# *Leaning toward consummation*
## *Mission and peace in the rhetoric of Revelation*

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TO ASK ABOUT THE INTERSECTION OF MISSION AND PEACE in the Apocalypse of John is, on the surface at least, to ask an odd question. What, after all, does the Apocalypse have to do with mission *or* with peace? If we define "mission" as inviting unbelievers to make a decision for Christ, and if we define "peace" as an absence of conflict, then the Apocalypse appears to have little to say on either account. On the contrary, the Apocalypse appears to hunker down into a survivalist pessimism about the possibility of repentance on the one hand,[1] and to revel in bloody violence on the other.

But if "mission" refers to the church's call to live out an alternative way of life in the world in a way that invites others—indeed, the whole creation—to join in the life of redemption, it may be appropriate to see the Apocalypse as missional in orientation. This is, after all, part of the rhetorical appeal of the New Jerusalem. As J. Nelson Kraybill has put it, "Identification with Jesus-centered Christian community—a place of healing and welcome—is the missiological strategy of Revelation."[2]

Revelation is irrelevant to mission only if one holds to a reductionistic view of mission. But if "mission is about calling people to a new political and spiritual allegiance," as Kraybill suggests,[3] then Revelation clearly emerges as a missional document. If mission is understood as contextualization, then Revelation itself is an affirmation

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[1] Revelation 22:11 seems most pertinent here: "Let the unjust continue to do injustice, and the filthy continue in their filth, and the just continue in being just, and let the holy still be holy." Recalling Ezek. 3:27 and Dan. 12:10, and ultimately, Isa. 6:9–13, this verse cannot be interpreted apart from a careful diachronic study of the theological and sociological function of "obfuscation" texts. For a helpful discussion of various efforts to deal with the theological challenges posed by this verse, see G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text,* The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 1131–4.

[2] J. Nelson Kraybill, "The New Jerusalem As Paradigm for Mission," in *Mission Focus: Annual Review* 2 (1994): 123.

[3] Kraybill, "New Jerusalem," 125.

that God has turned toward the world, because God makes all things new.[4] If mission is concerned only with individualistic or existential realities, then perhaps not; but if suffering is a "normal element of faithful Christian witness"[5] or if the gospel seeks to transform institutions as well as individuals, then perhaps the Apocalypse is a missional document. And what about peacemaking, vulnerability, economic justice, worship, symbol, or life in the community of faith?[6] Are these elements of the church's mission in the world or are they at best tangential?

Revelation begins and ends with a blessing on those who keep the words written in this book:

> *Blessed are those who . . . keep what is written in it (1:3).*
> Μακάριος . . . οἱ . . . τηροῦντες τὰ ἐν αὐτῇ γεγραμμένα
> *Makarios . . . oi . . . tērountes ta en autē gegrammena*
>
> *Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book (22:7).*
> Μακάριος ὁ τηρῶν τοὺς λόγους τῆς προφητείας τοῦ βιβλίου τούτου
> *Makarios ho tērōn tous logous tēs prophēteias tou bibliou toutou*

What does it mean to "keep" the words of prophecy? The blessing is an invitation to respond in a certain way—to allow the vision developed in this book not only to reinforce values held by the community of faith in the seven churches of the province of Asia, but also to make specific ethical decisions in their common life. The ethical calls of this book are most explicit in chapters 2–3, but the invitation to maintain certain allegiances and to give up certain allegiances pervades the book.

Is it valid to treat as mission an ethical call to faithfulness that is addressed not to unbelievers outside the church, but to believers within the church? I think that it is. The Apocalypse was not written for outsiders, but for insiders—for the seven churches in Asia. It is a call for the church to be the church—to reject the idolatry of emperor worship

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[4] Cf. the effort to rethink the definition of mission in David J. Bosch, "Elements of an Emerging Ecumenical Missionary Paradigm," in *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission,* American Society of Missiology Series, no. 16 (Maryknoll: Orbis Bks., 1991), 368–510.

[5] Kraybill, "New Jerusalem," 127.

