

**True and False Proclamation in the Book of Revelation**  
**(part 1)**

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Beginning from the twin convictions that the Book of Revelation exhibits considerable thematic cohesion and that all its major themes are shaped by carefully sustained use of literary contrasts, this article and its sequel in the next issue illustrate the usefulness of an overlooked reading-strategy by taking one such theme – *true and false proclamation* – and tracing its path from start to finish.

In my previous article devoted to the problem of deciding what the Book of Revelation is all about,<sup>1</sup> it was noted how recent literary and theological analysis of the content, structure or progress of this apocalyptic narrative rightly considers issues of characterisation, locale or plot. However, since this work chiefly entails dismantling the text into its component parts, that article deplored the absence of corresponding efforts to reassemble them into what, despite the incongruities of apocalyptic genre, still forms a remarkably cohesive composition. Accordingly, I contended that “*theme* is a major contributor to the linguistic unity of the book”<sup>2</sup> and as such, is an important heuristic category for appreciating the complex organisation of Revelation’s many parts into a whole. Necessary examination of thematic texture in the literary analysis of Revelation, it was also suggested, calls for patient exploration “of

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<sup>1</sup> ‘How to say what. Story and interpretation in the Book of Revelation’, *IBS* 23 (2001/3), pp.111-34.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.133,34.

the diverse thematic materials thoughtfully deployed and developed by John as facets of his story.”<sup>3</sup>

In the present article and its sequel, I go off exploring and chart the course taken through the text by one major theme which spans the entire Book of Revelation: *True and false proclamation*. After briefly sketching the contours of this double theme, its trajectory will be carefully plotted. Prolonged study of Revelation’s major themes<sup>4</sup> has convinced me that each is conditioned by an ever-present antithetical parallelism, so that everything which the story presents as worthy, good and true finds itself carefully and systematically counterfeited. I have made a case, elsewhere, for reading thematic development in Revelation in terms of the book’s pervasive and sophisticated use of antithetical parallelism, taking the narrative unit of Rev.13:1 – 14:5 as a sample. The following outline of the detailed argumentation presented there,<sup>5</sup> merely summarises for present purposes Revelation’s sophisticated deployment of this procedure and the mechanics of its impact on the reader:

The compositional significance of antithetical parallelism in Revelation may be deduced from the sheer number of connections between part and counterpart that are developed in the course of the

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.134.

<sup>4</sup> Undertaken for my doctoral thesis, *Parody in the Apocalypse. A literary-theological study of convergent antithetical themes in John’s Revelation*, which essentially studies inner-textual literary parody in Revelation.

<sup>5</sup> ‘Un procédé de composition négligé de l’Apocalypse de Jean : repérage, caractéristiques et cas témoin d’une *approche parodique*’, *Etudes Théologiques et Religieuses*, 77 (2002/4), pp.491-516. After explaining and justifying my refinement and development of E.-B. Allo’s ideas concerning the fundamental importance of antithesis in Revelation, and my adoption and methodological expansion of J. Roloff’s proposal that John is utilising a *parody approach*, the remainder of the article studies Rev.13:1 – 14:5 in antithetical correlation to 5:1-14 and 11:1-13, two passages which carefully anticipate and prepare for it.

narration. At the positive pole may be found those textual phenomena to which the story assigns the function and status of a model or exemplar (these may be characters, objects, slogans, titles, sub-plots, etc.). Every time that the developing narrative throws up a matching-piece which mimics some literary prototype already met by the reader, the parallelism's negative pole becomes visible and a part-to-counterpart relationship is created.

This parody approach is accessible and intelligible for readers because their seeing, hearing and imagining have been shaped by positive textual components before ever the negative forgeries appear. Some of this familiarisation relies on readers' prior knowledge of paradigms and their imitations borrowed and adapted, by Revelation, from *other* Jewish texts. Either way, it is the reader's resourcefulness in retaining prior information that determines 'competence' in spotting the counterfeit whenever it looms up in the story to mock its original by an indispensable combination of two types of literary correspondence: The first is an obligatory *resemblance* between an imitative entity and its model, allowing the reader to link the two features because of their clear congruity. The second is a contrary *dissimilarity* caused by discrepancies that permit the reader to differentiate between a simulation and its exemplar and to identify it as a mutant standing in fundamental antagonism to its original.

