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True and False Proclamation in the Book of Revelation (part 2)

Gordon Campbell

Driven by 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 pursues the reading-strategy adopted in part 1 and traces one such theme – *true and false proclamation* – through to the end of the book.

(For a brief justification of the approach adopted here, a preliminary sketch of the chosen theme and an exploration of its role in Revelation prior to 11:1, see part 1 of this article.)

Associates of the Faithful Witness (ch.11:1 – 12:18). The ministry of the two witnesses¹ prior to their demise (11:7) meshes with the experience of Old Covenant witnesses (11:5,6) whose testimony was regulated by the principle of double or multiple witness (No.35:30; Dt.17:6; 19:15)² – the plagues of 15:1ff will constitute a word like that of a Moses before Pharaoh, testifying against those who will not heed God, or like the affirmations of an

¹ Interpretative questions raised by the two witnesses well exceed the scope of this article. A good introduction to the critical issues and an in-depth treatment of 11:1-13 and its place within the account of the three woes, remains C.H. Giblin, 'Revelation 11.1-13: Its Form, Function, and Contextual Integration', *NTS* 30, 1984, 433-59.

² Thus Trites, *op.cit.*, p.168: " By means of dual evidence Christ's witnesses will sustain their case and thwart every accuser, including both the Roman delator and the arch-persecutor, Satan himself."

Elijah before Jezebel (confirmed by heavenly fire, or a sky without rain). The Gospels remind us, too, of how Jesus dispatched his disciple-spokesmen two by two (Lk.10:1). Olive trees in Israel (cf. Zac.4:2,3) or lamp-stands in the Church (11:4), these witnesses will receive the same portion as the Messiah; shamefully killed and dishonoured where he had been scourged and crucified (11:8), their lot will closely parallel his in four supplementary ways :-

- i) by the universal nature of their target audience that is, all humanity (11:9,10);³
- ii) by the resurrection which they, too, will undergo (11:11);
- iii) by their ascension in a cloud (11:12);⁴ and finally
- iv) by the fruit of their testimony, which is partial repentance (11:13).⁵

Such parallelism makes the witnesses participants in Christ's triumph; they belong to Jesus (1:5; 3:14), the witness faithful unto death and victorious over death (5:6-14), so their testimony and their life's work correspond to his.⁶

³ This is noted by M. Kiddle, *The Revelation of St. John*, London, 1940, p.176.

⁴ The reference is vague; it could echo Elijah's assumption or Jesus' ascension (II R.2:11; Lc.24:51 and Ac.1:9).

⁵ This improves on the total hardening of the survivors in 9:20! With R. Bauckham, *op.cit.*, p.280, a minority of interpreters read the 'fear' expressed here positively (it is a means to salvation) because, with the exception of the expression $\mu\eta\ \phi\omicron\beta\omicron\upsilon$ (1:17; 2:10), $\phi\omicron\beta\epsilon\iota\sigma\theta\alpha\iota$ is always positive in Revelation. However a contrary view is well defended by G.K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, Grand Rapids/Cambridge, 1999, pp.597-607.

⁶ Cf. $\eta\ \mu\alpha\rho\tau\upsilon\rho\iota\alpha\ \iota\eta\sigma\upsilon\varsigma$ which can mean either Jesus' own testimony (a subjective genitive) or the witness of others to him (an objective genitive).

Significant details of ch.12 carry the plot forward. The destiny of the male child (12:5ff), in conjunction with a second reference to Ps.2:8,9 (see also 2:26,27), anticipates the King of kings' victory over the kings of the earth (17:14); it also prepares, more immediately, for Michael's legal victory (12:10) which itself reflects the verdict secured by the faithful witness over against his enemies (19:11), in ratification of his triumph at the cross. As a result the satanic role of accuser, in heaven, can be declared to be defunct (12:10), even if the legal battle with Christians continues on the earth (as ch.13 will show), while the witnesses' earthly victory may already be counted upon as won (12:11).⁷ Those who have put their life on the line, whose conduct is epitomized as obedience to God's commands and loyalty to Jesus' testimony (12:17), take their stand alongside the martyr-witnesses of 6:9-11, 7:9ff and 11:3-12 and complete Revelation's characterisation of Christ's attestants. All have died and triumphed exactly as did their Lord, for Christ's past victory at Calvary has been renewed in theirs.

