opposition and persecution may have felt helpless and hopeless, but John writes to remind them that God is about to restore life to his slain witnesses, punish the wicked, and bring glory to himself.

The motivation for the glory given to God by the survivors of the divine judgment is an issue that has drawn the attention of commentators. What brought glory to God? Is it the death of the “two witnesses” or the divine intervention that resulted in their resurrection and the destruction of their enemies? Some commentators are of the opinion that the death of the “two

¹⁰³ That “a breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet” is an indication that the “two witnesses” came back to life after death (cf. D. Aune, Revelation 6-16, p. 624). This should be taken as “literal resurrection from the dead” (cf. G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation, p. 597).

¹⁰⁴ D. Aune, Revelation 6-16, p.625, comments that the ascension of the “two witnesses” (11:11-12) is essentially a rapture story, as distinguished from stories of the heavenly journey of the soul; that is, the “two witnesses” are physically taken up alive into heaven as the final conclusion of their earthly lives. Some commentators also observe a similar threefold pattern of “resurrection, manifestation, and ascent to heaven” in both Rev 11:3-13 and Luke 24 (e.g., K. Berger, Die Auferstehung des Propheten und die Erhöhung des Menschensohnes: Traditionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zur Deutung des Geschicks Jesu in frühchristlichen Texten. SUNT 13 [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1976], pp. 170-74, 471-75).

¹⁰⁵ The immediacy of divine judgment through a great earthquake is signified by the phrase ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ὥρᾳ in Rev 11:13a (cf. D. Aune, Revelation 6-16, p. 627).

¹⁰⁶ R. H. Mounce, The Book of Revelation, p. 222.

witnesses” brought glory to God. Caird, for instance, comments that “where retributive punishment had failed to bring men to repentance, the death of the martyrs would succeed.”¹⁰⁷ This is a questionable opinion, in that the text itself indicates that the response to the death of the “two witnesses” is that of contempt and rejoicing (11:8-10). It is when God intervened by resurrecting the “two witnesses” and punishing their adversaries that terror was struck in their enemies who, in turn, gave glory to the God of heaven. While it is true that faithful witness, marked by prophetic ministry and death (cf. 11:3-10, 12:11), is very much part of the process that brings glory to God, the primary place of divine intervention and vindication needs to be underscored in this text and in the rest of the Apocalypse. Glory is given to God when the survivors of divine judgment are compelled by the overriding terror (cf. 11:11, 13) to recognize the truthfulness of the witness they had opposed and rejected all along. This is the sense in which “to give glory to God” means “to admit and tell the truth” (cf. John 9:24).¹⁰⁸

As to what is meant by the fear experienced by the survivors of the divine judgment (οἱ λοιποὶ ἔμφοβοι ἐγένοντο) and the glory they gave to the God of heaven in Rev 11:13 (ἔδωκαν δόξαν τῷ θεῷ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ), divergent opinions are held by commentators. Despite the fact that the text simply states that those who were not killed were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven, several are of the opinion that, unlike the survivors of Rev 9:20-21, these exhibit sincere repentance which leads to their conversion. Krodel argues that since a tenth of the city died in the earthquake (11:13a), it follows that nine-tenths of humanity turn to God and give him glory; he

¹⁰⁷ G. B Caird, A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John The Divine, p. 140.

¹⁰⁸ J. P. Louw and E. A. Nida, Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains 33.468.

thus implies that God's triumph in the resurrection of his faithful witnesses brings about the salvation of the rest of humanity.¹⁰⁹ Bauckham is convinced that repentance is the result of the martyrdom of the "two witnesses" together with their following vindication by God. He argues that the central message of the unsealed scroll in Rev 10:9-11 is "the way the Church's prophetic witness to the point of death is to lead to the conversion of the nations."¹¹⁰ Thus, for Bauckham, "what judgments alone failed to effect (9:20-21), the witness of the 'two witnesses' does effect"¹¹¹ — though, to be sure, the career of the "two witnesses" attracts only opposition, rejection, and destruction prior to their divine vindication. Aune is also convinced that giving glory to God is the consequence of repentance. To buttress his point, Aune alludes to Rev 16:9, where it is mentioned that people blasphemed the name of God and did not repent so as to give glory to him; this suggests that, had they repented, they would have given glory to God. Aune also makes reference to the angelic proclamation of the "eternal gospel" in 14:6-7, where people are exhorted to fear God (φοβήθητε τὸν θεόν) and give him glory (δότε αὐτῷ δόξαν); this amounts to being

¹⁰⁹ G. A. Krodel, Revelation (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989), pp. 227-28. However, according to G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation, p. 606, the "tenth of the city" that fell and the "seven thousand" killed suggest that God was beginning to judge a significant portion of ungodly humanity, and the rest were soon to receive their due.

¹¹⁰ R. J. Bauckham, "The Conversion of the Nations," in The Climax of Prophecy: Studies in the Book of Revelation (Edinburgh: Clark, 1993), pp. 238-337. Others who hold Bauckham's position, although with some variations, include A. A. Trites, The New Testament Concept of Witness (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), pp. 169-70; J. Sweet, Revelation (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1979), pp. 106-9; E. S. Fiorenza, The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgment (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), p. 79; A. Feuillet, Johannine Studies (New York: Alba, 1964), pp. 249-50; and A. Y. Collins, The Apocalypse (Wilmington: Glazier, 1979), p. 73.

¹¹¹ R. J. Bauckham, The Climax of Prophecy, p. 279.

converted.¹¹² Thus Aune equates the use of ἔμφοβοι in 11:13 with the command to fear God (φοβήθητε) in 14:7.

However, there are commentators who argue that the survivors' fear in 11:13 (οἱ λοιποὶ ἔμφοβοι) is terror of judgment rather than a true fear of God, and that the glory given to God does not imply any sense of repentance leading to conversion. Beale, for instance, notes that ἔμφοβος is typically translated as “startled, alarmed, terrified, in fear, afraid”; it is never used in either the LXX or the New Testament in any expression analogous to “fear of the Lord,” for which the noun φόβος is used (cf. Rev 11:18; 12:23; 13:48; 14:6-7; and 21:20).¹¹³ This negative understanding of fear (ἔμφοβος) finds confirmation in the parallels in Rev 9:20; 19:21; and 20:5. To lend support for the view that ἔμφοβος is not indicative of true repentance and conversion, Beale alludes to Mic 7:8-17 in which a pattern similar to that of Rev 11:9-13 is found:

1) an enemy (ἐχθρά) “rejoices” (ἐπιχάρω) over Israel’s defeat; 2) Israel’s deliverance and restoration from captivity are portrayed as “rising” and likened to “the exodus out of Egypt”; 3) the enemies “see” the deliverance, “lay their hands on their mouth”; 4) ashamed by it; 5) then their “cities are leveled and parted” in judgment; 6) the last response of the enemies is that they become “amazed” and “afraid” (φοβέω) of God.¹¹⁴

Furthermore, Beale notes that the context of judgment beginning at Rev 8:6 up through 11:12 together with the Old Testament background favors an identification of the survivors in 11:13 as unbelievers suffering judgment.¹¹⁵

¹¹² D. Aune, Revelation 6-16, p. 628.

¹¹³ G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation, p. 605.

¹¹⁴ G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation, p. 606.

¹¹⁵ G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation, p. 606. Others who hold views similar to Beale’s include W. Hendriksen, More Than Conquerors: An Interpretation of the Book of

That repentance which leads to conversion is intended in the “terror” experienced by these survivors and the “glory” given to God by them seems to contradict the general impression that one gets from the Apocalypse. Remorse and not repentance is the condition of those who experience the judgment of God (cf. 6:15-27; 9:21); rather than be converted, subjects of judgment attempt to flee the presence of God. To argue that repentance and conversion are implied in Rev 11:13 would constitute, as Aune concedes, “the only instance in Revelation of people turning to the true God as a result of a punitive miracle.”¹¹⁶

That the survivors were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven could just be a typical conclusion to a miracle story, as observed by Berger¹¹⁷ and Theissen¹¹⁸ in their study of the Synoptic Gospels and the Book of Acts. This type of conclusion usually consists of two stock reactions, fear and amazement (fear: Matt 17:6; 27:54; Mark 4:41; Luke 2:9; 7:16; 8:35; amazement: Matt 8:27; Mark 1:27; 5:42; 6:51; Luke 4:36). An indication that glory is given to God often concludes a miracle story, particularly in Luke-Acts (Luke 8:47; 9:43; 13:13, 17; 18:43; 23:47; Acts 3:9). In most of these miracle stories, God’s heavenly sovereignty may be acknowledged by those who remain unrepentant and unconverted, as is likely the case with these survivors of Rev 11:13.

Here in the account of the “two witnesses,” John clearly outlines for the Asian churches a

Revelation (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1962), p. 159; R. Mounce, The Book of Revelation, p. 224.

¹¹⁶ D. Aune, Revelation 6-16, p. 628.

¹¹⁷ K. Berger, Die Auferstehung des Propheten und die Erhöhung des Menschensohnes, p. 24.

¹¹⁸ G. Theissen, The Miracle Stories of the Early Christian Tradition (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), pp. 69-72.

pattern of prophetic witness that is marked by the spirit of repentance (on the part of the witnesses); it is a story of “opposition, invulnerability, and success for a time, defeat and death, but final vindication and triumph of the cause.”¹¹⁹ The implication of the experience of the “two witnesses” for the Asian churches is well summarized by Beasley-Murray, who writes:

The passage shows that the Church has something more important to do than to survive. It is set in the world to bear witness . . . even when the witness is resisted with force (as in John’s day). The darker the hour, the more the need for the Churches to be what they are: lamps, through which Christ’s light shines. Witnesses may be crushed, and lamps put out, but in the end both witness and light achieved their desired object: . . . glory to God.¹²⁰

4. The Victorious Witnesses (12:10-12)

The theme of “victory in witness” is prominent in the Apocalypse. The verb νικάω, “to conquer, be victorious,” appears seventeen times in the Apocalypse. In the seven letters, several promises are held out (by way of encouragement) to the overcomers (2:7, 11, 17, 26f; 3:5, 12, 21 [2x]); in the concluding vision of the Apocalypse, the promise to the overcomers is reiterated (21:7).

There are strong indications in the Apocalypse that “victory in witness” is not only anticipated, but actually achieved. While the churches are challenged to be victorious in their tasks (in the seven letters of chapters 2-3), several characters in the visions of the Apocalypse that portray the witness of the Church actually attain and celebrate victory. The case of the two witnesses (11:1-13) is a good example. This is also emphasized in the reference that is made to the victorious witnesses of Rev 12:11. Victory for them, as Aune comments, is “one that has

¹¹⁹ J. Sweet, Revelation, p. 183.

¹²⁰ G. Beasley-Murray, The Book of Revelation, p. 181.

been won on earth through martyrdom; it is not victory that will be won in the future but one that is already a part of past experience.”¹²¹ However, here in 12:11, what makes a witness an overcomer or what constitutes victorious witnessing is spelt out for the benefit of John’s audience. Those who overcame (ἐνίκησαν)¹²² their accuser did so on the basis of the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony (διὰ τὸ αἷμα τοῦ ἀρνίου καὶ διὰ τὸν λόγον τῆς μαρτυρίας αὐτῶν),¹²³ in that they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death (καὶ οὐκ ἠγάπησαν τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτῶν ἄχρι θανάτου).¹²⁴ That the witnesses, in this context, overcame by the redemptive sacrifice of the Lamb and the offering of their own lives indicates to the churches again the martyrological implication of witness. It also underscores victory through suffering as the result of faithful witness.¹²⁵ In this respect, the victorious witnesses of Rev 12:11

¹²¹ D. Aune, Revelation 6-16, p. 703.

¹²² The certainty or completeness of their victory is indicated by the aorist tense ἐνίκησαν and the emphatic pronoun αὐτοί (cf. L. Morris, The Revelation of St. John, p. 162).

¹²³ The Greek word διὰ with the accusative τὸ αἷμα and τὸν λόγον denotes the cause and ground of the victory of the witnesses (cf. H. B. Swete, The Apocalypse of St. John, p. 156; and R. Mounce, The Book of Revelation, p. 239). However, there are commentators who argue for the irregular use of διὰ with the accusative rather than the genitive to speak of the means by which the witnesses overcame (cf. I. T. Beckwith, The Apocalypse of John, p. 627; and D. Aune, Revelation 6-16, pp. 702-3). Since διὰ used with the accusative to indicate the basis of something is close to the idea of means, as in Rev 13:14, the use of διὰ here in Rev 12:11 is considered as both the cause and instrument of overcoming (cf. G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation, p. 663f.). The genitive τῆς μαρτυρίας is a genitive of apposition, indicating that “their testimony” is a further specification of “the word” (cf. D. Aune, Revelation 6-16, p. 703, who also cites parallels to this expression in Rev 1:9; 6:9; 12:17; 19:10; 20:4).