Using a strategy of literary distortion, Revelation continually takes literary prototypes in the text and fashions caricatures whose traits disfigure and alter the nature of their models. Despite surface affinities, these parodies are seen to differ from their patterns in such a way as to subvert them profoundly. Not that such pretensions will actually achieve anything in the end: For in spite of reversals inflicted in the course of the developing story, each model eventually overcomes the usurper that has tried to take its place until all the elements which constituted the parallelism's negative pole have been progressively neutralised.

Forearmed with this awareness of the *double treatment* which, it is my contention, John reserves for every major theme developed in his book, we may now pursue our aim which is to track one of them – the thematic vector of *true and false proclamation* – through the

entire text of Revelation. I begin with a synopsis of the chosen theme:

***True and false proclamation: a skeleton***

*At the very heart of the revelation of Jesus Christ entrusted to John is to be found a message intended for Churches whose allotted task, in turn, will be to proclaim it. However, at the various stages of unveiling, receiving, taking in and passing on of this good news, the truth of the communication is at stake and there is a real risk of distortion and misrepresentation: The true prophet may be replaced by an impostor with appropriate characteristics and plausible words; the Gospel may be perverted by seductive propaganda; signs meant to buttress and authenticate the true message may themselves be misleading and fraudulent. All this and more happens in the plot of Revelation, where appearances are deceptive and may conceal rather than reveal the truth. A scenario is created where the Lamb's faithful followers, obedient to the Word of God, are continually pitted against an enemy wielding lying counter-propaganda.*

*Anchored in the introduction (1:1-8) and in the inaugural vision/audition (1:9-20) is the theme of prophetic testimony to a revelation whose source is in God and in Jesus Christ (1:2,3). As the plot develops, a number of elements combine to flesh out this theme: The successive visions and especially auditions which will be described; various moments of proclamation, including particularly the messages to the seven Churches and the testimony of the two witnesses in ch.12; revelatory signs which impact the plot at crucial stages of its development; and finally, textual mechanisms which encourage the reader's understanding and interpretation of what is going on, notably of what God is saying and doing, and where truth is the issue constantly at stake.*

*Every one of these aspects is subject to careful caricature as false witnesses and false prophets practise their deceit in word or in action and threaten to engulf the truth; correspondingly, the faithful – whether Christians in Roman Asia or, by extension, today's reader – need to train their ears to hear, focus their gaze and muster wisdom by which to judge. Passages where the theme of true and false proclamation is most prominent include the following: 1:1-8; 2:1 – 3:22; 11:1-13; 13:11-15; 19:11-21; 21:1-10; 22:10-21.*

**Revealer, revelation and recipients (ch.1).** From the very outset, revealed truth is guaranteed by Jesus Christ the faithful and true witness (1:5) who commands John to write (1:11-19) and whose trenchant words are intended for the Churches (1:16). Twice in 2:1 – 3:22, a vision that carries the programme for the ensuing scenes, the Church at Pergamum is reminded of this incisive word (2:12,16); two matching references will later use the same sword-metaphor in the vision that heralds Revelation's closing scenes (19:15,21). In fact each and every vision in the book is prefaced by a Word of divine origin whose role is also to give its interpretation. Thus the importance of 1:12 is not to be underestimated, for here the very first thing John *sees* is the voice that addresses him: In other words, the object of the vision is strictly speaking this revealed Word.<sup>6</sup> Although the seer is important in his roles as secretary and spokesperson (1:2,4,9-10; cf. 22:8,18) and although an angelic mediator singles him out for receiving a communication which Christ has for his followers (1:1), yet he does not pose as the author of the message he bears: Instead, the ultimate source is clearly said to be God, the Risen Christ and the sevenfold Spirit.<sup>7</sup>