[6] All of these are themes considered by Kraybill in "New Jerusalem," 123–31. For a brief overview of the relationship between apocalyptic and mission, see the article by Christopher Rowland, "Apocalyptic and Mission," in *Dictionary of Mission: Theology, History, Perspectives*, ed. Karl Müller, American Society of Missiology Series, no. 24 (Maryknoll: Orbis Bks., 1997), 30–3; and the older essay by Oscar Cullmann, "Eschatology and Missions in the New Testament," trans. Olive Wyon, in *The Theology of the Christian Mission*, ed. Gerald H. Anderson (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961), 42–54. However, Cullmann has little to say about Revelation and his working definition of missions is reductionistic.

and the various social-cultural entanglements that emperor worship involved and to live up to a higher calling. In making his appeal, the author uses the literary conventions of apocalypticism.

Revelation's invitation to engage in nonviolent resistance against the idolatry of empire is central to this book and is missional at its core.[7] The Lamb Christology of Revelation directly supports its ethic of nonviolent resistance. Revelation is not simply a pastoral letter intended to provide comfort. It is a biblical prophecy written to empower resistance against an idolatry accepted as commonplace in the larger society. It is an invitation to view the world in different terms, as fellow pilgrims on the way of protest against imperial politics wedded to religion.[8] This is engagement literature, not escapist literature.[9] I would say that Richard Hays is fully justified when he goes so far as to claim that "Revelation can be read rightly only by those who are actively struggling against injustice."[10]

Lesslie Newbigin sees the consummation as "the goal of history, that which makes possible responsible action in history, . . . something which heals the dichotomy between the private and public worlds which

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[7] For a striking interpretation of Revelation as a protest against empire with great potential significance for people living in the United States, see Wes Howard-Brook and Anthony Gwyther, *Unveiling Empire: Reading Revelation Then and Now* (Maryknoll: Orbis Bks., 1999).

[8] See Allan A. Boesak, *Comfort and Protest: Reflections on the Apocalypse of John of Patmos* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987), 11, *et passim*.

[9] Besides the works of Howard-Brook, Gwyther, and Boesak cited above, see also Christopher Rowland, "The Apocalypse: Hope, Resistance and the Revelation of Reality," *Ex Auditu* 6 (1990): 129–44; John H. Yoder, "Ethics and Eschatology," *Ex Auditu* 6 (1990): 119–28; Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, New Testament Theology (New York: Cambridge Univ. Pr., 1993), esp. 159–64; C. Freeman Sleeper, *The Victorious Christ: A Study of the Book of Revelation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Pr., 1996), esp. 56; Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "Visionary Rhetoric and Social-Political Situation," chap. 7 in *The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgment* (Philadelphia: Fortress Pr., 1985), 181–203; Loren L. Johns, *The Lamb Christology of the Apocalypse of John: An Investigation into Its Origins and Rhetorical Force,* Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, 2.Riehe 167 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 127, 187–8; Klaus Wengst, *The Pax Romana and the Peace of Jesus Christ*, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress Pr., 1987), 118–35; and Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination*, The Powers, vol. 3 (Philadelphia: Fortress Pr., 1992), esp. 87–104. For an overview of Revelation's contribution to the question of war and peace, see Willard M. Swartley, "War and Peace in the New Testament," in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* II.26.3 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1996), 2301–408. See esp. pp. 2369–74, which treat Revelation specifically. See also Fleming Rutledge, "The Apocalyptic Foundations of Peacemaking," *St. Luke's Journal of Theology* 34 (1991): 145–55, and the excellent chapter on Revelation in Richard B. Hays' *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1996), 169–85.

[10] Hays, *Moral Vision*, 183.

death creates."[11] This is a healing vision in which all of the positive contributions of history and culture are brought into the city (21:24–26), while that which is common, abominable, or unclean will be excluded (21:27). "John does not write to individual Christians who have withdrawn from public life, or to groups of Christians in retreat centers, but to churches in seven large cities."[12] The high point in humanity's realization of human community is portrayed as a city.

The Lamb Christology of Revelation is directly related to its ethical call. Jesus' resistance to the point of death is clearly treated as a model for the believers—a paradigm for their own faithful, nonviolent resistance, which may well lead to death, just as Jesus' own faithful witness led to his death (see esp. Rev. 3:21; 12:11).