¹²⁴ The concept of “overcoming” is further developed by the clause, καὶ οὐκ ἠγάπησαν τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτῶν ἄχρι θανάτου. This is another way of saying that “they persevered in their testimony to Christ, despite persecution” (cf. G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation, p. 665).

¹²⁵ The motif of martyrs conquering through suffering and even death in literature similar to the Apocalypse is well cited and discussed by D. Aune, Revelation 6-16, p. 702.

provide an example of what it means to maintain the witness of Jesus (cf. 12:7; 19:10), by following the path of Jesus — whom Rev 1:5 calls “the faithful witness.”¹²⁶

It is worth noting that suffering (even to the point of death) and victory are intertwined in the Apocalypse’s witness motif. Beale speaks of the “ironic victory” that is achieved even when witnesses experience defeat and death at the hands of their adversary. In his article titled “The Ironic Notion of Overcoming,” he writes:

Conquering entails being conquered by the world, since when believers refuse to compromise with the world, they are persecuted by the world. Hence the Church that perseveres in its witnessing faith wins a victory on earth though it suffers earthly defeat.¹²⁷

While one appreciates Beale’s discernment of “ironic victory” in the defeat and death of witnesses, one would like to caution against the tendency to equate death and defeat with “victory in witness.” Victory is achieved through a “faithful witness” that results in suffering and death. However, death itself is not synonymous with victory.

The view that victory in witness is based on faithfulness even to the point of death receives a strong emphasis in Rev 12:11 and some other texts of the Apocalypse (cf. 5:5; 15:2; 11:7). This understanding often leads commentators to infer that the overcomers of the Apocalypse are limited to those who suffer martyrdom. Beale, for instance, while he admits that the promises to the overcomers are not limited to the martyrs, seems to identify overcomers as those who have suffered martyrdom, even in some unlikely texts of the Apocalypse. In his treatment of the letter

¹²⁶ Cf. R. Bauckham, “The Apocalypse as a Christian War Scroll,” in The Climax of Prophecy, p. 229. According to Bauckham, “the blood of the Lamb” refers to the deaths of the Christian martyrs, who, following Christ’s example, bear witness even at the cost of their lives (cf. R. Bauckham, The Theology of the Book of Revelation, p. 75).

¹²⁷ G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation, p. 269.

to Sardis, for instance, Beale considers the reward to the faithful ones in Sardis to be granted to those with an experience like that of the “slain witnesses” (6:9-11), and of the Lamb that was slain (5:9, 12).¹²⁸ It should be noted that those who overcame in Sardis are complimented for not soiling their clothes (3:4-5), an indication that they maintain purity of devotion rather than that they suffer martyrdom. That overcomers are not limited to those who suffer martyrdom is strongly emphasized in the letters to the seven churches (chapters 2 and 3). For those in Ephesus victory means regaining “first love” (2:4); for those in Pergamum, Thyatira and Sardis, overcoming implies maintaining purity of life and doctrine (2:14-16, 20-25; and 3:4); and for those in Laodicea, victory amounts to not being lukewarm (3:14-18). Similarly, in Rev 21:7, the one who receives the promise for overcoming is set in contrast to “the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars” (21:8). Also, for those who refuse to worship the beast and its image, the consequence is not so much martyrdom as economic sanctions (13:16-17).

5. The Reigning Witnesses (20:4-6)

The theme of divine intervention and vindication accompanying faithful witness is again expressed in 20:4-6. Here John saw the souls of the slain witnesses (cf. 6:9) resurrected, enthroned, and authorized to execute judgment and to exercise rulership together with Christ, “the faithful witness.” With the binding of Satan in 20:1-3, the stage is set for the triumphal reign

¹²⁸ G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation, p. 277. Also see W. J. Harrington, Revelation (Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1993), p. 57, who observes that “the victor is, first and foremost, the ‘martyr’ — one who has won the victory as Christ did by the laying down of life”; and S. Laws, In the Light of the Lamb (Delaware: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1988), p. 56, who argues that the “conqueror” is most obviously a designation for the “martyr” in the Apocalypse of John.

of these who were “beheaded because of their witness to Jesus and the word of God” (20:4).¹²⁹

The irregular grammatical construction of this passage (20:4-6) presents some difficulties for the identification of the occupants of the thrones and their relation to the first resurrection. In spite of the eccentric syntax, Charles has made a concerted attempt to identify the enthroned ones as the martyrs mentioned in the same text (20:4b).¹³⁰ If the occupants of the thrones are the martyrs, the implication then is that they are the only ones who experienced the “first resurrection” (20:5b). Kiddle also advocates the view that the first resurrection is the special privilege awarded to the martyrs alone:

There is no doubt whatever that John saw its fitness in the unique reward it gave to the martyrs. . . . As in this life their sufferings must be more bitter, and the proof of their loyalty surer, so in the messianic kingdom their status must be higher than that of the Christian who had been preserved in quietness of life during the reign of Anti-Christ. Martyrdom is conceived to be the last act of a life utterly devoted to God; and the reward of special authority is given to the martyr by virtue not merely of his death but also of the unswerving devotion which inspired it.¹³¹

Taking Rev 20:4-6 as a “textual unit” that focuses on the theme of “the first resurrection,” these scholars agree that the occupants of the thrones are connected with the slain but resurrected witnesses who are twice mentioned as reigning with Christ and serving as priests for a millennium.¹³² However, the view that the first resurrection and millennial reign are reserved

¹²⁹ Cf. R. Mounce, The Book of Revelation, p. 365.

¹³⁰ R. H. Charles, The Revelation of St. John, p. 182f.; cf. G. Caird, A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John The Divine, p. 252.

¹³¹ M. Kiddle, The Revelation of St. John, p. 391f. Cf. R. L. Jeske, Revelation for Today (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), p. 114, who argues that “the millennium is not for everyone, not even for every Christian. It is a special time for Christ and his martyrs.”

¹³² Cf. D. Aune, Revelation 17-22, p. 1084.

for the martyrs alone certainly presents a problem. It contradicts the emphasis of the Apocalypse that the whole Church (regardless of the experience of martyrdom) is made priests and kings (1:6; 5:9; 19:6; 20:6). Perhaps to resolve this problem, attempts are made by some exegetes to introduce two different groups within the same text (20:4-6). Beasley-Murray suggests that the first occupants of the thrones cited in 20:4a should be taken as the whole Church, while those mentioned in 20:4b represent the martyrs alone.¹³³ Swete claims that the expression καὶ οἵτινες in 20:4 possibly introduces another class of Christians; thus he, too, creates two groups, the martyrs and the confessors of faith.¹³⁴ A similar view is expressed recently by Beale, who argues for the martyrs (as the first group) and the deceased saints who did not compromise but died in some other manner than martyrdom (as the second group).¹³⁵ While these are honest attempts to resolve the problem of identification that is raised in 20:4, they do not take sufficiently seriously the fact that the focus of this passage is on martyrs and martyrdom (cf. also 13:15ff.). In the words of Morris, “John’s concern here is with the martyrs.”¹³⁶ This is an indication that the

¹³³ G. Beasley-Murray, The Book of Revelation, p. 295.

¹³⁴ H. B. Swete, The Apocalypse of St. John, p. 259. Contrary to Swete’s attempt, this expression καὶ οἵτινες is used by R. H. Charles, The Revelation of St. John, p. 182f., to point out the function of parallelism in this passage (making 20:4a parallel to 20:4b). R. Mounce, The Book of Revelation, p. 365f., also argues that καὶ οἵτινες indicates a fuller definition of the previous group mentioned in the same text (20:4). He notes that they are the same as those of chapter 13 who refused to worship the beast (v.12) or receive his mark (v.16), and who consequently paid for their loyalty by death (v.15).

¹³⁵ G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation, p. 999.

¹³⁶ L. Morris, The Revelation of St. John, p. 237.

martyrs are worthy of a special reward.¹³⁷

While it is appropriate to wrestle with and attempt to resolve some of the syntactical and interpretive issues raised in 20:4-6, we would not want to lose sight of the contributions that the description of these slain witnesses make to our understanding of the Apocalypse's witness motif and mandate for the Asian churches. The first descriptive element to be noted is that of the position of these slain witnesses, as those who are seated on the thrones.¹³⁸ That they are enthroned emphasizes the exaltation that follows faithful witness; it signifies the royal reward for such faithfulness. The second is the judgment given to them (καὶ κρίμα ἐδόθη αὐτοῖς). Commentators understand this judgment (κρίμα) in two ways. While for some it is the "judicial function" that is given to the witnesses,¹³⁹ for others it is the "judicial vindication" that is carried out in their favor and on their behalf.¹⁴⁰ In light of the silence of the text on actual judgment being executed by the occupants of the thrones and the fact that God alone is portrayed as the judge in the Apocalypse's judgment scenes (cf. 20:11-15), the latter view has more merit. Furthermore, the enthronement of the slain witnesses, their resurrection and their privilege of reigning with

¹³⁷ Cf. D. Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, p. 1090. Also G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 991, who comments that "the primary point of the millennium is to demonstrate the victory of suffering Christians."

¹³⁸ Obviously, the narrative order of Rev 20:4-6 is not in proper temporal sequence as John speaks of the enthronement of the witnesses (v.4a) before alluding to their suffering, death, and resurrection (v. 4b, c). D. Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, p. 1085, notes John's tendency to describe where an individual or group of people sits before describing them (cf. Rev 4:2, 4; 14:14; 20:11).

¹³⁹ Thus καὶ κρίμα ἐδόθη αὐτοῖς is translated as "they were given the authority to judge" (cf. D. Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, p. 1084).

¹⁴⁰ For G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 997, a better translation would be "judgment was passed on their behalf (or "for them", taking αὐτοῖς as dative of advantage)."

Christ are pointers in the text to their “judicial vindication.” In keeping with the promise of Rev 3:21 that those who conquer through faithful witness would share the throne with Christ, these witnesses are rewarded with enthronement. Also, the plea of the witnesses of Rev 6:9 for vindication receives further positive divine response in Rev 20:4.¹⁴¹

The third descriptive element has to do with the character of these witnesses. They had been beheaded¹⁴² because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. Also, they had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands (20:4). Here again the martyrological implication of faithful witness is apparent. But in addition, we find the implication that faithful witness has for worship in the Apocalypse. Faithful witness which leads to martyrdom includes refusal to worship the beast or his image. In a similar fashion, saints in chapter thirteen who refused to worship the beast (v.12) or to receive his mark (v.16) paid for their loyalty by death (v.15). The Apocalypse places strong emphasis on the theme of worship. For faithful witness there is a choice to be made between the worship of the beast and the worship of the Lamb. Here then, we see true worship as a task that defines faithful witness. For the Church, then, faithful witness, which may result in martyrdom, is marked by a

¹⁴¹ There are verbal similarities between Rev 6:9-11 and 20:4-6, suggesting not simply that the two passages are doublets (cf. D. Aune, Revelation 17-22, p. 1087), but that the case of the slain witnesses is taken up again for appropriate justice (cf. G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation, p. 998).

¹⁴² While it seems extremely unlikely that all the martyrs would have been executed by decapitation, the term used in this context to describe the slain witnesses (πεπελεκισμένων) is a perfect passive substantival participle from the verb πελικιζειν, meaning “to behead with a πέλεκυς — an axe” (cf. D. Aune, Revelation 17-22, p. 1086). However, since Christians were known to be killed in ways other than by decapitation (e.g., crucifixion), G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation, p. 998, while admitting that only actual martyrs are meant in Rev 20:4-5, notes that τῶν πεπελεκισμένων is figurative for different kinds of execution.

commitment to the true worship of Christ.

The fourth descriptive element is the “life after death” which these witnesses enjoy.

Though beheaded (πεπελεκισμένων) for their faithful witness to Jesus (διὰ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ), they came to life (καὶ ἔζησαν). The verb “to live” is used here with the meaning “to be raised (from the dead), or resurrected.”¹⁴³ Like “the faithful witness” who died and came to life (ὃς ἐγένετο νεκρὸς καὶ ἔζησεν) (2:8; cf. 5:6), these slain witnesses are resurrected from the dead. Moreover, that death does not mark the end of faithful witness is emphasized as well in the case of the two witnesses (11:11) who experienced physical resurrection.¹⁴⁴ These slain witnesses share in the “first resurrection” (v.5),¹⁴⁵ and the “second death”¹⁴⁶ has no power over them (v.6). “Their resurrection existence,” as Beale notes, “is why the second death has no

¹⁴³ Cf. D. Aune, Revelation 17-22, p. 1089.

¹⁴⁴ That physical resurrection is implied in Rev 20:4-6 is understood by most commentators. It is argued that “if the physical resurrection of the wicked is described with ‘they came to life’ (ἔζησαν) and the identical word is used of the resurrection of the saints in v.4, then the resurrection in v.4 must also be a physical resurrection” (G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation, p. 1003).