The mechanism which permits transmission of this revelation to the Churches (2:1 – 3:22) is that of a revelatory chain which, for Leonard Thompson, comprises six links: God-Jesus-angels-John-reader-hearer.<sup>8</sup> However, it is preferable to identify *seven* connecting links and to include the Spirit (or seven spirits, sevenfold Spirit); Thompson has overlooked the programmatic significance of 1:4,5 where the Spirit is associated both with the Eternal God and with Christ the faithful witness. By making explicit the combined roles of the Risen One and the Spirit, this text is an

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. R.H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, Grand Rapids, 1998<sup>2</sup>, p.196. Not until 9:17 will it be stated explicitly that John received revelation in a vision, εἶδον... ἐν τῇ ὁράσει.

<sup>7</sup> Thus E. Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Vision of a Just World*, Edinburgh, 1993, pp.137,38.

<sup>8</sup> *The Book of Revelation : Apocalypse and Empire*, Oxford/New York, 1990, p.178.

overture to the double refrain which will punctuate the seven oracles to the Churches: The Risen Christ will initiate all seven by ordering John to write and by dictating their content and he will gift each Church with a promise to the victor (the subject of both οἶδα and δώσω, 2:7, is unchanged throughout). However, it is the Spirit who will round off each communication and address each Church.

Four indicators in the text confirm the dignity of the Christians to whom this revelation is sent. Firstly, there is John's insistence that although he may be a seer, he is also one of them and thus shares the servant status (1:1), brotherhood and Christian experience (1:9) of the recipients. Secondly, an inaugural beatitude (1:3) explicitly promises a reward to those hearers who will heed and obey the prophecy. Thirdly, the imperatives which, in 1:11, govern the writing and dispatching of the verbal testimony, designate the faithful by name as the addressees of the revelation. And lastly the interpretation given to them concerning the mystery of the seven stars and seven lamp-stands, confirms them in their privileged role as beneficiaries of a divinely authorised message.<sup>9</sup>

These elements all give the Churches advance assurance of their active participation in witnessing (1:2,9) to the Jesus that all eyes will one day see (1:7). The Risen One's voice is characterised as ὡς φωνὴ ὑδάτων πολλῶν (1:15), a simile not clarified until 17:15<sup>10</sup> (ὕδατα ἃ εἶδες οὗ ἡ πόρνη κάθηται, λαοὶ καὶ ὄχλοι εἰσὶν καὶ ἔθνη καὶ γλῶσσαι). The point is that right from the start Revelation's universal scope is being assumed, before the sevenfold proclamations to a symbolically complete Church (2:1 – 3:22) make this clear. Positive universality is indispensable for grasping its parody when there emerges, in 13:5 (cf. 13:14), a rival campaign characterised as λαλοῦν μεγάλα καὶ βλασφημίας, which will seek to

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<sup>9</sup> Thompson, *ibid.*, p.179, also notes the last two of these four indicators.

<sup>10</sup> I owe my awareness of the correlation between 1:15 and 17:15 to E. Corsini, *L'Apocalypse maintenant*, Paris, 1984, p.85.

persuade the inhabitants of the earth (13:3,7-8,12ss) by universal claims imitating those of the prior revelation (see my discussion of ch.13 in part 2).

**Approval and censure, truth and lies (ch.2:1 – 3:22).** After the establishment, in ch.1, of the theme of a divine revelation transmitted to Churches whose task is to bear witness to it, these seven-proclamations-in-one<sup>11</sup> pursue the trajectory by expounding on the “revelation of Jesus Christ.” Straightaway, on the Lord’s Day when human hearts are scrutinised and their intentions revealed, the recipients are given to understand not only that the revelation is indeed for them but also that it concerns them intimately. For the members of the Churches, John’s writing both attests to God’s truth and spells out terrible consequences for any subtraction from or addition to its contents (1:18; cf. 22:18,19). Nonetheless, it is with the resurrected Jesus in person that they meet as they assemble on the Lord’s Day. So although John is a vital link in the revelatory chain, in the septet of oracles he disappears behind the figure of Christ;<sup>12</sup> his involvement is implicit, for the same Spirit who addresses the Churches (2:7 etc.) had taken hold of him (1:10), yet he stays as it were in the wings while the Risen One and the Spirit hold the stage.