The Apocalypse of John has been perhaps the most influential book in the history of the West in terms of informing and empowering the sort of imagination that undergirds an ethical vision. It is also arguably the most dangerous book in the history of Christendom in terms of the history of its effects.[13] It has inspired Münsters[14] and Wacos.[15] Thus, any attempt to consider the contribution of the Apocalypse for understanding mission, peace, and the reign of God today must deal with the book's contribution to the problem of ethics and responsibility for the world.

This essay will consider first the mixed record of the Apocalypse regarding the history of its effects. Then, following an introduction to the rhetoric of the Apocalypse, it will examine one particular vehicle of that rhetoric, the rhetoric of "coming" in the Apocalypse, which reaches its climax in the last chapter of the book. The essay will conclude with a brief consideration of some of the promises and challenges this book represents for a biblical theology of peace and mission.

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[11] Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 115.

[12] M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville: John Knox Pr., 1989), 219.

[13] See Johns, *Lamb Christology*, 5, and the discussion there on 1–14.

[14] In 1534–35, certain Anabaptists seized control of the city of Münster and named it a "New Jerusalem," the "kingdom of God," the "new Zion." See Cornelius Krahn, "Münster Anabaptists," in *The Mennonite Encyclopedia: A Comprehensive Reference Work on the Anabaptist-Mennonite Movement* (Scottdale: Herald Pr., 1957), 3:777–83.

[15] In 1993 in Waco, Texas, David Koresh and the Branch Davidians were tragically killed in a confrontation with federal authorities. See Craig L. Nessan, "When Faith Turns Fatal: David Koresh and Tragic Misreadings of Revelation," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 22 (June 1995): 191–9; Peter Steinfels, "Bible's Book of Revelation Was Key to Waco Cult," *New York Times* 142 (1993): 16; James D. Tabor and Eugene V. Gallagher, *Why Waco?: Cults and the Battle for Religious Freedom in America* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Pr., 1995).

THE APOCALYPSE AND THE ETHICS OF ENGAGEMENT: GOOD NEWS OR BAD?

Although the Apocalypse has inspired in some readers both fear and violence, it has provided for other readers significant hope, peace, comfort—and even grounds for nonviolence. In his book, *Irenic Apocalypse: Some Uses of Apocalyptic in Dante, Petrarch, and Rabelais*, Dennis Costa argues that to see the Apocalypse as supporting a violent world view or ethic is essentially to misappropriate the text. Although the book is full of violent images, its aim is to liberate a people and leave them at peace. This irenic function is often missed in today's discourse, according to Costa. Even Dante, who drew on the most violent of Revelation's images, found in apocalyptic language a means of resolving his own political and spiritual aspirations nonviolently. Costa does not go so far as to suggest that the Apocalypse articulates a nonviolent ethic. Rather, his point is that the vision is essential irenic—that whatever the means to the goal, the goal actually is an irenic paradise, not cataclysmic destruction or violence for its own sake.[16] Whatever the violence encountered along the way, the goal of the Apocalypse is an irenic paradise.

Allan Boesak has articulated a different sort of hopeful vision. Boesak has found in the Apocalypse significant support for active protest—a message of hope and nonviolent resistance to evil.[17] It is here, in the Apocalypse, that we encounter the "deepest questions about human history." It is here that "we are present with the struggle to understand the meaning of history . . . and the inexplicable chasm and relationship between God's promises and Israel's lot."[18] A word of comfort? Yes, but not comfort through escapism. Rather, the comfort offered in the Apocalypse is a comfort in and for engagement in the world, generated by a vision of the ultimate victory of God—a victory that comes through protest, active witness, resistance to evil, and martyrdom.[19]

For this reason, the Apocalypse has occasionally been seen as quite subversive in a this-worldly sort of way. Boesak notes that in the

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[16] Cf. Dennis Costa, *Irenic Apocalypse: Some Uses of Apocalyptic in Dante, Petrarch, and Rabelais* (Saratoga: Calif.: Anma Libri, 1981), 1–3, 44–5; cf. also R. E. Kaske, "Dante's DXV," in *Dante: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. John Freccero (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1965), 122–40.