¹⁴⁵ The idea of a distinct resurrection expressed with the phrase “the first resurrection” is found only in the Apocalypse in 20:5-6 and nowhere else in the Old or New Testament (cf. G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation, p. 1004; and D. Aune, Revelation 17-22, p. 1090). This implies that there is more than one resurrection; the text itself speaks of other people who were not resurrected until after the millennium reign of these slain but resurrected witnesses (v.5). However, some commentators argue that only one resurrection is intended in this text (e.g. H. Kraft, Die Offenbarung des Johannes, pp. 257-61; and P. Prigent, L’Apocalypse de Saint Jean, pp. 311-12.).

¹⁴⁶ The term “second death” (ὁ δεύτερος θάνατος) is distinctive to the Apocalypse (2:11; 20:6, 14; 21:8); the notion, however, appears twice in nearly contemporary Greek literature (cf. D. Aune, Revelation 17-22, p. 1091). In Rev 20:14; 21:8, “second death” is defined as being cast into the lake of fire.

authority over them.”¹⁴⁷

The fifth descriptive element returns to the enthronement of the slain witnesses, in that they are said to reign with Christ for a thousand years. Twice this is stated in two different tenses: ἐβασίλευσαν μετὰ τοῦ Χριστοῦ χίλια ἔτη (v.4), and βασιλεύσουσιν μετ’ αὐτοῦ (τὰ) χίλια ἔτη (v.6). One observes that the privilege which is elsewhere granted to all the saints (cf. 1:6; 3:21; 22:5) appears to be limited to the slain witnesses in this instance. Again this is likely another attempt by John to demonstrate in particular the vindication of the slain witnesses. What we witness here, as Charles rightly notes, is a reversal of judgment in favor of the slain witnesses:

authority is now vested in the hands of the righteous and not in those of the oppressors of the Church as aforetime.¹⁴⁸

Assurance is here given to the Asian churches faced with persecution, suffering and death (real or imagined) that “the martyrs, though slain in ignominy, . . . have not lost everything. They have gained royalty and triumph.”¹⁴⁹ Thus the believers are encouraged to remain faithful even unto death, for God will certainly vindicate his people.

A benediction is then bestowed upon these slain witnesses: μακάριος καὶ ἅγιος ὁ ἔχων μέρος ἐν τῇ ἀναστάσει τῇ πρώτῃ· ἐπὶ τούτων ὁ δεύτερος θάνατος οὐκ ἔχει ἐξουσίαν, ἀλλ’ ἔσονται ἱερεῖς τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ βασιλεύσουσιν μετ’ αὐτοῦ (τὰ) χίλια

¹⁴⁷ G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation, p. 1002.

¹⁴⁸ R. Charles, The Revelation of St. John, p. 183. Also see L. Morris, The Revelation of St. John, pp. 236f., who comments on John’s passionate concern for justice, which is expressed throughout the Apocalypse.

¹⁴⁹ L. Morris, The Revelation of St. John, p. 237. Also see J. Sweet, Revelation, p. 288.

ἔτη (20:6). This is the fifth of the seven benedictions pronounced in the Apocalypse (cf. 1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7, 14). Based upon their “favored position, which here is their immunity to the second death and their identification as priests and kings,”¹⁵⁰ they are uniquely pronounced here in the Apocalypse (20:6) as “blessed and holy.”¹⁵¹

The last but not the least of the descriptive elements associated with these slain witnesses is their identification as priests of “God and Christ” (20:6b).¹⁵² Combined with their priesthood is their kingship (20:6b) — a dual office which is based not only on Exod 19:6 but also on Isa 61:6.¹⁵³ One observes here the significant role of witnesses as priests. A privilege that is granted elsewhere to all the saints (1:6; 5:10) is uniquely attributed here to the slain witnesses. That witnesses are to perform priestly activities features prominently in the Apocalypse and again raises the possibility of a connection between the witness motif and the worship theme.

C. Witness Metaphors

In keeping with the character of the Apocalypse of John, several symbols are utilized to express as well as provoke the faithful witness of the Asian churches. These symbols have been

¹⁵⁰ G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation, p. 1002. Also see R. Mounce, The Book of Revelation, p. 370, who notes the three-fold basis of their blessedness.

¹⁵¹ Cf. D. Aune, Revelation 17-22, p. 1091, who observes that this is the only beatitude in the early Christian Greek literature with a double predicate (i.e., “blessed and holy”).

¹⁵² That Christ is on a par with God is suggested here and underscored elsewhere in the Apocalypse (e.g., 5:13-14; 7:9-17). Cf. A. Vanhoye, Old Testament Priests and the New Priest according to the New Testament (Petersham: St. Bede’s, 1986), pp. 302-3.

¹⁵³ Cf. E. S. Fiorenza, Priester für Gott: Studien zum Herrschafts und Priestermotiv in der Apokalypse (Münster: Aschendorff, 1972), pp. 336-38.

identified as a key to understanding the concept of witness in the Apocalypse.¹⁵⁴ As we give attention to each metaphor, we hope to discover what each may further contribute to our knowledge of the meaning of witness in the Apocalypse.

1. The Lampstands

The lampstands (αἱ λυχνίδαι) as a symbol for the Church appear seven times in the Apocalypse of John (out of the twelve times the term is used in the New Testament): four times in the inaugural vision of the Apocalypse, where “one like a son of man” stands among the seven golden lampstands which are identified as the seven churches (1:12, 13, 20); twice in the letter to the church of Ephesus which is threatened with the removal of its lampstand (2:1, 5); and once in the vision of the two witnesses, who are identified as “the two lampstands” (11:4).

For some commentators, the lampstands of the Apocalypse, with their background in the Old Testament (cf. Exodus 25, 37; Numbers 8; and Zechariah 4), represent the Church simply in its role as a “light-bearer.” For instance, Poucouta, in her article on “The Prophetic Mission of the Church in the Apocalypse of John” (“La mission prophétique de l’Église dans l’Apocalypse johannique”), communicates this simple understanding. Poucouta notes that the lampstands of the Apocalypse speak of the mission of the Church as that of reflecting the light of God on earth,¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁴ E.g., P. Poucouta, “La mission prophétique de l’Église dans l’Apocalypse johannique,” *NRTh* 110 (1988), pp. 38-57; and D. Aune, “St John’s Portrait of the Church in the Apocalypse,” *EvQ* 38 (1966), pp. 131-49, who through their examination of the symbols and portraits of the Church in the Apocalypse attempt to define the functions and tasks of the Church.

¹⁵⁵ P. Poucouta, “La mission prophétique de l’Église dans l’Apocalypse johannique,” p. 49f.

maintaining the flame of the divine presence,¹⁵⁶ and making the light triumph over darkness.¹⁵⁷

But nowhere in her article does Poucouta spell out what it means for the Church of the Apocalypse to serve as “light-bearer.” Rather, Poucouta simply concludes in her article that in a world full of upheaval, the mission of the Church is that of watchmen, their lamps blazing, staying awake and awaking others.¹⁵⁸ By failing to explore the manner in which the Church is to fulfill its mission as a “light-bearer,” she leaves one wondering about the actual task of the Church as symbolized by the golden lampstands of the Apocalypse.

For other commentators, the lampstands of the Apocalypse, as a symbol of “light bearing,” represent the Church in its task as a “witness-bearer,” since the term *λύχνος* is also used in reference to the “two witnesses” (cf. 11:3-7).¹⁵⁹ It is in light of this understanding that some commentators equate “light” with “witness” and attempt to demonstrate in the Apocalypse (especially in the letters of chapters 2-3) what it means for the Church to bear witness. Thus both Thomas¹⁶⁰ and Beale¹⁶¹ in their commentaries point to the likelihood that the witness of the seven

¹⁵⁶ P. Poucouta, “La mission prophétique de l’Église dans l’Apocalypse johannique,” p. 50.

¹⁵⁷ P. Poucouta, “La mission prophétique de l’Église dans l’Apocalypse johannique,” p. 51.

¹⁵⁸ P. Poucouta, “La mission prophétique de l’Église dans l’Apocalypse johannique,” p. 57.

¹⁵⁹ That the primary meaning of lampstand is that of witness is indicated in Rev 11:3-7, where the “two lampstands” refer to the “two witnesses” (cf. G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation, p. 231 and D. Aune, Revelation 6-16, p. 612).

¹⁶⁰ R. L. Thomas, Revelation 1-7, pp. 277-78.

¹⁶¹ G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation, p. 289.

churches is the prevailing theme of the seven letters. Beale in particular makes a notable contribution to the study of the letters of the Apocalypse by demonstrating that all the letters call attention to the different character of the witness of each church. Beale writes:

all of the letters deal generally with the issue of witnessing for Christ in the midst of a pagan culture. The churches with problems are all exhorted to strengthen their witness in various ways, and the two churches without problems are encouraged to continue to persevere in the faithful witness that they have been maintaining.¹⁶²

In light of the understanding that the lampstand symbolizes the witness of the Church, Beale makes the following observations from the letters regarding each church's witness.

The loss of "first love" in the Ephesian church "was tantamount to becoming unzealous witnesses,"¹⁶³ and the failure of the Ephesian Christians to exercise their call to be a "lamp of witness" means ceasing to exist as a church.¹⁶⁴ As for the churches of Smyrna and Pergamum, both of them are commended for their suffering which was provoked by their witnessing openly to their faith in Christ.¹⁶⁵ In the case of of the church of Thyatira, the "works" for which it is complimented are not merely general deeds of "Christian service," but "works of persevering witness to the outside world."¹⁶⁶ As for some of the Christians that were castigated in Sardis, the problem with them was their failure to witness to their faith before the unbelieving culture,¹⁶⁷ they

¹⁶² G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation, p. 227.

¹⁶³ G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation, p. 230.

¹⁶⁴ G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation, p. 232.

¹⁶⁵ G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation, p. 241-242, 246.

¹⁶⁶ G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation, p. 260.

¹⁶⁷ G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation, p. 273.

suppressed their witness by assuming a low profile in idolatrous contexts.¹⁶⁸ With regard to the church of Philadelphia, its commendation for “not denying the name of Christ” is an indication of persevering witness.¹⁶⁹ And in the case of the Laodicean church, criticisms are leveled due to the church’s “innocuous witness” — a witness which was either non-existent or consistently compromised by participation in idolatrous facets of the Laodicean culture.¹⁷⁰

Beale’s approach to the concept of witness in all the letters to the seven churches tends to be broad and some of his descriptions of the witness of each church appears a bit stretched. However, he certainly confirms the understanding of other commentators that the Apocalypse’s use of the term *λύχνος* “emphasizes the local church in its capacity as a witnessing community.”¹⁷¹ Beale also opens the possibility of discovering the specific content and function of the “witness motif” in the individual letters addressed to the seven churches (the seven lampstands) of the Apocalypse of John. As a “lampstand,” each church in her vocation of witness is called upon to hear and respond to the voice of the Spirit with regards to the character of her witness (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22).

2. The Temple

In the Apocalypse, there are several symbolic and literal references to “temple” (cf. 3:12; 7:15; 11:1, 2, 19; 14:15, 17; 15:5, 6, 8; 16:1, 17; 21:22). Of particular interest to our examination of the witness motif in the Apocalypse is the reference to the temple of God in 11:1

¹⁶⁸ G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation, p. 276.

¹⁶⁹ G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation, p. 283-286.

¹⁷⁰ G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation, p. 303.

¹⁷¹ D. Aune, “St. John’s Portrait of the Church in the Apocalypse,” p. 143.

and 2 (ὁ ναός τοῦ θεοῦ). It is widely held that the temple of God, together with the altar and the worshipers, symbolizes “the Christian community who worship God.”¹⁷² However, some proceed further to consider the temple of God, especially in the context of the vision of the two witnesses (cf. 11:1-14), as a metaphor for the Church’s witness.¹⁷³

The attempt to turn the temple of God into a metaphor for witness appears questionable. The temple in the Apocalypse is primarily a worship term. Especially in Rev 11:1 and 2, it is linked with the altar and the worshipers. While it is true that both the temple and the two witnesses could be identified as the Church, they express complementary and not synonymous roles of the Church. The two witnesses exemplify the witnessing task of the Church (11:3-14), but the temple of God (11:1-2) represents the worship experience of the Church in the context of suffering and oppression. For these reasons, “the temple of God” should not be considered as a “witness metaphor” in the Apocalypse.

3. The “Open Door”

Following the common interpretation that the “open door” imagery of Rev 3:8 (θύρα ἠνεωγμένη) denotes a great opportunity for missionary activity,¹⁷⁴ Beale considers the “open door” as a “witness metaphor” for the church of Philadelphia.¹⁷⁵ The “open door” metaphor, as

¹⁷² M. E. Boring, Revelation (Louisville: John Knox, 1989), p. 143 (cf. R. Mounce, The Book of Revelation, p. 213, and D. Aune, Revelation 6-16, p. 597).

¹⁷³ E.g., R. Mounce, The Book of Revelation, p. 214.

¹⁷⁴ Cf. W. Ramsay, The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1963), p. 404; R. Charles, The Revelation of St. John (Vol 1), p. 87; and G. B. Caird, Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine, p. 51.