Every oracle begins with words spoken by Christ (γράφον· Τάδε λέγει - 2:1 etc.) and ends with a repeated conclusion from the Spirit (ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει -

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<sup>11</sup> A key expression in the central oracle to Thyatira – γνώσκονται πᾶσαι αἱ ἐκκλησίαι (2:23) – justifies this description. Cf. Schüssler-Fiorenza, *op.cit.*, pp.46,47, who says “the so-called seven letters are... best understood as royal edicts or divine oracles... an integral part of the author’s overall visionary rhetorical composition.”

<sup>12</sup> As Thompson puts it (*op.cit.*, in *loc.*) “John’s subjectivity is buried within that narrated chain... the churches are not being guided and admonished by John but by the Christ whom John saw and heard.”

2:7 etc.).<sup>13</sup> The Risen Christ and the Spirit co-operate to reveal a communication of divine origin and authority and crucially, their tandem serves as an exemplar: This model team will be parodied, as we will see, by a counterfeit duo composed of a bogus resurrected one and a pseudo-spirit (13:1-18) united in the service of diabolic propaganda. For the moment it is sufficient to notice how another anti-team, comprising Balaam and Balak (2:14), acts as a precursor or first version of the two monsters.<sup>14</sup>

Repeating this or that aspect of Christ's prior titles or traits (drawn from 1:12-20), every oracle proceeds directly from the mouth of the Revealer (1:1,2) who has perfect knowledge of every Church's particular situation (2:2 etc.). In the opening message to Ephesus comes a refrain which, with variations, will punctuate all seven: οἶδα τὰ ἔργα σου (2:2). In each message negative or positive elements identified by Christ are highlighted, setting up a sliding-scale from praise for the good which should be pursued to blame for the evil that must be abandoned. This movement corresponds to the ambiguity of human existence and to the resulting ethical choices which Christians must make in the world.<sup>15</sup>

Revelation's constant intertwining of two contrasting threads, the genuine and the fraudulent, is fully operational at the heart of this first septet. A key term characteristic of *false* proclamation is ψευδεῖς, used as a sobriquet for various groups to be found in the

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<sup>13</sup> For J. Ellul, *L'Architecture en mouvement*, Paris, 1975, pp. 132,33, the messages are at one and the same time Jesus Christ's objective testimony and the Spirit's personification of a Word which all, in the Churches, are called upon to make their own. Similarly G.R. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, London, 1974, p.76.

<sup>14</sup> J.P.M. Sweet, *Revelation*, London, 1979 (in loc.), takes this duo selected from Israel's past to be a prefiguring of what he sees as a false king and a false prophet in ch.13.

<sup>15</sup> In the introduction to his commentary, *Revelation*, London, 1993, p.4, C. Rowland summarises the positive and negative characteristics church by church and finds John's report to be pastorally appropriate.



Churches. John applies it to the Nicolaitans (2:6) and their detestable actions and to teaching of similar character which surfaces in Pergamum (2:15). Meanwhile Jezebel who styles herself a prophetess (2:20) and has a following (2:22,23) is assimilated to a pseudo-prophetic figure in Israel's history, Balaam, whose doctrine some at Pergamum profess. The pseudo-apostles (2:2) are perhaps recognizable by their lack of deeds of apostolic legitimacy (τὰ σημεῖα τοῦ ἀποστόλου, II Co.12:12). To these fake apostles in Ephesus may be added the so-called Jews of Smyrna, whose words are mere βλασφημία (2:9), and those of Philadelphia – expressly labelled ψεύδονται – in their “synagogues of satan.” Sardis, meanwhile, is a community where the majority have besmirched their garments (cf. 3:4).