[17] Allan A. Boesak, *Comfort and Protest*, esp. 34–9. It is not clear to me whether in Boesak's perspective, resistance to evil that is consistent with the apocalyptic vision is *essentially* nonviolent, or whether it simply needed to be nonviolent in light of the historical contingencies of the seven churches of the Apocalypse.

[18] Ibid., 16–17.

[19] Ibid., 17.

Japanese occupation of Korea during World War 2, the Japanese were wary of the subversive power of the Apocalypse. It undercut the authority of the occupying powers. As a result, they prohibited Korean preachers from preaching from the Apocalypse.[20]

What is odd about contemporary readings of the Apocalypse is the gaping divide between those who hold that the Apocalypse is literature's greatest betrayal of the ethical vision[21] and those who hold that the Apocalypse informs and upholds a just and empowering ethical vision. For Jack Sanders, the Apocalypse represents a type of Christianity that is at odds with what the gospel is really about. He says that it is the Apocalypse's "retreat from the ethical dimension that is the basic evil of the Apocalypse." Furthermore, "it is unfortunate that we are today experiencing a revival of just the kind of Christianity found in Revelation."[22]

Sanders was influenced by scholars like Albert Schweitzer, Martin Dibelius, and Philipp Vielhauer who, all in different ways, buried the ax deep between eschatology and ethics. Typical of this approach was the

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[20] Ibid.

[21] Examples here would include D. H. Lawrence, who found the Apocalypse "annoying," "ugly," even "detestable" (*Apocalypse* [1931; reprint, Harmondsworth: Penguin Bks., 1974]; see esp. 5–9); C. H. Dodd, who hated its "eschatological fanaticism" and considered the Apocalypse a "relapse into a pre-Christian eschatology" (*The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments,* 2d ed. [London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1944], 41 and 40, respectively); Harold Bloom, who says, "Resentment and not love is the teaching of the Revelation of St. John the Divine. It is a book without wisdom, goodness, kindness, or affection of any kind. Perhaps it is appropriate that a celebration of the end of the world should be not only barbaric but scarcely literate. Where the substance is so inhumane, who would wish the rhetoric to be more persuasive, or the vision to be more vividly realized?" (*The Revelation of St. John the Divine,* Modern Critical Interpretations [New York: Chelsea Hse. Pubs., 1988], 4–5); and Tina Pippin, who says that misogyny, which is deeply writ in the Apocalypse, ultimately destroys any liberating vision the author may have intended (*Death and Desire: The Rhetoric of Gender in the Apocalypse of John,* Literary Currents in Biblical Interpretation [Louisville: Westminster John Knox Pr., 1992], 47). Even Rudolf Bultmann mostly ignored the Apocalypse in his theology of the New Testament, a work Heikki Räisänen says is still regarded as "the unrivalled classic in the field" (Heikki Räisänen, *Beyond New Testament Theology: A Story and a Programme* [Philadelphia: Trinity Pr. International, 1990], xi). Bultmann called the thought of the Apocalypse "a weakly Christianized Judaism" (Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, trans. Kendrick Grobel [New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951–55], 2:175).

[22] Jack T. Sanders, *Ethics in the New Testament: Change and Development* (Philadelphia: Fortress Pr., 1975), 114–15. In contrast to Sanders, Pheme Perkins argues that Revelation "is really a work about justice." See Pheme Perkins, "Apocalyptic Sectarianism and Love Commands: The Johannine Epistles and Revelation," in *The Love of Enemy and Nonretaliation in the New Testament,* ed. Willard M. Swartley, Studies in Peace and Scripture (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Pr., 1992), 287–96; see esp. 293.

denial that apocalyptic literature had any interest in ethics or in the concrete applications of the Law in light of the imminent end of this age. It was claimed that apocalypticists, like Gnostics, knew no ethic. Ethicists presupposed an unbroken world that should be preserved, or a curable world that should be renewed. Apocalypticists had no such presuppositions.[23]

Philipp Vielhauer's highly influential "Introduction to Apocalypses and Related Subjects" in Hennecke-Schneemelcher's two-volume *New Testament Apocrypha* did much to perpetuate a dichotomy between the this-worldly, national eschatology found in rabbinic texts and the other-worldly eschatology found in the apocalypses.[24] In this article, Vielhauer essentially equated apocalyptic thought with pessimism, determinism, and temporal dualism (this age vs. the age to come). The result of this approach was a near consensus that apocalyptic thought is essentially escapist, pessimistic, sectarian, and conservative—even survivalist.