¹⁷⁵ G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation, p. 286. For similar use of the “open door” imagery indicating “witness,” Beale cites Acts 14:27; 1 Cor 16:9; 2 Cor 2:12; and Col 4:3.

most commentators would agree, basically speaks of “an opportunity,” or “a possibility.” It is with this understanding that some consider the “open door” as access to eschatological salvation — entrance into the Messianic kingdom.¹⁷⁶ This same metaphor is used in Rev 4:1 (θύρα ἠνεωγμένη ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ) where it simply means the granting of access, possibility and opportunity to perceive visions.¹⁷⁷ Turning the “open door” imagery in the context of the Apocalypse (cf. 3:8; 4:1) into a metaphor specifically for witness is doubtful.

Out of these three metaphors, the lampstands metaphor, used in reference to the two witnesses (11:3-4) and the seven churches (1:20), seems to be the only one that contributes to our understanding of the witness motif of the Apocalypse of John. As a symbol of witness for each of the seven churches, it provides the possibility of finding the meaning of witness in the issues that are addressed in the letters to the seven churches. In as much as the lampstand metaphor identifies each church as a witness, the tasks for which each church is complimented or condemned in the letters could be considered as functions of the witnessing church.

Conclusion

The manner and the extent to which witness terminology is used in the Apocalypse of John have become evident in this examination. Our investigation of the “witness metaphors” led to the conclusion that “the lampstands” of the Apocalypse represent the Church in its symbolic role as a “light-bearer” and in its task as a “witness-bearer.” Our consideration of the “witness

¹⁷⁶ Cf. I. T. Beckwith, The Apocalypse of John (New York: MacMillan, 1919), p. 480; H. Kraft, Die Offenbarung des Johannes (Tübingen: Mohr, 1974), p. 81; and J. Roloff, The Apocalypse of John (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), p. 61.

¹⁷⁷ See D. Aune, Revelation 1-5, pp. 279-82, who provides a comprehensive discussion of the motif of the “open door” in ancient religious traditions and apocalyptic literature.

phrases” ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστός (1:5; 3:14; 2:13) and ἡ μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (1:2, 9; 12:17; 19:10; 20:4; cf. 6:9; 11:7, 12:11) provides the insight that the witness motif of the Apocalypse implies the authenticity and truthfulness of the one bearing witness; it contains prophetic and martyrological nuances; and it includes obedience to God’s commandments. The Church is, thus, called upon to maintain such faithful witness: by maintaining her authenticity and truthfulness; by executing the prophetic ministry; by experiencing martyrdom (in the case of persecution); and by giving obedience to God’s commandments.

Our exegesis of the “witness passages” has further illumined our understanding of what the Apocalypse means by “witness,” as well as the mandate of the Church to maintain faithful witness to Jesus. John’s reference to his own personal witness has legal, martyrological and prophetic nuances (1:2, 9). The witness of the slain witnesses is primarily marked by martyrdom (6:9-11).

As for the “two witnesses” (11:1-14), the phrase is used with a juridical implication: two witnesses meet the requirement for valid testimony. Witness takes place in a context in which worship is involved (11:1-2). The tasks of witness include prophetic mediation and repentance (11:3-4). Finally, witness is again marked by martyrdom, shame and seeming defeat which is, however, turned into victory through divine intervention (11:5-14).

That victory is the goal of witness is emphasized in the testimonies of the “two witnesses” (11:1-14), the “victorious witnesses” (12:10-12), and the “reigning witnesses” (20:4-6). As for the “victorious witnesses,” triumph is achieved through faithful witness, even to the point of death, but also by maintaining purity of life and doctrine (2:14-16, 20-25; 3:4). Faithful witness, which ends in victory, means not only the experience of martyrdom (as in the case of

persecution), but also the expression of purity of devotion to Christ in terms of the Church's lifestyle, teachings, and beliefs.

That divine intervention and vindication accompanies faithful witness is reiterated in the case of the "reigning witnesses" who maintained faithfulness, even to the point of death (20:4-6). Their faithful witness is marked by their refusal to worship the beast. And for their faithful witness, they are brought back from death to life; they are exalted to the throne; judgment is given to them; they reign with Christ for one thousand years; they are pronounced blessed and holy; and they serve as priests unto God and Christ. Here again in the divine vindication of the "slain witnesses" (20:4-6), one observes (with emphasis) the task of giving true worship to Christ, which may result in martyrdom, as part of the Church's vocation of maintaining "faithful witness" to Jesus.

From our deliberation in this chapter, it can be seen that "faithful witness" for the Church is a comprehensive mandate which implies maintaining authenticity and truthfulness (shunning all forms of falsehood and deception), hearing the voice of the Spirit, mediating the words of prophecy (especially as contained in the Apocalypse), showing patient endurance (especially in the midst of persecution), giving obedience to the commandments of God (especially those commanded by Christ — the sender of the letters and the revealer of the contents of the Apocalypse), being an overcomer, and expressing purity of devotion to Christ through worship, lifestyle, teachings and beliefs (especially in the midst of deception and perversion). The extent to which "faithful witness" serves as a primary mandate that embraces the various tasks of the Church in the Apocalypse will be addressed in more detail in the concluding section of this dissertation.

CHAPTER FOUR

MOTIF AND TASK OF REPENTANCE IN THE APOCALYPSE

Another significant task of the Church in the Apocalypse of John (even though “conditional”) is repentance, particularly when the Church has failed in any of its other mandates. The significance of this task is made evident in both the letters and visions of the Apocalypse. Through the examination of relevant terms and texts in both the paraenetic and visionary sections of the Apocalypse, the focus of this chapter is on the necessity, nature, and function of the mandated repentance, particularly in relation to the primary task of the Church, “to bear witness to Jesus Christ.” This examination will include: A) a discussion of the “hearing formula” and its relevance to the mandate to repent; B) an exposition of texts in the letters of the Apocalypse that feature the explicit invitation and command to five of the seven churches of Asia Minor to repent; and C) a study of passages in the visions of the Apocalypse that feature warnings and judgments meant to elicit a positive response of repentance on the part of the readership of the Apocalypse.

A. The Hearing Formula

Of relevance to the discussion of the repentance motif in both the letters and visions of the Apocalypse of John is what Enroth has termed “the hearing formula,”¹ Aune has called “a proclamation formula,”² and Roloff has described as “the summons to listen,” or “the call to awakening.”³ This formula, ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις,

¹ A. Enroth, “The Hearing Formula in the Book of Revelation,” *NTS* vol. 36 (1990), pp. 598-608.

² D. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, p. 150.

³ J. Roloff, *The Revelation of John*, p. 46.

indicating one of the tasks of the Asian churches, occurs eight times in the Apocalypse of John. It is used seven times in the second and third chapters of the Apocalypse (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22) in connection with the message to the seven churches and (in an abbreviated form) once in the thirteenth chapter (13:9) in the context of an apocalyptic vision. In the New Testament writings, it is a formula which is certainly not peculiar to the Apocalypse of John: a related formula is combined with the parabolic teaching of Jesus in the synoptic gospels (cf. Mk 4:9, 23; Matt 11:15; 13:9, 43; Lk 8:8; 14:35).⁴ In some places at least the formula appears to imply an esoteric sense (deeper or hidden meaning) to what is being said, which involves highly specialized or abstruse knowledge.⁵ However, Enroth, in her discussion of the tradition, background, context and function of the “hearing formula” in the Apocalypse of John, underscores its paraenetic function.⁶ It is in light of this paraenetic function that one sees the relevance of the “hearing formula” to the discussion of both the motif and mandate of repentance in the Apocalypse.

In its paraenetic function, the “hearing formula” calls the audience of the Apocalypse of John to listen and pay attention.⁷ As Enroth notes concerning the usage of the “hearing formula,”

⁴ Other places where a “hearing formula” is found include the Gospel of Thomas 8:21, 24, 63, 65, 96; the Gospel of Mary 7:10; 8:16; Pistis Sophia I:17, 19, 33, 42, 43; II:68, 86, 87; III:124, 125; the Sophia of Jesus Christ 98, 105, 107 (cf. A. Enroth, “The Hearing Formula in the Book of Revelation,” p. 598).

⁵ The esoteric application of the “hearing formula” in all of the New Testament writings, including the Apocalypse of John, is championed by both M. Dibelius, “Wer Ohren hat zu hören, der höre,” *ThStKr* 83 (1910), p. 461 and H. Kraft, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, p. 58.

⁶ A. Enroth, “The Hearing Formula in the Book of Revelation,” p. 602.

⁷ The concern of the author of the Apocalypse for his audience to listen and pay attention is apparent in several of his beatitudes that pronounce benediction on those who hear and respond positively to the words of his prophecy (cf. 1:1-3; 16:15 οὐ; 22:7, 14).

especially in the letters of the Apocalypse (chapters 2, 3), “It underlies what should be heard and how it should be heard and what follows from hearing aright.”⁸ In all seven letters, the “hearing formula” underscores the words of encouragement, comfort, rebuke, warning and promise. While it punctuates the challenge to maintain faithfulness in two of the letters (cf. 2:10-11; 3:8, 10-11), it provides incentives for repentance in five of the letters (2:5-7, 16-17, 20-29; 3:3-6, 19-22).⁹ Thus, it highlights repentance as one of the tasks of the Church, especially when any of its members (as in the case of the five churches) have failed to maintain their faithfulness.

Even though the “hearing formula” appears in a different form and context in the visionary section of the Apocalypse (13:9),¹⁰ it retains its paraenetic function of calling attention to what should be heard and done by the recipients of the Apocalypse. In Rev 13:9, it occurs in connection with the revelation of the beast’s program of worship and the ensuing persecution of the saints who deny him their worship and allegiance (13:1-8). However, the usage of the “hearing formula” in this context does not highlight the call to repentance; rather, in keeping with its usage in the letter to the church of Smyrna (2:10-11), it underscores the exhortation to the saints to maintain patient endurance and faithful witness, even to the point of death (13:10). In the Apocalypse, then, it is obvious that when the “hearing formula” does not underscore the call to repentance, it stresses the importance of the challenge to the Church to maintain faithful

⁸ A. Enroth, “The Hearing Formula in the Book of Revelation,” p. 602.

⁹ That the “hearing formula” calls each hearer to appropriate the promises and warnings addressed to the churches is well observed by W. J. Harrington, The Apocalypse of John, p. 57.

¹⁰ Though the word οὐς and the imperative ἀκουσάτω remain unchanged, the participial construction ὁ ἔχων is replaced by a conditional clause εἴ τις ἔχει, and the refrain τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις is dropped.

witness.

B. Repentance Motif in the Letters

The command to repent is explicit in five of the seven letters to the churches: the letter to Ephesus (2:4-7); the letter to Pergamum (2:14-16); the letter to Thyatira (2:20-23); the letter to Sardis (3:1-4); and the letter to Laodicea (3:14-20).¹¹ A study of these passages reveals the necessity of repentance when a church has failed in any of its functions, the nature of repentance, the incentives for repentance, and the penalty for lack of repentance.

1. The Letter to Ephesus (2:4-7)

The call to repentance in this letter is preceded by an indication of a need to repent in 2:4, where it is stated that the writer of the letter has something against the church of Ephesus: ἀλλὰ ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ ὅτι τὴν ἀγάπην σου τὴν πρώτην ἀφήκες. Contrary to the preceding commendations that underscore the Ephesians' active service, patient suffering, and discerning spirit (2:2-3), they are here rebuked for abandoning their "first love" (2:4). One should observe the parallelism between the "first love" which the church abandoned (v. 4) and the "first works" which the church is called upon to do (v. 5). In light of this parallelism, it appears that the "first love" to which the Ephesian church is summoned to return is to be reflected in the Church's deeds (τὰ πρῶτα ἔργα).

The rebuke for the abandonment of "first love" is followed by a series of three complementary imperatives that call for a positive response from those whose present condition

¹¹ Even though the letters to the churches of Smyrna and Philadelphia lack an explicit call to repentance, the need for constant earnestness, vigilance and faithfulness (even when a church has no need for repentance) is sustained through the author's use of commendations, warnings, promises, and the "hearing formula" (cf. P. E. Hughes, The Book of Revelation, p. 61 and J. Roloff, The Revelation of John, p. 62).

the writer now finds displeasing: μνημόνευε οὐν πόθεν πέπτωκας καὶ μετανόησον καὶ τὰ πρῶτα ἔργα ποίησον (2:5). The verb μνημόνευειν is used here in Rev 2:5 and in 3:3 to prompt recollection of a moral and spiritual state that the churches of Ephesus and Sardis once enjoyed. The imperative to remember, then, as Aune observes, is an appropriate device to encourage the church of Ephesus (as well as the church of Sardis) “to live up to or to recapture earlier moral and spiritual standards.”¹² That the church of Ephesus is called upon to remember the heights from which it had fallen implies the threatening aspect of its downward trend and the need for an immediate return to its previous state or condition.¹³ This necessity is further stressed by a clear command to repent, and an explicit charge to return to the things the church did previously.¹⁴ Repentance, then, is to mark a turning point for the Ephesian church in its life as a church; provoked by recollection, repentance leads to a renewal of abandoned tasks. For the Ephesian church, repentance means a return to its “first love” — its “first tasks” which it abandoned.