Whilst there is much more to Revelation's Jezebel than her prophetic traits convey,<sup>16</sup> these clearly tie her to a falsification of prophecy from which the believing community is never entirely free. In Matthew's version of his apocalyptic discourse, Jesus gives a threefold declaration of how false prophets and phoney christs will deceive many (Mt.24:5,11,24). Here, John's way of presenting Jezebel follows the logic of Dt.13, where a hallmark of false prophecy is said to be its incitement to worship other gods and thus to imitate the behaviour of pagan neighbours.<sup>17</sup> The effect of Jezebel's instruction is to lead the faithful astray (through fornication and eating meat from pagan temples, 2:20); later

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<sup>16</sup> For her key role among Revelation's female figures, cf. already Preston and Hanson, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine*, London, 1945, p.65. Despite her clear representative and symbolic value, recent exegesis has often seen in Jezebel a rival prophetess whom John lampoons, e.g. P. Duff, *Who Rides the Beast? Prophetic Rivalry and the Rhetoric of Crisis in the Churches of the Apocalypse*, New York, 2001, pp.15,16. For an audacious recent attempt to identify Jezebel as Paul's convert Lydia of Thyatira (cf. Acts 16), see Margaret Barker, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, Edinburgh, 2000, pp.96-102, especially p.100.

<sup>17</sup> Other texts that tackle the problem of true/false prophecy include Dt.18 and Jer.19. See Rowland, *op.cit.*, p.40.

subjects of *πλανῶ* will be the satan, his sidekicks and Babylon (12:9; 13:14; 18:23; 19:20; 20:3; 20:8; 20:10). Thus since Jezebel's function in the text is primarily that of a rival, bogus prophetic voice soon to be echoed by the false prophecy of the monster and its assistant (ch.13; cf. 19:20), she must be repudiated (2:20).

Only one lone human counterpart to all these companions in falsehood is named in the oracles, Antipas; he alone has reproduced Christ's witness and heeded the Spirit's voice. His depiction as ὁ μάρτυς μου ὁ πιστός μου, ὃς ἀπεκτάνθη παρ' ὑμῶν (2:13) seems designed to cast him in the mould of the *true* prophet,<sup>18</sup> as is shown by the fact that John appears deliberately to take his own stance where Antipas fell.

It should be noticed that it is *inside the Churches* where truth confronts deception and, from the seer's viewpoint, where Christ's Word echoed by the Spirit could well go unheard. In several oracles the problem is obviously that the congregations concerned allow verity and falsity to exist side by side, to such an extent that lies have the upper hand (in Sardis or Laodicea) or exert a significant influence (in Pergamum or Thyatira). Whereas the faithful hold out against falsehood in Smyrna, the devil in his characteristic roles as *agent provocateur*, legal adversary and fountain of all lies has nevertheless declared war on them (2:10); only the Philadelphians' unshakeable commitment to the truth (3:10) protects them.

All of this points up the problem of how the enlightened reader (ὁ ἔχων οὖς, 2:7 etc.) is to tell the real from the sham, exercising a discernment Jesus required of his own attentive hearers (ὁ ἔχων ὄτα ἀκούτω, Mt.11:15; 13:9,43). Such wisdom will

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<sup>18</sup> H. Kraft, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, Tübingen, 1974, p.64, reads μάρτυς as a technical term not for 'martyr' but for the prophet who bears witness and suffers for it, just as do the two prophesying witnesses of 11:3; this is consonant with the definition given later in 19:10 (ἡ γὰρ μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ ἐστὶν τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς προφητείας). Thus for Kraft, Antipas is a martyr in the sense of a suffering prophet.

prove essential amid the twists and turns of the later narrative.<sup>19</sup> Another requisite in the struggle against falsehood is the capacity for perseverance (ὑπομονή), a key concept in the message to the Church at Philadelphia. This quality takes its inspiration from the life and witness of Jesus, much as in the Pauline tradition: In II Th.3:5 the addressees are encouraged εἰς τὴν ὑπομονὴν τοῦ χριστοῦ – an endurance which Heb.12:2 sees encapsulated in the suffering of the cross.