This generally negative consensus about the ethical stance of apocalyptic thought continued in biblical studies until the 1960s and '70s, when a number of significant studies of apocalyptic literature appeared that cast apocalyptic literature in a new light. In 1964, D. S. Russell published his book, *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic*, which accelerated the rehabilitation of apocalyptic literature among biblical scholars.[25] More influential on the continent was Klaus Koch's little 1970 volume, *Ratlos vor der Apokalyptik*, which appeared in English as *The Rediscovery of Apocalyptic*, but whose title would more faithfully be translated as "perplexed with [or embarrassed by] apocalyptic."[26] Since then, apocalypticism has come into its own as a subdiscipline, marked by such significant studies as Paul Hanson's *The Dawn of Apocalyptic*[27] and

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[23] For an excellent discussion of this era and of the relation of ethics and eschatology in Jewish apocalyptic literature, see Christoph Münchow, *Ethik und Eschatologie: Ein Beitrag zum Verständnis der frühjüdischen Apokalyptik mit einem Ausblick auf das Neue Testament* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1981).

[24] Philipp Vielhauer, "Apocalypses and Related Subjects: Introduction," revised by Georg Strecker, in *New Testament Apocrypha*, rev. ed., ed. Wilhelm Schneemelcher and Edgar Hennecke, trans. Robert McL. Wilson (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Pr., 1992), 542–602.

[25] D. S. Russell, *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic: 200 BC–AD 100*, The Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster Pr., 1964). Ernst Käsemann's work in the 1950s remains an important precursor to Russell's work theologically.

[26] Klaus Koch, *The Rediscovery of Apocalyptic: A Polemical Work on a Neglected Area of Biblical Studies and Its Damaging Effects on Theology and Philosophy*, trans. Margaret Kohl, Studies in Biblical Theology (London: SCM Pr., 1972).

[27] Paul D. Hanson, *The Dawn of Apocalyptic: The Historical and Sociological Roots of Jewish Apocalyptic Eschatology*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Pr., 1979).

John J. Collins's *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*.[28]

Nevertheless, despite recent gains in the study of apocalypticism among biblical scholars, such terms as "apocalypse," "apocalyptic," and "apocalypticism" retain in popular use connotations of catastrophe, chaos, horror, despair, and violent cosmic meltdown. Even among some scholarly disciplines, it remains acceptable to define apocalyptic discourse and apocalyptic rhetoric phenomenologically in terms of a presumably stable "apocalyptic myth" that perceives salvation as "collective, terrestrial, imminent, total, and miraculous."[29] Such writers deal with Hal Lindsey and the author of the Apocalypse, for instance, not in terms of the content of their thought or message, however similar or disparate they may be, but in their common dependence upon apocalyptic discourse as their mode of communication.

The recent works of Stephen O'Leary[30] and Catherine Keller,[31] for all of their brilliance, ultimately assume too much about the deep structure of apocalypticism within the human soul. They imagine too easily what apocalypse "is," regardless of whether their readings are faithful to the rhetorical strategy of *John's* Apocalypse. As a biblical scholar, I would appeal to John's right to object to what later became of the discourse to which he contributed.

Like O'Leary and Keller, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza also attempts a rhetorical reading strategy. However, Fiorenza's rhetorical method honors the historical specificity of the Apocalypse more than do O'Leary's and Keller's. Fiorenza's rhetorical method aims at "reconstructing both Revelation's rhetorical world of vision and the rhetorical and sociopolitical situations in which this imagery can be understood to have developed as an active and fitting response."[32] As such, Fiorenza's rhetorical method forces the modern reader to take seriously the conventions of communication current in first-century Asia Minor. Fiorenza's method takes seriously the historical task of interpretation

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[28] John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

[29] See, e.g., Norman Rufus Colin Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages*, rev. ed. (New York: Oxford Univ. Pr., 1970), 15; and Stephen D. O'Leary, *Arguing the Apocalypse: A Theory of Millennial Rhetoric* (New York: Oxford Univ. Pr., 1994), 6.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Catherine Keller, *Apocalypse Now and Then: A Feminist Approach to the End of the World* (Boston: Beacon Pr., 1996).