The call to repent is followed by a statement of severe warning and penalty, should the Ephesian Church fail to do so: εἰ δὲ μή, ἔρχομαι σοι καὶ κινήσω τὴν λυχνίαν σου ἐκ τοῦ

¹² D. Aune, Revelation 1-5, p. 147. This summons, even though it serves different types of “remembering,” is frequently used in early Christian texts (cf. Rom 15:15; 1 Cor 15:1; Gal 1:6-9; 3:2-3; 5:7; 1 Thess 1:5-10; 2:13-14; 4:1-2; 9:2; 2 Pet 1:12-13; 3:1-2).

¹³ See J. Roloff, The Revelation of John, p. 45, who notes that “the summons to repent is introduced with the singular graphic image of a downfall from great heights, which demonstrates the threatening aspect of this development.”

¹⁴ That the motif of “remembering” was sometimes used in the Old Testament and early Judaism, in contexts where people were summoned to repentance, is noted by D. Aune, Revelation 1-5, p. 147, who cites several texts including Isa 44:21; 46:8-9; Mic 6:5; Sir 7:28; 23:14; 26:6-7; 38:22. Twice in the letters of the Apocalypse, the appeal to remember is connected with the command to repent (2:5; 3:3).

τόπου αὐτῆς, ἐὰν μὴ μετανοήσῃς (2:5b). Of significance here is the warning that the lampstand of the Ephesian church — its symbol of witness — will be removed, if it fails to repent. The implication of this is that the Ephesian church will cease to exist as a church if the very function that defines the essence of its existence is no longer performed;¹⁵ the church as an empirical Christian congregation will be obliterated.¹⁶ The mandate to repent thus “carries a threat to the Christian churches, calling them back to reflection, to turning from sin and weakness, to the renewal of their former state of life.”¹⁷ Incentives for repentance can be gleaned from the “hearing formula” of 2:7a which admonishes the church of Ephesus to pay attention not only to the commendations (2:2-3, 6), but also to the rebuke, the warning, and the promise to the one who overcomes (2:7b). An overcomer, then, in the church of Ephesus, is not only one who remains faithful in the tasks commanded, but one who repents of the failure condemned in the letter.

Of significance in the letter to Ephesus, as well as in other letters, is the understanding that the urgent call to repentance is tied to the coming of Christ, the one who sends the letters (2:5, 16; 3:3, 19). There is a clear warning that if the churches fail to repent, Christ will descend upon them in judgment. As Caird notes, the coming “is contingent on the Church’s refusal to repent”¹⁸ — εἰ δὲ μή, ἔρχομαι σοι. . . ἐὰν μὴ μετανοήσῃς (2:5).

¹⁵ Cf. G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation (Michigan: Eerdmans, 1999), p. 232.

¹⁶ Cf. D. Aune, Revelation 1-5, p. 147.

¹⁷ J. Behn, “μετανοέω” in Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, vol. IV (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), p. 1004.

¹⁸ G. Caird, A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John The Divine, p. 49.

However, the concern of many commentators is whether this coming of Christ is historical or eschatological. For some, the reference to the coming of Christ is not to the Parousia of Christ but to an immediate historical visitation for preliminary judgment.¹⁹ Those who take this position base their argument on the understanding that the coming itself (ἔρχομαι σοι), not the effect or result of the coming, is conditioned by the failure to repent (ἐὰν μὴ μετανοήσης). For some other commentators, the reference is to the eschatological appearance of Christ.²⁰ In support of this position, it is argued that what is conditional here in Rev 2:5 is not the coming but its effect (whether Christ comes to judge or reward the churches). Both historical and eschatological visitation of Christ are likely in view. Support for these two possibilities comes from the understanding that historical churches which fail to repent face the possibility of both historical and eschatological judgment.

2. The Letter to Pergamum (2:14-17)

As in the letter to Ephesus, the exhortation to repent in the letter to the church of Pergamum is preceded by a statement of the need that compels its repentance. Once again, what the writer of the letters has against a church (ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ ὀλίγα) necessitates a call to repentance (2:14-15). While the church of Ephesus is rebuked for the loss of its first love, the

¹⁹ See R. Mounce, The Book of Revelation, p. 7; J. Roloff, The Revelation of John, p. 45; G. Caird, A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John The Divine, pp. 32, 54.

²⁰ See R. Bauckham, "Synoptic Parousia Parables and the Apocalypse," NTS (23), 1977, pp. 173-74, who argues this eschatological interpretation for 3:3, 20 and implies that it is valid for 2:5, 16. Others with similar convictions include T. Holtz, Die Christologie der Apokalypse des Johannes (Berlin: Akademie, 1971), p. 207; A. Satake, Die Gemeindeordnung in der Johannes Apokalypse (Neukirchen: Neukirchener, 1966), p. 153; G. A. Krodel, Revelation (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989), p. 109; and R. L. Thomas, Revelation 1-7: An Exegetical Commentary (Chicago: Moody, 1992), pp. 143-47, 154.

church of Pergamum is condemned for compromising with those who hold the teachings of Balaam and the Nikolaitans. The letter does not spell out the historical reference to the Nikolaitans and the character of their teachings which calls for repentance, but it gives an indication of what the writer of the letter may have found wrong with the teachings of Balaam. This is probably a broad reference to a proverbially disreputable character (as in the case of Jezebel in Rev 2:20). Like those who succumbed to the influence of Balaam in Num 25:1-2 and 31:16, some in the church of Pergamum were led to commit acts of religious infidelity by eating food sacrificed to idols.²¹

The call to repentance is again explicitly stated here in the letter to the church of Pergamum: *μετανόησον οὖν* (2:16). Whether part or the whole of the church of Pergamum is called to repentance has been discussed by exegetes. Harrington is of the opinion that the mandate to repent is aimed only at the offenders, the “false teachers” (2:14-15),²² despite the fact that the rebuke is not specifically addressed to them. However, several commentators consider the charges as being addressed to the entire community (*ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ ὀλίγα*) because of their harboring (*ἔχεις*) those who hold (*κρατοῦντας*) false teachings. Roloff, for instance, opines that the whole community has become guilty and must be called to repentance.²³ While it is true that corporate responsibility for harboring false teachers is indicated (*ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ*), it should also be noted that there are certain individuals within the church of Pergamum, against whom the

²¹ Cf. D. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, p. 185.; and J. Roloff, *The Revelation of John*, p. 52.

²² W. J. Harrington, *The Apocalypse of John*, p. 61.

²³ J. Roloff, *The Revelation of John*, p. 52. Also see G. Ladd, *Revelation*, p. 48 and G. B. Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John The Divine*, p. 41, who argue that the entire church is summoned to repent.

sender of the letter indicates that he would specifically contend (καὶ πολεμήσω μετ' αὐτῶν) if they failed to repent (2:16).

Again, to provide incentives for repentance, the letter to the church of Pergamum continues with a warning of severe penalty for failure to repent: εἰ δὲ μή, ἔρχομαι σοι ταχὺ καὶ πολεμήσω μετ' αὐτῶν ἐν τῇ ῥομφαίᾳ τοῦ στόματος μου (2:16). Here again, the coming of Christ is conditioned by the church's response. Failure to repent would invite an immediate visitation which would be marked by the destruction of the unrepentant individuals within the church of Pergamum.

The explicit call to repentance issued to those in the church of Pergamum who have engaged in idolatry and fornication ends with further incentives to repentance as the writer concludes with the usual "hearing formula" (2:17a) and the promise to overcomers (2:17b). While the "hearing formula" calls the attention of the entire church of Pergamum to listen and act appropriately, for several individuals who have embraced vices that are contrary to the well-being of the Church, the challenge of the "hearing formula" is to give a positive response of repentance. And for those who like Antipas have remained true to the name of Jesus and have not renounced their faith in him (2:12-13), the encouragement of the "hearing formula" is to remain faithful.

3. The Letter to Thyatira (2:20-29)

The situation that calls for repentance in the church of Thyatira is that of tolerance of and even participation in the teachings and activities of "the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess" (2:20-23). The identity of this woman Jezebel, which in the letter does not receive as much attention as her influence on the church of Thyatira, is of interest to scholars who wonder in what respect she is thought to be like the Jezebel mentioned in the Old Testament. Sweet notes

that Jezebel is “John’s nickname for the woman.”²⁴ Aune deals at length with the possibility that “Jezebel” was a patroness or hostess of one of the house churches in Thyatira who came into conflict with others through her attempt to accommodate Christian practices to the surrounding culture, especially by justifying the eating of meat offered to idols.²⁵

For the writer of the letter to the church of Thyatira, the primary concern is the influence this woman “Jezebel” had on the church. By her teaching, which is connected with “learning Satan’s so-called deep secrets” (2:24), she misled some into fornication and the eating of food sacrificed to idols (2:20b).²⁶ Similar to the case of some in Pergamum (2:14-16), some in Thyatira are called upon to repent of idolatry and sexual immorality (2:20-24).

What John meant by “the deep things of Satan” has received some attention from commentators. Taking “[the depths] of Satan” (Satanic depths) as an adjectival genitive, Beale sees a reference to “depths of knowledge about Satan.”²⁷ Aune suggests that the heretical teaching in this context may have involved a kind of Satanism that has parallels in several second

²⁴ J. Sweet, Revelation, p. 94.

²⁵ D. Aune, Revelation 1-5, p. 203.

²⁶ Several scholars who take πορνεῦσαι καὶ φαγεῖν εἰδωλόθυτα literally are of the opinion that “Jezebel taught heretical opinions that cause them to wander from the truth and in consequence to indulge in sexual immorality and to eat meat from animals sacrificed to idols” (D. Aune, Revelation 1-5, p. 204). That heretical teachings often lead to “looseness in ethical matters” is underscored by J. Roloff, The Revelation of John, p. 54. However, other commentators are of the opinion that the term “fornication” (particularly in the letters) is a metaphor that speaks of religious infidelity (cf. G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation, p. 250; and R. Mounce, The Book of Revelation, p. 86).

²⁷ G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation, p. 266.

century Gnostic groups.²⁸ However, it is also possible that what was considered in Thyatira to be “the deep things of God” may have been labeled by John as “the deep things of Satan.”²⁹ This may also be true of the labeling of “those who called themselves Jews” (in Smyrna and Philadelphia) as “a synagogue of Satan” (2:9; 3:9), rather than “a synagogue of God.”

Jezebel and her associates have been given time to repent, but with no positive results (2:21). Hence, the writer of the letter to the church of Thyatira continues with serious warnings that make repentance an imperative for several of the church members: ἰδοὺ βάλλω αὐτὴν εἰς κλίνην καὶ τοὺς μοιχεύοντας μετ’ αὐτῆς εἰς θλίψιν μεγάλην, ἐὰν μὴ μετανοήσωσιν ἐκ τῶν ἔργων αὐτῆς, καὶ τὰ τέκνα αὐτῆς ἀποκτενῶ ἐν θανάτῳ (2:22-23a). Lack of repentance, failure to discontinue the activities of Jezebel in Thyatira, would result in punishment that would be marked by intense suffering and even death (2:22-23).³⁰ This punishment would also serve as a warning to other churches (2:23b). Here again, one finds an additional indication that the repentance of some of the members of the Church, especially when they have failed in any task of the Church, is of utmost concern to the author of the Apocalypse.

For those in the church of Thyatira who failed to maintain religious fidelity, there is a call to repentance. However, for those who have not been influenced by the teachings of Jezebel, the

²⁸ D. Aune, Revelation 1-5, p. 207.

²⁹ Cf. H. Alford, The Greek Testament IV (Chicago: Moody Press, 1958), p. 576; and G. A. Krodel, Revelation (Minnesota: Augsburg Publishing House, 1989), p. 118, who comments that “John, with biting irony, may turn their own claim to know ‘the depths of God’ (1 Cor 2:10) into the very opposite, holding that their claim to know God’s mysteries is, in fact, a knowledge of Satanic realities which they express in their behavior.”

³⁰ Cf. G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation, p. 263; W. J. Harrington, The Apocalypse of John, p. 64; and D. Aune, Revelation 1-5, p. 205.

letter concludes with an admonition to remain faithful (2:25),³¹ and an exhortation to await the reward for faithfulness (2:26-28). Furthermore, the “hearing formula” invites the entire church to pay attention and respond appropriately. While for some, the expected response is that of maintaining faithfulness in the activities appreciated by the writer of the letter (cf. 2:19, 24-25), for others, it is repentance from the sexual immorality and idolatry taught and influenced by Jezebel (cf. 2:20-23).