To summarise, this first septet sets the Word of God against words which feign it. The battle is for the ears of Christians who cannot always rightly perceive a true word and who therefore risk making shipwreck of their faith and having their names erased from a book of life (also 13:8, 17:8, 20:12,15; 21:27; cf. Ex.32:32,33; Ps.69:28-29), whose only indelible entries belong to those who are constant to the end, when Messiah will confess their name before his Father (3:5, in an apparent echo of Jesus' words, cf. Mt.10:32/Lc.12:8). Believers have the task of making a good confession to the truth of their faith (2:13; 6:9; 11:7; 12:11,17; 17:6; 20:4), in emulation of the Confessor who once stood before Pontius Pilate (cf. I Ti.6:13).<sup>20</sup>

Since Messiah alone is the faithful witness (cf. 1:5), ὁ ἀληθινός (3:7), it is not fortuitous that the last of the seven oracles should state the Risen One to be Ὁ Ἀμὴν, ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστὸς καὶ ἀληθινός (3:14), thus underscoring his reliability as a witness and the trustworthiness of his testimony (cf. Ps.89:37; Pr.14:5,25;

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<sup>19</sup> 13:9 εἰ τις ἔχει οὖς ἀκουσάτω, 13:10 ὧδέ ἐστιν ἡ ὑπομονή, 13:18 ὁ ἔχων νοῦν; 14:12 ὧδέ ἡ ὑπομονή; 17:9 ὧδε ὁ νοῦς ὁ ἔχων σοφίαν.

<sup>20</sup> Compare A.A. Trites, *The New Testament Concept of Witness*, Cambridge, 1977, ch.10 'The Concept of Witness in the Book of Revelation', p.159 : "As in many of the writings of the Old and New Testaments, the word 'testimony' retains its juridical sense, and means the open confession of the truth."

Es.8:2).<sup>21</sup> Even so, right where the risen Christ knocks at the door (3:20), other counter-testimony is heard and whereas *he* knows perfectly the state of his Church, *she* alas is capable of ignorance of her sorry state (her faults are fourfold, 3:17). These are precarious circumstances; in the name of the Messiah who, as true wisdom, reproves and chastens the Church, John will undertake a rhetorical strategy using the counterfeit to parody the authentic in such a way as to ridicule compelling falsehoods which fascinate the Church and to shake out of their lethargy and self-satisfaction the blindest and deafest of believers, stirring them into making right choices.<sup>22</sup>

**Behind the scenes of Revelation (ch.4:1 – 5:14).** Several aspects of our theme undergo development in this important diptych. Here the reader first encounters the Lamb with seven eyes and seven spirits who will reveal God's designs. Of particular relevance is the inseparable nature of what is seen and heard (καὶ εἶδον, καὶ ἤκουσα, 5:1; 6:1, in two stages), where audition elucidates vision.<sup>23</sup> The same interpretative strategy will be indispensable to the reader later when faced with deceitful artifices that need to be unmasked (13:9ss,18; 17:9). Now is also the moment at which access is granted to the central zone where the seer receives revelation – the heavenly throne-room (4:2) where the scroll is unsealed and perused, as in a synagogue (5:1ff) with its altar (perhaps that reserved, later, for incense and prayer, 8:3ff).

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<sup>21</sup> In this regard see Mounce, op.cit., p.108; he takes the title ὁ Ἀμὴν to come from Isa.65:16.

<sup>22</sup> I lack Schüssler-Fiorenza's confidence (op.cit., p.137) that dissenting views of the state of the Asian Churches, which John might be combating, are capable of being reconstructed from this sevenfold oracle or that John, here, is establishing his ethos or credibility over against what remain, for the reader, ghostly opponents!