These various factors weigh more heavily with the reader than do the risk of imprisonment or the sword which every witness must face;⁸ the satan in John's story may captivate the vast majority of earth-dwellers, but his reprieve is only limited and since God no longer consults him, he remains a poor parody of Christians' advocate with the Father. It is thus a thwarted and defeated snake/devil/satan, ignominiously ejected from God's presence with his angels, who leads the whole earth astray (12:9). During the time-lapse given over to witnessing, he will indeed stalk the earth, pursue the woman and her offspring (12:13ss) and lurk by the edge

Two very recent interpretations share our approach: cf. Beale, op.cit., p.567, and now J.W. Marshall, *Parables of War: Reading John's Jewish Apocalypse*, Waterloo, 2001, pp.145,46: "The 'two witnesses' ... can be understood as minor types of Jesus who bear the witness that Jesus bore."

⁷ W.J. Harrington, *Revelation*, Collegeville, 1993, p.134, puts it rather nicely: "The victims become victors."

⁸ Similarly J. Roloff, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, Zurich, 1987, p.159.

of the sea (12:18). However, in the limited theatre of operations that are earth and ocean his stratagems (12:12) may be cheerfully endured; because of the cross, his 'victories' barely disguise his defeat and the faithful now face only a defending counsel (cf. I Jn.2:1,2).

An elaborate hoax (ch.13:1-18). If John's reader constantly bears in mind foregoing developments in the apocalyptic narrative, then it becomes feasible to grasp both the subtlety and scope of the double caricature of Jesus' testimony and his followers' witness which is about to be revealed: Bogus witnesses, phoney proclamation and fake miracles performed by false prophets⁹ all conspire to mount a counter-offensive to the revelation, transmission and confession of God's truth. Ch.11 has made it clear that faithful testimony to Jesus and satanic harassment of the witnesses run concurrently. It is vital to hold on to the thread of this plot, for idolatrous and cynical propaganda that parrots witness to the true God must not be mistaken for the real thing, as could all too easily happen in the complexities and ambiguities of life in John's narrative world. The issue is where to find truth and how to recognize it.¹⁰

For reasons of space we must take for granted, here, the second monster's close relationship to the first and their joint substitution for the dragon, as well as the way in which this monstrous duo parodies the Lamb;¹¹ this frees us to approach 13:1-18 mainly from the standpoint of the second monster and false prophet, a master deceiver who cajoles humans into worshipping the first beast. Essentially a false prophet (16:13; 19:20; 20:10), the second beast's

⁹ Counterfeit signs are always in the plural (13:14; 16:14; 19:20), whereas the singular σημεῖον refers to what John sees in his vision (12:1,3; 15:1). Compare P. Prigent, *L'Apocalypse de St. Jean*, Geneva, 2000³, pp.183,84.

¹⁰ See Rowland, *op.cit.*, p.114.

¹¹ On the latter point, see my article 'Un procédé de composition', *op.cit.* For the former, the exegetical tradition starts with Irenaeus and finds classical critical expression in the commentary of R.H. Charles, *The Revelation of St. John*, Edinburgh, 1920, p.357.

being, speech and actions all merit our attention. The mimicry of its two lamb-like horns obviously ape the Lamb but also convey deliberate guile: Since this monster has the dragon's voice, its horns identify it to the discerning reader as an opponent of the Word, a satanic propagandist hostile to God's true witness and to his fellow-witnesses.¹² The amalgam of matching horns and contradictory voice both hides and shows the antagonistic nature of a monster whose activity caricatures apostolic proclamation by mocking the ministry and authority of the Risen One's successors (13:12a), faking their accredited testimony to his resurrection (13:12b) and embodying a pseudo-messianic royalty which parodies the reign of God displayed in their signs and wonders (13:13).¹³