4. The Letter to Sardis (3:1-7)

The church of Sardis is called to repentance because its deeds are not found to be satisfactory in the sight of God (οὐ γὰρ εὗρηκα σου τὰ ἔργα πεπληρωμένα ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ μου, 3:2b). Its false reputation for being “alive,” when it is actually “dead,” introduces its need for repentance and indicates the character of its unsatisfactory performance which calls for repentance: οἶδα σου τὰ ἔργα ὅτι ὄνομα ἔχεις ὅτι ζῆς, καὶ νεκρὸς εἶ (3:1b).

As in the case of the church of Ephesus, there are steps for this church to take in the direction of repentance. These steps are explicitly stated with the writer’s use of five consecutive and complementary imperatives: γίνου γρηγορῶν καὶ στήρισον τὰ λοιπὰ ἃ ἔμελλον ἀποθανεῖν, οὐ γὰρ εὗρηκα σου τὰ ἔργα πεπληρωμένα ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ μου. μνημόνευε οὖν πῶς εἴληφας καὶ ἤκουσας καὶ τήρει καὶ μετανόησον. (3:2-3a). In light of Aune’s observation that “life” and “death” are contrasting metaphors which represent moral and spiritual vitality and morbidity,³² repentance for this church begins with waking up from its “deadness” and

³¹ For those who have no need to repent in the letters, the admonition is to remain faithful. These include those in the two churches of Smyrna and Philadelphia (2:10 - γίνου πιστὸς; 3:11 - κράτει ὃ ἔχεις) and a few in the church of Thyatira (2:25 - πλὴν ὃ ἔχετε κρατήσατε).

³² D. Aune, Revelation 1-5, p. 219.

sustaining the little measure of life that is left. Repentance also implies remembering and giving obedience to what the church once received and heard, though it has been forgotten and disobeyed.

While the text does not spell out the implications of the complementary metaphors which are used to call the church of Sardis to repentance, in an attempt to find meaning, some commentators often read other issues into the text. Krodel, for instance, writes:

The awakening is in fact a return to baptism, to their appointment as kings and priests unto God. The community should also remember the traditions concerning Christian conduct heard in baptismal instruction. The community is exhorted to keep them in faithful obedience. Second, in view of their present sorry state, the members of the church of Sardis are admonished to repent, to turn at once to the God of promise and the giver of obligations (cf. 2:25a).³³

Failure for the church of Sardis to wake up amounts to a lack of repentance, which, as in the cases of the Ephesian (2:5), the Pergamum (2:16), and the Thyatiran churches (2:22-23), would invite a sudden judgmental visitation from the sender of the letter: ἐὰν οὖν μὴ γρηγορήσης, ἦξω ὡς κλέπτῃς, καὶ οὐ μὴ γνῶς ποίαν ὥραν ἦξω ἐπὶ σέ (3:3b). While it is true that the reference to the coming, like that of a thief in the night, may be an allusion to the eschatological coming of Christ (Matt 24:42-44; 1 Thess 5:2; 2 Pet 3:10), this may again be a historical visitation, since Christ's eschatological coming is not dependent on repentance in Sardis.³⁴

In contrast to those in the church of Sardis whose deeds are not "complete" and who are thus commanded to repent, there are a few people who have maintained their religious fidelity by

³³ G. Krodel, Revelation, p. 132.

³⁴ Cf. R. Mounce, The Book of Revelation, pp. 94-95.

not “soiling their clothes” (3:4a). This suggests that the problem with those that are called upon to repent may be failure to maintain purity of devotion to Christ in Sardis. In order to encourage faithfulness and also to incite repentance, the sender of the letter to the church of Sardis makes promises to the faithful (3:4b-5), and warns his readers with the usual “hearing formula” to pay attention and give the appropriate response (3:6). Once again, while the appropriate response for some means repentance of imperfect deeds that involve infidelity, for others, it is continuing faithfulness.

5. The Letter to Laodicea (3:14-21)

The deeds of the Laodicean church that call for repentance are addressed in several rebukes, using metaphors loaded with meaning. The church is neither cold nor hot but lukewarm (3:15-16), an indication of its ineffectiveness as a church.³⁵ While it claims to be rich and resourceful, it is actually wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked (3:17); clearly the church is marked by pride and false self-assessment.³⁶ The call to repentance commences with a series of admonitions: to turn to Christ for all that the church is lacking (3:18)³⁷ and also to accept his loving rebukes and discipline (3:19a). These admonitions conclude with an explicit command to be earnest and repent: ζήλευε οὖν καὶ μετανόησον (3:19b). Since Hughes is of the opinion that

³⁵ While cold or hot water is desirable for various purposes, lukewarm water is so undesirable and useless to Christ that it warrants being vomited (cf. D. Aune, Revelation 1-5, p. 258); lukewarmness seems to indicate instability, ineffectiveness and unfaithfulness.

³⁶ While the Laodicean church considers itself to be rich materially (cf. G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation, p. 304), or spiritually (cf. D. Aune, Revelation 1-5, p. 259), Christ points out its poverty and blindness to its true condition.

³⁷ The church of Laodicea is counseled to obtain from Christ three essential commodities that are expressed in metaphoric terms: 1) gold — that they might be truly rich; 2) white garments — that they might be clothed with garments that symbolize purity and that their shame of nakedness might not be manifest; and 3) medication — that they might regain their vision (cf. D. Aune, Revelation 1-5, p. 260).

the verb in the command “to be earnest” (ζήλευε) has a common root with the adjective that is used for “the church not being hot” (οὔτε ζεστός), he concludes that the church of Laodicea is commanded to “be hot, fervent, on the boil and by implication, cease being lukewarm.”³⁸ One may question this opinion and the implications drawn by Hughes, since it would imply that Christ wanted the church of Laodicea only to be “hot,” which would contradict the statement of the text that the church of Laodicea could be either hot or cold (ὄφελον ψυχρὸς ἢς ἢ ζεστός). The desire of Christ, expressed metaphorically, is that the church of Laodicea would be known for being hot or cold (3:15), which implies purposefulness and effectiveness. Their repentance then would imply turning away (μετανοήσου) from lukewarmness (i.e., ineffectiveness) with zeal and earnestness (ζήλευε) in the performance of the tasks expected of them as a church.

Tied with the explicit imperative to the church of Laodicea to repent is a warning of impending rejection (3:16)³⁹ and an invitation to intimate fellowship with Christ, perhaps intended to incite repentance (3:20); a promise of reward to the faithful ones (3:21); and again, as in every letter, a “hearing formula” to stimulate positive attention and response to the call to repentance (3:22).

C. Repentance Motif in the Visions

Embedded in the visions of the Apocalypse of John are passages that underscore the command to some in the churches of the Apocalypse to repent. Even though there is no explicit command (as in the letters) to any of the seven churches to repent in the passages about to be

³⁸ P. E. Hughes, The Book of Revelation, p. 67.

³⁹ The possibility of rejection by Christ is a threat to two of the Asian churches: the Ephesian church is warned about the removal of its lampstand (2:5); and the Laodicean church is threatened with being spewed out (3:16).

considered, those already commanded to repent in the letters are undoubtedly intended to take further warning from later references to the theme and from the responses to judgment that are later described.

1. Response to Judgment in the Opening of the Seals (6:15-17)

The first observable response to judgment is found in the narrative which contains the opening of the seven seals. Here, responding to the terrible destruction that has occurred due to the opening of the six seals by the Lamb (6:1-14), the recipients of judgment (including the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, slaves and free people) all call for a place to hide from God and from the wrath of the Lamb (6:15:17). Of significance is the observation that these recipients of divine judgment, which include all classes of people, are the same as the group of people mentioned as allies of “the beast” (cf. 13:15-16; 19:18-19); they thus function as enemies of God and his people.⁴⁰

One can understand the motivation for hiding from the unbearable wrath of God.⁴¹ However, of interest here is the implication that these people seek to avoid plagues that are meant to serve as warnings from God that lead to repentance (cf. 9:20-21; 16:9).⁴² Obviously lacking in this judgment scene is the positive response of repentance. As Mounce notes, “Better death by a

⁴⁰ See D. Aune, Revelation 6-16, p. 419.

⁴¹ D. Aune, Revelation 6-16, p. 420 and R. Mounce, The Book of Revelation, p. 152, both note that the hiding in 6:15-17 is an allusion to Isa 2:19-21, and that the primary reason for fleeing from the divine presence is to avoid judgment (cf. Gen 19:17; Ps 68:1; Hos 5:3; Zech 14:5).

⁴² Cf. D. Aune, Revelation 6-16, p. 419. In the Apocalypse of John, the outpouring of wrath in the letters and in the judgment narratives of the visions serves the purpose of punishment for the unrepentant (cf. 2:5b, 16, 22-23; 3:3; 19:21; 20:7-10), but it also provides a stern warning to the survivors (cf. 2:23b; 11:13).

crushing avalanche than face the wrath of the Lamb.”⁴³ Their vain efforts are well described by

Roloff :

They hid anxiously in the caves and fissures of the mountains — obviously not to protect themselves from external bodily dangers but rather to escape the look of the judge of the world. . . . Desperately they all ask the mountains and the rocks to bury them (Hos 10:8; cf. Luke 23:30), so that they will not have to confront the One seated on the throne and the Lamb, but in vain.⁴⁴

In this judgment narrative there is an echo of the possibility and danger of failing to repent, a danger against which the sender of the letters warned in several of the letters to the churches: the churches of Ephesus, Pergamum and Sardis would suddenly be visited in judgment if they failed to repent (2:3, 16; 3:3); Jezebel and her children would suffer judgment if they remained unrepentant (2:21-23). This echo in the visionary section serves as a reminder as well as a stern warning to elicit the response of repentance on the part of those in the churches who have been unfaithful to their mandate. That the plagues of judgment in the Apocalypse are not meant to be ends in themselves, but are meant to be stern messages of warning from God intended to produce repentance is well observed by Aune.⁴⁵

2. Response to Judgment in the Series of the Trumpet Plagues (9:20-21)

Rev 9:20-21 appears to be a conclusion, as well as a response by the survivors, to the entire series of six trumpet plagues in Rev 8:7-9:19. This is one of the instances in the Apocalypse of John where explicit mention is made of a failure to repent in spite of divine

⁴³ R. Mounce, The Book of Revelation, p. 152. See also P. Hughes, The Book of Revelation, p. 91f., who notes that “to be crushed by the mountains and rocks will seem far preferable to meeting with the Creator and his judgment which none can stand.”

⁴⁴ J. Roloff, The Revelation of John, pp. 92-93.

⁴⁵ See D. Aune, Revelation 6-16, p. 419.

judgment (cf. 16:8-11, 17-21).⁴⁶ Despite the fact that these survivors had witnessed the terrible destruction of others (which should have served as a stern warning to them), they refused to repent of the works of their hands (οὐδὲ μετενόησαν ἐκ τῶν ἔργων τῶν χειρῶν αὐτῶν).⁴⁷ As a result of their lack of repentance,⁴⁸ they did not stop worshiping demons, and idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood; nor did they repent of their murders, their magic arts, their sexual immorality or their thefts. Included in the list are vices for which people in the churches of Pergamum and Thyatira are commanded to repent (cf. 2:14-16, 20-24). The punishments here reinforce the earlier command to the churches to repent of religious infidelity shown in eating food sacrificed to idols and engaging in sexual immorality.

In this instance, it is obvious that the plagues of judgment are not just punishments expressing divine vindictiveness; rather “they are a summons to metanoia.”⁴⁹ On the one hand they serve as a clear demonstration of divine power against a hostile humanity; but on the other hand they are meant to provide an incentive to repentance.⁵⁰ The partial character of divine judgment, as Hughes notes, provides the survivors with an opportunity for a change of heart

⁴⁶ Cf. D. Aune, Revelation 6-16, p. 541. However, for G. K. Beale, Revelation, p. 517, that judgment is meant to provoke repentance applies only to those who have the seal of God. So for these ones who failed to repent, as in the case of the plagues of Egypt (Exod 14:4-8, 17), judgment serves the purpose of hardening their hearts.

⁴⁷ The phrase τῶν ἔργων τῶν χειρῶν αὐτῶν is likely an echo of a stereotypical semitic phrase that often refers to idols as lifeless, impotent, manufactured objects (e.g., Deut 31:29; 1 Kgs 16:7; 2 Kgs 22:17). See D. Aune, Revelation 6-16, p. 541.

⁴⁸ ἵνα, here in 9:20b, introduces a result clause (cf. D. Aune, Revelation 6-16, p. 541).

⁴⁹ W. Harrington, The Apocalypse of John, p. 113.

⁵⁰ Cf. J. Roloff, The Revelation of John, p. 119.

(μετάνοια), as well as being an unmistakable warning of the doom awaiting the impenitent.⁵¹

Nevertheless, these survivors responded to judgment by refusing to repent.