<sup>23</sup> Similarly Sweet, op.cit., in loc. R. Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, Edinburgh, 1993, p.185, shows how John metaphorically 'sees' everything said of the Lamb, dragon or whore and enables his reader to 'see' in turn.

The dragon, too, will soon strike the pose of ultimate revealer, showing that he possesses power, a throne and considerable authority (13:2). Yet despite having once been party to the celestial council (Jb.1:6-12; 2:1-7; Za.3:1-5), with the function of accuser, the dragon will not be able to shake off the verdict of condemnation which has befallen it, a sentence of exclusion from the divine presence (12:10) and of exile upon the earth (12:13). Nor will the spate of words it inspires (13:6ff) ever be compiled into anything like a rival book of destiny, for the seals of ch.6-10, whose rupture signifies the transmission of knowledge, attest that none may share the prerogatives of God who alone knows the secret of his actions and will only divulge it via the Lamb's action in breaking the seals. The issue here is authenticity; consequently it is only after the word of true witness has been spoken (11:7) that the rival version of the dragon and his understudies is heard, thus insuring its ineffectiveness in advance.<sup>24</sup>

**All are witnesses (ch.6:9-11).** The picture painted in this cameo reveals a characterisation of faithful witnesses as precise as it is significant: οἱ ἐσφαγμένοι] διὰ τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ διὰ τὴν μαρτυρίαν ἣν εἶχον. The question on their lips ( ἕως πότε;, 6:10) links them to the martyr-witnesses of the Old Covenant.<sup>25</sup> As vehicles for the Word of God and witness-bearers – implicitly, to Jesus Christ – their task is identical to the seer's (1:2) carried out, from Patmos, on behalf of his brothers. The expression in 1:9 is virtually identical, διὰ τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ. Moreover, these witnesses have given their lives just like the faithful Antipas who was killed (2:13); now ψυχὰί themselves, immolated like the Lamb (5:6) who breaks the

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<sup>24</sup> Compare Rowland, op.cit., p.83.

<sup>25</sup> At this point in his commentary, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine*, London, 1966, G.B. Caird gives a list of relevant OT texts: Pss.6, 13, 35, 74, 80, 89, 90, 94, as well as Isa.6:11, Jer.47:6, Hab.1:2 and most particularly, for Caird, Zac.1:12. For Trites, op.cit., p.162, this cry for justice must be set against a legal backdrop.

seals, they share his fate and enjoy his dignity. Their exemplary testimony, which still others will bear after them (6:11), is dependent on his, since in the initial revelatory chain he is designated ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστός (1:5).

Their white tunics (6:11) link these martyrs to those associated with the blood of the Lamb in 7:14. The trial which the latter endure (ἡ θλίψις ἡ μεγάλη) is simply an instance of that θλίψις... ἐν Ἰησοῦ (1:9) which every true witness is called upon to face (2:10), and the care the Lamb gives them (7:17) like the promises that the final vision will rehearse (21:3,4; 22:3-5) are their recompense for their sufferings. In sum the martyrs of 6:9-11, together with the 'blessed' of 7:9ff, form a preliminary sketch for the fuller characterisation reserved for the two witnesses in 11:3-12. It may even be that the remainder of the book's plot is played out within the time-frame which separates their plea for justice from its realization.<sup>26</sup>

(For a discussion of the role played by the theme of *true and false proclamation* in the rest of Revelation, see part 2 of this article in the next issue.)

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<sup>26</sup> J.P. Heil, 'The Fifth Seal (Rev 6,9-11) as a Key to the Book of Revelation', *Bib* 74, 1993, concludes his study (pp.242,43) by seeing in the prayer of 6:10, both the crux of the dilemma facing the Lamb's followers in 1:1 – 6:9, and also a sketch of the agenda for the rest of Revelation (which in essence answers this prayer).