Looking more closely at the monsters' team-work, we discover in their combined actions as dummy risen one and sham spirit an imitation of the joint roles of Christ and the Spirit throughout the septet of oracles. As the Paraclete defers to Christ, so the second monster promotes its pseudo-truth by drawing people to the first (Jn.14:16-27). The land monster is an activist (13:12-16) in the cause of the sea monster and the dragon, and his deeds are those of a phoney spirit¹⁴ determined to copy prophetic inspiration by the Spirit of God. It performs in the presence of the first monster (13:12,14) just as true prophets do before the Lord of all the earth (11:4; cf. Elijah, I Ki.17:1, 18:15; the two witnesses, Zac.4:14), bolstering its message (13:13,14) with counterfeit miracles that evoke Elijah (cf. I Ki.18:38). It is an anti-spirit, breathing out a sort of life-giving infernal spirit (13:15), and a false prophet animating an icon by its trickery and gathering around it a sort of prophetic anti-community.

¹² Compare H.B. Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, London, 1907, p.169, and more recently Beasley-Murray, *op.cit.*, p.216.

¹³ Here I am following R.W. Wall, *Revelation*, Peabody, 1991, p.172, who locates in Acts each of the three aspects of apostolic ministry satirised here: (i) Ac.1:1-11; (ii) Ac.2:22-36; and (iii) Ac.2:14-21/5:12/ 15:4,12.

¹⁴ See the suggestive summary given by D. Ford, *Crisis!* (3 vols.), Newcastle, 1982, pp.571,72.

The second monster is thus a powerful propagandist and liar and a fitting antagonist for the Word of God, Jesus' prophetic witness.¹⁵ Closer attention to its characteristics bears this out. The true prophet exercises his role before God whose word he speaks and whose will he does. By contrast this impostor operates in presence of the sea monster (13:12,14; cf. 19:20) from which its authority is derived and to which it answers. It coaxes earth-dwellers into superstitious veneration of the monster with the healed wound (13:12), which is patently worship of a false crucified-and-risen one. Its propaganda is a counterfeit gospel backed up by the sort of equivocal signs warned about from the Pentateuch onwards (Ex.7:11; Dt.13:1) and associated with false messiahs or pseudo-prophets by Jesus (Mk.13:22 and par.) and by his apostles (2 Th.2:9,10).¹⁶ Good News is proven true whenever liberating actions accompany its proclamation; a bogus gospel is seen to be illusory if signs confirm its capacity to enslave, and it is indeed bondage for earth's inhabitants which results from this message (13:12).

In the story, all onlookers see fire come down from heaven but none recognizes the hocus-pocus. The reader, however, should know better, being forewarned by Moses and Jesus that the most spectacular of signs corroborating true prophetic testimony – such as Elijah's fire at Mt. Carmel, pentecostal fire (Ac.2:3,4) and perhaps most of all, the devouring fire of true witness (in Rev.11:5¹⁷) – may all be faked. Unlike those the monster has branded (cf. 19:20), the reader need not fall for this skilful sleight of hand but ought, instead, to perceive that these satanic wonders, like Jezebel's false prophecy (2:20), are designed to lead astray (13:14;

¹⁵ I cannot, here, engage with exegetes who link the land monster to some institutional reality in Roman Asia.

¹⁶ For other anti-christ traditions, cf. Caird, *op.cit.*, in loc.; he gives the following extra-canonical parallels: *Asc.Es.*4:5ss; *II Es.*5:4; *Sib. Or.*3:63ss. Prigent, *op.cit.*, p.210, adds the Apocalypse of Elijah.

¹⁷ There will, of course, be genuine fire (of divine judgment) again later, in 20:9.

cf. 12:9) and that here is a false Elijah preparing the way of a simulated christ.