3. The Two Witnesses and Repentance (11:3, 13)

In two instances, the account of the two witnesses appears to indicate a connection between the theme of witness and the motif of repentance. As witnesses, their commission to prophesy includes that of being clothed in sackcloth (11:3), which is probably to exemplify the need for repentance and humility before God (cf. Isa 20:2; Zech 13:4; Mark 1:6).⁵² Also at the conclusion of the witnesses' prophetic ministry, which culminated in their resurrection and their enemies' destruction, the survivors of the destruction were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven (11:13). It is claimed by some exegetes that the faithful witness of these two witnesses brought about the repentance of the survivors which the earlier punitive plagues had failed to achieve.⁵³

Most commentators would agree that the garments of the two witnesses hint at the repentance motif; however, the question whose repentance is implied is often debated. For instance, Bauckham sees in the garments of the two witnesses an indication that the message of the two witnesses (which is not spelt out in the text) is to call people to repentance;⁵⁴ Hughes

⁵¹ P. E. Hughes, The Book of Revelation, p. 114f.

⁵² Cf. D. Aune, Revelation 6-16, p. 611.

⁵³ Cf. W. Harrington, The Apocalypse of John, p. 124. Also see G. Caird, The Revelation of St. John The Divine, p. 140, who thinks "fear," "worship," and "repent" are synonymous terms in the Apocalypse of John, and who also argues that "where retributive punishment had failed to bring men to repentance, the death of the martyrs would succeed."

⁵⁴ R. Bauckham, "The Conversions of the Nations," in The Climax of Prophecy, p. 278. Also see W. Harrington, The Apocalypse of John, p. 121 and J. Roloff, The Revelation of John,

notes that their being clothed in sackcloth signifies that they themselves stand for those who have repented,⁵⁵ and Satake argues that the two witnesses (according to the narratives) are not in any way concerned with securing the repentance of their enemies; rather, they simply act as God's agents in judgment.⁵⁶ In response to these suggestions, it should be noted that the lack of repentance on the part of survivors in the Apocalypse as a whole, and the ambiguity of the message of repentance by the two witnesses, would discourage one from regarding the two witnesses as preachers of repentance. Nevertheless, one cannot miss the link between the theme of witness and the motif of repentance, which is strongly emphasized in the Apocalypse of John.

As for the suggestion that the response of the survivors in 11:13 is that of repentance, one should exercise caution in any attempt to equate being terrified and giving glory to God with sincere repentance which leads to conversion.⁵⁷ Again, it should be noted that the general impression that one gets from reading the Apocalypse of John is of a lack of repentance even when it is explicitly called for. As Aune observes, if the eschatological judgment of God has in fact arrived according to the visions of the Apocalypse (chapters 6-20), the real possibility of repentance or conversion in 11:13 would be difficult to establish.⁵⁸ Perhaps in an attempt to harmonize this perceived lack of repentance with the possibility of repentance, especially in Rev

p. 132.

⁵⁵ P. E. Hughes, The Book of Revelation, p. 123.

⁵⁶ A. Satake, Die Gemeindeordnung in der Johannes Apokalypse, pp. 119-33.

⁵⁷ See R. J. Bauckham, "The Conversion of the Nations," in The Climax of Prophecy, pp. 238-337, who champions the view that the response of the survivors who were terrified and gave glory to God (Rev 11:13) is that of repentance that leads to conversion.

⁵⁸ D. Aune, Revelation 6-16, p. 827.

11:13, Mounce considers the response of the survivors of 11:13 as a temporary repentance and conversion (linking 11:13 with 16:8-9). Thus Mounce writes:

Following the great earthquake of 11:13, the nations were “dazzled into homage and conversion” — a temporary condition at best — but now knowing full well that it is God himself who controls the plagues, they refuse to repent but resort to blasphemy (in 16:8-9).⁵⁹

Mounce’s approach is certainly questionable, as it requires us to see not only a connection but a progression between the two pericopes (11:13 and 16:8-9), which the author of the Apocalypse may not have intended. Besides, a similar response to that of 16:8-9 was already given in 9:20-21, followed by consequences that serve as a warning to those in the churches who need to repent.

Obviously, there is a connection between the activities of the two witnesses, the response of the survivors of the plagues of judgment, and the motif of repentance. Undoubtedly, in a book addressed to the seven churches, the theme of repentance serves as a warning to the readership of the Apocalypse (the churches) to exhibit a spirit of repentance (especially in areas in which they have been unfaithful). The churches are to learn from the example of the “two witnesses” who wore “sackcloth” the necessity of a witnessing church being marked by repentance. It takes a repentant church to be an effective and faithful witness.

4. The Angel and the Call to Repentance (14:6-7)

In a visionary context, John saw an angel who had the eternal gospel (ἔχοντα εὐαγγέλιον αἰώνιον) to proclaim to the inhabitants of the earth. Flying in midair, this angel, in light of the impending judgment, commands his audience to fear God and give him glory

⁵⁹ R. Mounce, The Book of Revelation, p. 296.

(φοβήθητε τὸν θεὸν καὶ δότε αὐτῷ δόξαν) and also to worship (προσκυνήσατε) the one who has created the heavens and the earth (14:6-7).

Much discussion has centered around the character of the “gospel” proclaimed by the angel, and the meaning of the three commands of the angelic pronouncement (φοβήθητε τὸν θεὸν καὶ δότε αὐτῷ δόξαν, ὅτι ἦλθεν ἡ ὥρα τῆς κρίσεως αὐτοῦ, καὶ προσκυνήσατε). Is the gospel proclaimed by the angel good news or bad news? Also, by asking his audience to fear God, give glory to him and worship him, is the angel calling for repentance and conversion?

As for the εὐαγγέλιον of the angel, an important lexicographical problem to note is whether the infinite εὐαγγερίζειν here means “to tell good news” and the noun εὐαγγέλιον means “good news,” or whether both verb and noun are here neutral — in the sense that the verb simply means “to proclaim a message” (whether good or bad) and the noun also simply means “a message” (whether positive or negative).⁶⁰ Another important factor to consider is the context of judgment in which the εὐαγγέλιον is proclaimed in Rev 14:6-7.

Taking εὐαγγέλιον strictly as good news despite the context of judgment in Rev 14:6-7, Harrington links the “eternal gospel” of the angel with the “little scroll” of Rev 10:1, 2, 7 which he claims contains the good news of the mystery of God revealed to the prophets (10:7) and proclaimed to the inhabitants of the earth (14:6).⁶¹ Even the judgment announced by the angel, according to Harrington, should be regarded as good news, as it is designed for the removal of the destroyers of the earth (11:18).⁶² Roloff would like to see both good news and bad news in

⁶⁰ D. Aune, Revelation 6-16, p. 825.

⁶¹ W. Harrington, The Apocalypse of John, p. 149.

⁶² W. Harrington, The Apocalypse of John, p. 151.

the eternal gospel proclaimed by the angel. Reading Isa 52:7 into the context of Rev 14:6-7, he argues that εὐαγγέλιον is the message of God's coming for judgment and salvation.⁶³

If we focus primarily on the immediate context in which both εὐαγγέλιον and εὐαγγελίσαι are used in Rev 14:6-7, the wrathful nature of the angel's commission and "gospel" is suggested.⁶⁴ It is with judgment in view (ὅτι ἦλθεν ἡ ὥρα τῆς κρίσεως αὐτοῦ) that the angel proclaims his gospel, and warns his audience to take positive action (14:7); the succeeding verses (14:8-11) underscore that the angel's gospel bears a penal character; and the rest of the chapter (14:14-20) highlights the judgmental nature of the gospel which is introduced in v. 6 and further elaborated in vv. 10-11.⁶⁵ Thus in this context of impending judgment, as in other judgment scenes already considered, the angel makes an appeal for repentance and conversion to the God who created heaven and earth.⁶⁶ The urgency of the call for repentance and conversion implies that the day of God's judgment of the world has arrived. While the command to repent is explicitly stated in this judgment scene (14:6-7), the negative response from the objects of divine wrath is expressed later (cf. 16:8-11, 17-21). For the sake of John's readership, especially those in the churches of Asia Minor who have failed in their deeds (according to the letters), one observes the relevance of this urgent call for repentance, even though in the first instance it is directed to "the inhabitants of the earth." Without equating the repentance of members of the

⁶³ J. Roloff, The Revelation of John, p. 174f.

⁶⁴ Incidentally, a similar portrayal of angels as instruments of God's wrath is found in the case of the three messengers of woes in Rev 8:13ff.

⁶⁵ Cf. G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation, p. 748; and G. B. Caird, A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John The Divine, p. 183.

⁶⁶ D. Aune, Revelation 6-16, p. 825; and W. Harrington, The Apocalypse of John, p. 151.

Church with that of “the inhabitants of the earth,” it should be emphasized that the call for repentance is applicable to all who need to repent (in the letters as well as the visions of the Apocalypse); and its mention in the Apocalypse is, of course, intended for the readers of the book.

5. Response to the Judgment of the Seven Bowls of God’s Wrath (16:8-11, 17-21)

That several of the judgment scenes of the Apocalypse are intended to elicit a positive response of repentance is implied in John’s record of the last plagues of judgment. As in 9:20-21, here in the sixteenth chapter of the Apocalypse the motif of repentance features prominently in the context of divine punishment,⁶⁷ first, in connection with the fourth and fifth bowls of wrath (16:8-11), and then in relation to the seventh bowl of wrath (16:17-21). Once again, however, a lack of repentance marks the response of the recipients and survivors of divine wrath.

In response to the fourth bowl of wrath (16:9), the objects of God’s wrath, who were seared with intense heat, cursed the name of God (ἐβλασφήμησαν τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ θεοῦ)⁶⁸ and did not repent so as to glorify him (καὶ οὐ μετενόησαν δοῦναι αὐτῷ δόξαν). In contrast to the celebration of divine justice found in several of the worship scenes of the Apocalypse (cf. 11:16-18; 15:2-4; 16:5-7; 19:1-2), these ones refused to give glory to God.

Similarly, in response to the fifth bowl of wrath (16:10-11), recipients of divine punishment gnawed their tongues in agony (ἐμασῶντο τὰς γλώσσας αὐτῶν ἐκ τοῦ πόνου),

⁶⁷ Cf. D. Aune, Revelation 6-16, p. 889.

⁶⁸ The character of the beast as one who blasphemes and curses the name of God and his throne is reflected in the response of the recipients of divine wrath (cf. 13:1, 5, 6; 17:3). This type of response, thus, forms a distinctive motif in Revelation 13 and 16 (cf. D. Aune, Revelation 6-16, p. 889).

cursed the God of heaven (καὶ ἐβλασφήμησαν τὸν θεὸν τοῦ οὐρανοῦ), and did not repent of their works (καὶ οὐ μετενόησαν ἐκ τῶν ἔργων αὐτῶν). That they did not repent of their works echoes the stubbornness of the survivors of Rev 9:20-21.

The response to the seventh and final plague (16:21) is not any different from the response to the fourth and fifth bowls of wrath (16:9-11). Due to the intensity and climactic nature of the last plague, recipients of divine judgment cursed God (καὶ ἐβλασφήμησαν οἱ ἄνθρωποι τὸν θεὸν ἐκ τῆς πληγῆς τῆς χαλάζης, ὅτι μεγάλη ἐστὶν ἡ πληγὴ αὐτῆς σφόδρα). An implication here is that they, like other objects and survivors of divine judgment, refused to submit to the intended purpose of judgment: they refused to repent (οὐ μετενόησαν). As Roloff notes, “even under the final, most severe blows of judgment . . . they reject repentance and maintain their no to God.”⁶⁹ The inability of judgment to produce repentance has led many commentators to seriously question the goal of judgment in the Apocalypse of John. Thus some have drawn the conclusion that the goal of judgment is not repentance but destruction. Beale, for instance, writes:

At the least the plagues served as warnings though they were not intended to have a redeeming effect but a damning effect. . . . The “plagues” were never intended to cause the vast majority of idolaters to “repent” of worshiping demons, but only have the effect that those “not having the seal of God” remain in their hardened condition (cf. 9:4).⁷⁰

It is true that judgment produces destruction in the Apocalypse (cf. 18:8; 20:13-14); however, it must also be noted that even if repentance, as an intended goal of judgment, is not achieved in the Apocalypse of John, that does not negate the understanding that punishments, like

⁶⁹ J. Roloff, The Revelation of John, p. 192.

⁷⁰ G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation, p. 517.

warnings (cf. 3:21-23; 9:20-21), are intended to elicit a positive response of repentance. That judgment did not bring its objects to repentance is the responsibility of the recipients and survivors of judgment themselves. Despite all punishments and warnings, they simply refused to repent. In relation to John's readership, it is observable that the reality of judgment, as presented in the visions, is expected to shape a positive ethical response of the Asian churches to the messages of the Apocalypse. While for some it is continued faithfulness, for others it is repentance.

Conclusion

The command to repent features prominently in both the letters and visions of the Apocalypse. In its paraenetic function, the "hearing formula" calls the attention of each church in its witness as a "lampstand" to hear the voice of the Spirit and so underscores the words of encouragement, comfort, rebuke, warning, and promise which are intended to elicit a response of repentance from the churches that received the Apocalypse of John.