Another detail, rarely noticed by commentators, helps us penetrate the monsters' smoke-screen: It is the brief initial entrance, in 11:7, of the first beast who successfully combats, defeats and kills the two witnesses leaving them unburied. Everyone recognises the obvious anticipation of the successes of ch.13, but the real question is, why this early appearance? 11:11,12 gives the answer, for after the monster has done its worst the witnesses are raised from death and ascend to heaven. What we have in ch.13 is therefore another, more indirect attempt to neutralise their testimony; the 'war' is the same, as can be seen from the verbal identity of what afflicts the witness of 11:7 and the saints of 13:7. The careful linking of the monsters' tandem with the two witnesses is surely the most surprising aspect of John's composition; their anti-witness acts as negative counterpart to the earlier positive word and their career is modelled on that of the two martyrs.

Moment of truth (ch.14:1-20). Deceitful appearances now give way to reality in 14:1;¹⁸ whatever the impact on his reader of 13:1-18, John is not about to give falsehood the last word. Right from the opening scenes of Revelation John has been equipping Asian Christians to spot genuine witness to Jesus when they see it, and to unmask false testimony however well disguised. Now in this passage he makes double sure that their eye is firmly redirected to what is real and their ear re-attuned to truth. The redeemed accompanying the Lamb have no lie in them (14:5) and this is a key characteristic, for lies and deception exclude from the book of life and from life with God (21:27; 22:15). The trait recalls Zephaniah's remnant (Zep.3:13) and especially Isaiah's servant (Isa.53:9); in their integrity and truth, the 'sealed' offer a stark contrast to the duplicity and lies of the monsters and their retainers.

¹⁸ M.E. Boring, *Revelation*, Louisville, 1989, p.168, shows how 14:1-20 contrasts the true salvation offered by the Lamb with the false salvation the monster brings.

Now the true Gospel destined for all nations (cf. Ac.17:29-31; Ro.2:16) may ring out and silence the false (Rev.14:6). The monster had threatened, brainwashed and made idolaters out of virtually all earth-dwellers (13:12,13,16), but now comes the massive retort of a universal proclamation honouring and glorifying the creator and judge of the whole world (14:7). The dragon's deputies had forced human beings into servile prostration before false gods, but the eternal Gospel enjoins fear of God and gives him the glory mistakenly offered to the monster.

The threefold angelic proclamation (14:7,8,9-11) more than drowns out the monster's false testimony¹⁹ (13:15,17); it may, in addition, offer a riposte to the three previous woes.²⁰ Although only the first message is positive (a call to repentance, 14:7), while the two others predict Babylon's fall (14:8) and a sorry fate for the monster's followers (14:9-11), grace and judgement remain the obverse and reverse of the one Gospel. The real contrast is between the redeemed and the condemned,¹ the Word and falsehood, monsters and true witnesses or angels,²¹ as 14:12,13 confirms. Preceded by an exhortation to perseverance, obedience and fidelity,²² the last word is one of consolation spoken by a heavenly voice (14:13a), underlined and ratified by the Spirit addressing the Churches (14:13b; cf. 2:7 etc.).

A hymn to truth (ch.15:1-4). 15:3,4 hails both the successful testimony whose truth none can deny and the universal worship it produces. Significantly, when as in the parallel vision of 11:19 the Temple opens, it is the holy place of the Tent of Testimony that is

¹⁹ Compare Swete, op.cit., p.184.

²⁰ This is Schüssler-Fiorenza's proposal, op.cit., p.89.

²¹ The three angels of 14:6ff are a foil to three others who had announced woes in chapters 8 and 9, and as Bauckham shows, op.cit., p.286, they are also functionally equivalent to the two witnesses.

²² I.T Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John*, New York, 1919, p.658, notes "special admonition and encouragement to the saints."

glimpsed (15:5). The unique johannine use of μαρτυρίον (and not μαρτυρία) here invites comment. It might, as in the Septuagint, connote legal evidence or proof that will testify to covenant (un)faithfulness or it could simply refer to the copy of the Decalogue placed in the Ark (Ex.16:34, etc.); in Revelation, all other uses of μαρτυρέω or μαρτυρία qualify testimony by or to Jesus. Accordingly, the hymn may be lauding both witness to the Gospel by which all are converted (15:4) and also the final plagues afflicting those who refuse it; this would accord fully with the declaration that God's judgements are true and just (16:7).

Staying on the alert (ch.16:13-17). Within our chosen theme the pendulum of contrast now swings right back again: The three angels give way to three unclean spirits²³ spewed from the mouths of the triumvirate of dragon, sea monster and land monster (16:13). This foul discharge recalls the dragon's sputtering (12:15), the blasphemy vomited by the sea monster (13:6), the land monster's coercion to worship its partner (13:12) or again, the deadly utterances of the image it animates (13:15). The three unclean spirits' actions (16:14,16) spellbind the earth so effectively that a cautionary interruption in the narrative is necessary (16:15), picking up both a warning already delivered at Sardis (3:3) and an order to watch uttered both there and in Laodicea (3:2,18).

A prophetic word to the wise recaptures the theme of urgency found on the lips of Jesus in the Gospels (Mk.13:15,16), with his warning about the unexpected thief (Lk.12:39) and his exhortation to vigilance (Mt.24:43), compressing them into direct speech: Ἴδου ἔρχομαι ὡς κλέπτης. In the story so far, Jesus has already interjected a blessing (in 14:13) whilst another word has also encouraged those facing grim trials and the temptation to apostasy (13:9,10). Soon betrayal personified as a whore (17:1ff) will take centre stage. But first, God has the last word on all that has gone before and the first word concerning what is still to come: Γέγονεν (16:17; cf. its

²³ Thus E.-B.Allo, *St. Jean, l'Apocalypse*, Paris, 1933, p.259.

reprise in 21:9). He is also the author of a powerful and decisive concluding act (16:18) where the 'special effects' round the throne at once parallel and exceed those of 4:5.

Staring treason in the face (ch.17:1 – 18:4). With the vignette of the prostitute mounted on the scarlet monster we sense an escalation in the conflict between truth and lies, life-giving Word and deadly propaganda. In 17:6 the saints/witnesses (the terms are in apposition)²⁴ pay with their own blood; the blood-drunk whore so bewitches even John that the very sight of her is his confusion (ἐθαύμασα... θαῦμα μέγα). In such circumstances, a mind enlightened by wisdom is what is needed (17:9). In this vision, Babylon the hooker offers a shocking caricature of Jerusalem the bride; the combined sexual/urban metaphor conjures up a vision of what the Church would look like if she fell into apostasy by betraying the Gospel; the result is a nightmarish scenario meant to prevent the faithful from ever letting it happen.²⁵

A similar motivation surfaces in the command of 18:4 telling God's people to leave Babylon to her condemnation and ruin (18:4,5). John has reused prophetic oracles against Babylon (for example, Isa.46-48 and Jer.50-51), especially the texts where the people are told to flee the city (Jer.51:45; Isa.48:20). The latter verse presents the order as good news, for Babylon's fall means salvation and restoration for the people of God; this is why when justice is done, an imperative to utter praise is appropriate (18:20), as in the case of an earlier favourable verdict (12:12). Unrighteous deeds characterise Babylon (18:5) whereas God's judgements against her

²⁴ Against the view that μάρτυς here means martyr (unlike 16:6; 18:24; 19:2), we agree with A.A. Trites, 'Μάρτυς and Martyrdom in the Apocalypse', *NovT* XVI, 1973, pp.72-80, that in Revelation the word essentially has a judicial reference and means a court witness (whose blood may or may not have been spilt).

²⁵ Or did John see this already in the Church? D. Ford (op.cit., p.667) thinks so, following P. Minear, *I Saw A New Earth*, Washington, 1968, p.211.

are righteous and true (19:2): The witnesses' testimony convinces the court and their blood is avenged by a not-guilty verdict.