An explicit command to repent is given to five of the seven churches. The call to repentance in the letters is usually preceded by references to something that the writer of the letters "has against" the church in question (ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ in 2:4, 14, 20). For the church of Ephesus, it is the loss of first love (2:4); for the church of Pergamum, it is compromise with those who hold the teachings of Balaam and the Nikolaitans (an indication of religious infidelity, idolatry and sexual immorality) (2:14-15); for the church of Thyatira, it is the tolerance of Jezebel who through her teaching led some into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols (2:20); for the church of Sardis, it is the failure to produce deeds that are perfect in the sight of God (3:2); and for the church of Laodicea it is being lukewarm in its tasks (3:15). To reveal

not only the necessity but the character of repentance, complementary imperatives are employed by the author of the Apocalypse. The church of Ephesus is to remember and return to its previous state, thus living up to and recapturing earlier moral and spiritual standards (2:5); the church of Sardis is to wake up from its slumber, strengthen what remains, and remember and obey what it heard previously (3:2-3); and the church of Laodicea is to become earnest (3:19). In all of these exhortations there is a challenge to change to behavior that is in keeping with the faithful witness of Jesus, to live up to what the Church is called upon to be and do.

It is in the context of the call to repentance that both warnings and promises are issued to the “overcomers” (2:5-7, 16-17, 21-29; 3:2-6, 19-22). There is an indication that the “overcomers” in some of the churches are those who respond positively to the call to repentance. One cannot miss, then, the connection between the mandate to overcome and the call to repentance.

With the churches that are rebuked and commanded to repent (in the letters) still on the mind of the author of the Apocalypse, further attention is given to the motif of repentance in the visionary section of the Apocalypse.⁷¹ As was the case with the five churches that are called to repentance, an explicit command in the visionary section is given to “the inhabitants of the earth” to repent (cf. Rev 14:6-7). The call to repentance is implied in some of the narratives of judgment, which are meant to serve as warnings (9:20-21; 16:9). However, the response of the objects and survivors of divine wrath in the visions (as in the case of Jezebel in the letters — 2:21) is consistently that of a failure to repent. This is evidenced particularly in the response to the

⁷¹ Clearly the command to repent is first and foremost, in the letters, directed to members of the churches of Asia Minor as the primary recipients of the Apocalypse.

judgment plagues found in the opening of the seals (6:15-17), the blowing of the trumpets (9:20-21), the vindication of the two witnesses (11:13), and the outpouring of the bowls of wrath (16:8-11, 17-21). Lack of repentance, for the churches castigated in the letters, is characterized by a refusal to discontinue activities that are contrary to the task of bearing faithful witness to Jesus. However, for those in the judgment narratives who serve as a warning to those in the churches who need to repent, it amounts to outright blasphemy and rebellion against God.

CONCLUSION: HIGHLIGHTS AND SUMMARIES OF RESULTS

The studies embarked upon in this dissertation have shown that the Apocalypse of John reflects a broad understanding of the functions and tasks of the Church, and that these can be seen as converging under the mandate of the Church to maintain faithful witness to Jesus Christ. These observations are worth highlighting and summarizing in this concluding section.

In the first chapter of this dissertation it was demonstrated that the writing of the Apocalypse was prompted by ethical concerns and considerations; the Apocalypse has a focus on ethical instruction, not just on eschatological prediction. Thus, in the letters we note criticisms, cautions, counsels, and commands that have ethical significance. Even in the visions we note an underlying ethical understanding as to what the Church ought to be and do. Throughout the Apocalypse, we observe the connection between the contents of the revelatory visions and their functions in terms of provoking an ethical response.

The extent to which the functions and tasks of the Church are varied is made evident both in the first chapter of this dissertation, which provides an enumeration of the various tasks of the Church in the Apocalypse, and in the subsequent chapters, which discuss dominant tasks as well as related functions of the Church mandated in the Apocalypse of John. A comprehensive list of functions and tasks of the Church identified and discussed in this dissertation includes the following: reading, hearing and obeying the contents of the Apocalypse, especially as attention is given to what the Spirit says in the Apocalypse; functioning as a community loved and delivered from sin, and thus expected to maintain purity of life and teaching; shunning all forms of perversion and deception; awaiting with preparedness the imminent return of Jesus Christ; mediating the prophecies of the Apocalypse; bearing faithful witness to Jesus with patient

endurance even in the midst of perversion and persecution; being an overcomer; offering true worship (as opposed to idolatry) to God and the Lamb; singing hymns and offering prayers of intercession to God; serving God as a kingdom and priests; and responding positively to the call for repentance, especially when there is failure in any of the primary tasks of the Church.

In our discussion of the theme of worship, it became obvious that the mandate to worship is a major theme that features prominently in at least twelve chapters of the Apocalypse, excluding the opening and concluding chapters of the Apocalypse (1-3; 20-22); it embraces several related tasks of the Church, and it is vitally connected with the mandate of the Church to maintain faithful witness to Jesus. Worship includes the offering of prayers and singing of hymns in the Apocalypse of John. Prayer is seen to contribute to the process of divine justice (cf. 11:15-19; 15:1-4; 16:5-7). In hymns, the attributes, activities and worthiness of the objects of worship (God and the Lamb) are affirmed. In terms of the relationship between the mandate to worship and other tasks of the Church in the Apocalypse, worshipers are notably characterized by victory (cf. 7:9-10; 11:16-18; 12:10-12; 14:1-5; 15:14), purity (cf. 7:9-10, 14; 14:1-5; 15:4; 16:5), and patient endurance of hardship and even martyrdom (cf. 13:10, 15; 20:4). However, the worship mandate does not embrace as many related tasks as does the mandate to witness.

The relationship between the mandate to worship and the task of witness is of crucial significance for our attempt to discover the primary mandate of the Apocalypse of John. It is noted that the themes of witness and worship (both of which feature prominently in the Apocalypse) intersect at several points. 1) As a witness to the churches, John receives the visions and the messages of his Apocalypse on the Lord's Day (1:9) in the context of worship. 2) The Apocalypse itself, as a witness document, is meant to be read aloud in the context of worship

(1:2-3). 3) Worshipers in the Apocalypse are also designated as witnesses who secured victory through their patient endurance and faithful witness (7:9-10; 12:10-12). 4) Those rewarded by God are identified as true worshipers as well as faithful witnesses: they were beheaded because of their testimony to Jesus and they are known for their refusal to worship the beast or his image (cf. 20:4). 5) In the case of the two witnesses, they were commissioned in a context that speaks of both the preservation and desecration of worship (11:1-3); also their prophetic ministry, suffering, death and divine vindication culminated in worship of the God of heaven (11:7-13; cf. 11:15, 16-18). 6) The task of witness appears to reckon seriously with the demands of true worship (13:1-18; 14:9-12). 7) Both the faithful witnesses and the true worshipers of the Lamb share a similar fate of martyrdom (examples include the two witnesses in 11:1-14; the slain and victorious witnesses in 20:1-4; and those with the mark of the beast in 13:7-10, 14-18). 8) Faithful witness, as indicated in our examination of the theme of witness, is defined in part by a refusal to worship the beast or his image (cf. 13:12-16; 20:4); true worship appears as one of the components of faithful witness that attracts hardship and martyrdom.

In terms of the structure of the Apocalypse and the distribution of materials relating to the witness motif, one observes several indicators that point to the theme of witness as a unifying factor. 1) John, the author of the Apocalypse, is a witness to the visions of the Apocalypse, in connection with the word of God and the witness (μαρτυρία) of Jesus Christ (cf. 1:2, 9). 2) Jesus Christ, the sender of the Apocalypse, is identified as the faithful witness (ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστός cf. 1:5); with this designation the themes of faithfulness and truthfulness combine to establish the authenticity of the Apocalypse (cf. 3:14; 19:11). 3) The Apocalypse is sent to seven churches of Asia Minor that are designated by the lampstand symbol (cf. 1:20; 2:11), which

speaks of the witnessing task of each church; and as a symbol of witness for each church, the lampstand suggests that the nature and demands of the church's witness are spelled out in the issues addressed in the letters to the seven churches. 4) In both the introduction and conclusion of the Apocalypse, where the worship motif is notably absent (1:1-3; 22:6-21), the prominence of the witness motif is linked with the legitimacy and authenticity of the Apocalypse. 5) In the first three chapters, both Jesus Christ and Antipas serve as examples of faithful witness for the churches that receive the Apocalypse's letters and visions. 6) Throughout his Apocalypse, John speaks of the witness that is borne by Jesus (1:2; 11:7; 12:11; 20:4), and he is equally concerned about the witness that is borne to Jesus (12:17; 14:12; 17:6; 19:10; 20:4). 7) Thus special attention is given by John to individuals who are designated as witness(es) of Jesus (e.g., John in 1:2, 9; Antipas in 2:13; slain witnesses in 6:9-11; 20:4; and the two witnesses in 11:1-14). 8) It is important to note the manner in which the mandate to witness connects with and, in fact, contains several of the tasks related to the mandate of worship. Such tasks include exhibiting purity, being an overcomer, shunning falsehood and deception, exercising patient endurance, and maintaining faithfulness.

In our search for a unified mandate of the Church in the Apocalypse of John, we may note the attempt by Thompson to demonstrate that "the language of worship" plays an important role in unifying the Apocalypse of John and, thus, in making the Apocalypse coherent in terms of both form and content.¹ He observes the dominant presence of "liturgical language" in the prologue

¹ L. Thompson, The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 53.

and the epilogue of the Apocalypse;² he cites a significant distribution of “liturgical language” in the visions;³ he detects a connection between the scenes of heavenly worship and the dramatic narratives of things to come;⁴ and he indicates that worship serves as the context and setting in which the eschatological narratives of the Apocalypse unfold.⁵

Thompson confirms our understanding that there is a major emphasis in the Apocalypse on the mandate to worship. However, it cannot be said that the mandate to worship has overshadowed the mandate to witness. In fact, the theme of witness has an overwhelming presence in the Apocalypse. 1) In both the prologue and epilogue of the Apocalypse one observes not only the presence of “liturgical language” (as Thompson notes), but also the emphasis that John places on the motif of witness, especially in the opening and closing chapters of the Apocalypse where the emphasis on worship is lacking. 2) Even in the visions that contain worship scenes, the focus on faithful witness which is introduced in the letters of the Apocalypse is retained. 3) In the eschatological expectations that are celebrated in the Apocalypse, one sees the insistence that faithful witness will be rewarded in the age to come. 4) While it is true that the Apocalypse of John is set in the context of worship, the task of true worship is tied to that of faithful witness throughout the Apocalypse, as we have seen. 5) True worship is defined, in part, and provoked by faithful witness (cf. 13:12-16; 20:4).

All of this suggests that the mandate of the Church to bear faithful witness to Jesus is

² L. Thompson, The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire, pp. 54-55.

³ L. Thompson, The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire, p. 56.

⁴ L. Thompson, The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire, 63-66.

⁵ L. Thompson, The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire, p. 72.

primary in the Apocalypse of John. While it is true that there is more than one task for the Church in the Apocalypse, John appears to be insistent that the role of ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστός is of central importance. The role of “faithful witness” which is borne by Jesus is to be sustained by the churches of Asia Minor. For those in these communities who have compromised their witness, the Apocalypse calls for repentance; and for those who remain faithful in their witness to Jesus (especially in the context of real or perceived persecution, as well as perversion), the Apocalypse issues encouragement and inspiration to maintain patient endurance and pure devotion to Jesus.

Contributions of this dissertation to the discussion of several issues which are central to the study of the Apocalypse of John are also worth underscoring. 1) Our attempt to show the varied and unified character of the mandate to witness reveals that the “witness” terminology of the Apocalypse functions in more ways than are often discussed and debated in scholarship. 2) It is indicated here that the prominence of the “witness terminology” and the dominance of the mandate of the Church to witness in the New Testament writings is significant in the Apocalypse of John. 3) Our focus on the mandate of the Church in the Apocalypse further strengthens the value and necessity of reading the Apocalypse of John with an eye to its practical relevance for its primary recipients; it also demonstrates that the Apocalypse contains rich materials that can enrich our study of ecclesiology. 4) Our understanding of the comprehensive character of the tasks and functions of the Church, as well as the interconnections between the tasks, obviously enriches our knowledge of the mandate of the Church in the Apocalypse of John and cautions against limited discussions that focus on parts of the mandate to the exclusion of other tasks. 5) Our attempt to cover the entire Apocalypse in our study of the mandate of the Church counters the usual tendency to limit discussions to the letters of the Apocalypse; obviously, both the letters and

visions of the Apocalypse reflect the tasks and functions of the Church. 6) Our thesis that “faithful witness” is of primary concern to John has implications for the discussion of issues such as the unity and purpose of the Apocalypse; the witness motif and its mandate may be considered as a unifying factor that connects the contents of the Apocalypse (in terms of the letters and the rest of the book); it may also be regarded as a dominant issue that contributed to the writing of the Apocalypse.

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