A victory for truth (ch.19:11-21). Why does this new scene use a military metaphor while maintaining a courtroom atmosphere? For the simple reason that we are still dealing with a war of words, as in 12:7-12 where the defence counsel Michael defeated the satanic prosecutor.²⁶ Beneficiaries of the penetrating, vivifying Word confront rebellious unbelievers that this same trenchant Word will 'kill', for the sharp sword of the Gospel preached (19:21) acquits some and sentences others to death (cf. Jn.16:8ff). The incarceration of the sea monster and false prophet puts an end to their so-called miracles and coercive power – they had sought in vain to counterfeit Christ's testimony and Spirit-inspired witness. All this is carefully set up in 19:9,10 where there is a transition to this scene from the preceding hymn (19:1-8) and a focus on four related matters which are at stake here :-

- i) the transmission of revelation, governed by the solemn command $\gamma\rho\acute{\alpha}\psi\omicron\nu\nu$ (cf. 1:11,19; 14:13; and 21:5);
- ii) the written transcript of the true words Christ has spoken, faithfully reproduced – as the triple repetition of $\lambda\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\epsilon\iota$ implies (cf. the voice that addressed the seer in 1:12);
- iii) the testimony of Jesus which every Christian possesses ($\acute{\epsilon}\chi\omicron\nu\tau\omega\nu$ $\tau\acute{\eta}\nu$ $\mu\alpha\rho\tau\upsilon\rho\acute{\iota}\alpha\nu$ $\text{I}\eta\sigma\acute{\omicron}\upsilon$, cf. 6:9);
- iv) the establishment of an equivalence between witness and prophet (thus the brother-witnesses here will be called brother-prophets in 22:9).

²⁶ Joel's portrayal of a "valley of decision" had already mixed legal and military metaphors (Jl.3:1-16).

These points highlight the rider's title, *faithful and true*, marking him out as the authentic witness, truly to be trusted, who spoke to the Church at Laodicea (3:14). Insistence on his trustworthiness brings to a climax the sequence set in motion by the cameos of 14:1-5 and 14:6-20, in which believers have stuck by the truth in their battle with falsehood. Faithful witness to the Gospel had been celebrated in 15:3,4, but thereafter three evil spirits and a blood-drunk whore had revived the enemy cause for a time, till its final defeat in the verdict of 19:2.

The rider is a foil to every fraud so far thrown up by the plot - Balaam, the Nicolaitans, Jezebel or the monstrous false witness and false prophet. He is the real Messiah whose word is true, the one deemed faithful from the very start (1:5) who had reproved then consoled the Laodiceans (3:14ff) and whom the Philadelphians already knew to be authentic (3:7). No wonder a sharp sword issues from his mouth (19:15; cf. 1:16; 2:12), symbolising the true testimony to be expected from none other than the Word of God (19:13). No surprise, either, to see those who were deaf to his word judged as they sup at a sort of universal anti-banquet (19:7,8). By the same logic the duo of monsters, whose lies had duped humanity (19:19,20), die a living death as will the ultimate adversary, dragon by whatever name, temporarily arrested in 20:2,3 and definitively put away in 20:10.

Beware of falsehood even now! (ch.20:1 – 22:21). At this point Revelation's readers might be saying, "We knew it! The saints slaughtered for their testimony had to get the verdict in the end." Rising to life and reigning with Christ are thus a fitting result for those who had chosen to resist monstrous lies and bear responsibility for their testimony even to death. But John holds his readers in a rhetorical tension right to the end of his book. Even as true and reliable words, making all things new, bring the victor's heritage to fruition (21:7) – spoken, in all likelihood, by God himself – there comes an accompanying solemn warning (21:8), repeated again after the expansion of 21:9-27. It seems that for John, true believers need encouragement, till their last breath, to go on renewing their commitment; for this reason, the certainty that their salvation is approaching is no justification for their falling asleep!

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Beware of falsehood even now! (ch.20:1 – 22:21). At this point Revelation's readers might be saying, " We knew it! The saints slaughtered for their testimony had to get the verdict in the end." Rising to life and reigning with Christ are thus a fitting result for those who had chosen to resist monstrous lies and bear responsibility for their testimony even to death. But John holds his readers in a rhetorical tension right to the end of his book. Even as true and reliable words, making all things new, bring the victor's heritage to fruition (21:7) – spoken, in all likelihood, by God himself – there comes an accompanying solemn warning (21:8), repeated again after the expansion of 21:9-27. It seems that for John, true believers need encouragement, till their last breath, to go on renewing their commitment; for this reason, the certainty that their salvation is approaching is no justification for their falling asleep!

It is also consistent with John's parody approach that the fulfilment of the promises to the victors should be paralleled, antithetically, by an anti-message reiterating the contrast between Gospel and propaganda, true witness and misleading counter-proclamation. This explains the positioning of the two vice lists (cf. 1 Cor.6:9-11), one detailed (21:8) and the other more succinct (21:27), and the fact that both converge on falsehood as the worst form of evildoing and the sum of all the rest.²⁷ Jn.8:44 readily springs to mind, where the devil is called father of lies. Again in 22:15 falsehood comes at the end of the exclusion order, insuring that the ongoing opposition we have seen is sustained to the very close of Revelation. From start (2:2; 3:9) to finish, the person of faith is warned against being counted among the monster's followers who believe and who live a diabolical lie.

A final reference to words that are certain and true (22:6, picking up on 1:1) appears to encompass all the foregoing visions and auditions: ἤκουσα is used only here without a complement, for there is no more to be heard; and και ἔβλεψα occurs for the seventeenth and last time, since there is no more for John to see, 22:8. The theme of prophetic testimony to the revelation given by God through his Christ finishes where it began, with final explanations provided by angelic mediation (22:6).²⁸ Just as the link-persons in the opening revelatory chain collaborated in transmitting and unveiling a message to the Churches (2:1 – 3:22), so here there is an ultimate liturgical dialogue where Jesus's ἔρχομαι ταχὺ (22:7) expressly echoes 2:16 and 3:11 and recalls the ἐν τάχει of 1:1.

The revelatory event's solemnity is highlighted in two ways – by an ultimate temptation to fall down before the revealing angel, then by

²⁷ See, for example, Giblin, op.cit., p.196, or Kraft, op.cit., p.266.

²⁸ In this concluding dialogue, it is hard to know exactly who says what; some think Christ is already speaking in 22:6 as well as in 22:7. Also difficult is 22:18-20, where John, Jesus or John-quoting-Jesus are the options!

a corrective (22:9) which shows who fits where in the revelatory chain. Why such seriousness? Because now that revelation has taken place, it is the recipients' turn to testify; therefore their keeping all the words of *this book* will entail faithfully bearing witness to Jesus (19:10). The apocalyptic story, reinforced by a penultimate beatitude mirroring the first (22:7), has shown following Jesus the faithful witness to be a calling of dignity and worth. Readers can refresh this knowledge whenever necessary, for the book will remain open, accessible and useful to them (22:10). Nevertheless, the ups and downs of the intrigue, ending in a final exhortation (22:11) and warning (22:12; cf. 16:15), have stressed the need to be always on the *qui vive*.

Nor is John yet finished with the literary tension between comfort and caution, for still to come are a final macarism, focussing on Christ's redemption (cf. 7:14) and on the restoration it brings humanity, plus a definitive declaration of non-admittance (22:14,15). Only then will Christ the true witness have the last word, because his was from the start the communication to the Churches (22:16) and because he is the guarantor standing over the truth of the testimony (22:18,20).

* * *

Among other things this reading has demonstrated the close association, in the Apocalypse, between Christ as faithful witness and his followers who continue his testimony. This theme echoes the Gospels, where the disciples' difficulty in speaking for and of Jesus is already apparent. But Revelation dramatises truth issues in a scenario where the chief witness and his fellow-witnesses are impersonated, the Gospel is countered by an elaborate counterfeit, pseudo-miracles falsify apostolic credentials and Christ's heralds are shadowed by servile promoters of a false Messiah. A closely related theme in Revelation is that of *discipleship and counter-allegiance* which traverses the book in a similar way, opposing a redeemed people who belong to God and to the Lamb and a rival

horde whose activities, allegiance and destiny caricature theirs in every respect. But that is another story!²⁹

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²⁹ I explore this associated theme in an article in the journal *Théologie Evangélique* (forthcoming).