[32] Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World*, Proclamation Commentaries (Minneapolis: Fortress Pr., 1991), 22.

without privileging one particular form of historical criticism. Rhetorical criticism asks questions like "What is going on in the text?" and "What is the force of this discourse?" and "What persuasive techniques is the author using and to what end?" These questions are too often passed over or their answers simply assumed in popular approaches to the Apocalypse.

### THE RHETORIC AND ETHICS OF THE APOCALYPSE

The Apocalypse of John is an example of epideictic rhetoric. Deliberative rhetoric seeks to effect certain kinds of decisions and thus focuses on the future. Juridical rhetoric seeks to establish the legitimacy of decisions previously made and thus focuses on the past. In contrast, epideictic rhetoric is concerned primarily with values, with worldview, with the constitutive vision of its audience. It therefore focuses on the present. In the case of the Apocalypse, the language of the future functions to inform and energize a worldview designed to transform the present. There is certainly a deliberative edge to this rhetoric, since the author is eager for the audience to remain "faithful unto death" (2:10; cf. 1:5; 2:13; 3:14; 17:14; 19:11), and there is admittedly overlap between deliberative and epideictic rhetoric.[33] But the primary rhetorical mode of the Apocalypse is that of epideictic.

According to Robert M. Royalty Jr., epideictic rhetoric is designed, first, to "affect an audience's view, opinions, or values. . . . Second, epideictic rhetoric includes speeches of praise (encomium, panegyric, *laudatio*) and blame (ψόγοι, *vituperatio*) of persons and cities. . . . Third, epideictic rhetoric is distinguished by its amplification (ἐργασία, *amplificatio*) of topics and imagery; vivid description *(*ἔκφρασις*);* and compassion (σύγκρισις). All three of these characteristics are prominent features in Revelation."[34]

In the case of the Apocalypse, the author's aim is to mold or reshape the worldview and values of the audience. The Apocalypse seeks to effect a worldview consistent with the understanding of Jesus' slaughter as the key to God's victory over evil. This understanding necessarily entails an ethic of nonviolent resistance to any worldview,

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[33] Cf. George A. Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric and Its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient Times to Modern Times* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Pr., 1980), 74.

[34] Robert M. Royalty Jr., "The Rhetoric of Revelation," in *Society of Biblical Literature 1997 Seminar Papers*, Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers Series, no. 36 (Atlanta: Scholars Pr., 1997), 601–2. For a further consideration of the rhetoric of the Apocalypse, see Johns, *Lamb Christology*, 155–8; and Loren L. Johns, "The Lamb in the Rhetorical Program of the Apocalypse of John," in *Society of Biblical Literature 1998 Seminar Papers*, Part 2, Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers Series, no. 37 (Atlanta: Scholars Pr., 1998), 762–84.

social influence, or political power that would challenge such a gospel. The rhetorical tools of praise and blame[35] figure prominently in the author's persuasion technique.

Epideictic rhetoric is sometimes considered politically neutral or even essentially conservative, because it often serves to shore up the status quo, reaffirming traditional values in a nonthreatening way. Nevertheless, epideictic rhetoric can also be revolutionary. As I have argued elsewhere, "The inculcation of values is not politically neutral or inherently conservative; rather, by focusing on values, epideictic rhetoric not only 'messes with the mind' of the readers, both individually and collectively; it also represents a socially significant act. John used the tools this sort of rhetoric provided not only to criticize the prevailing values of the seven churches, but also to suggest the sorts of values that were in keeping with the new order being revealed by God."[36]

### Mission and peace as particularistic universalism

There is a strong universal thrust in the Apocalypse. In one sense, Revelation is the most conspicuously nonsectarian book in the New Testament. It is akin to the Zion theology of Isaiah or Micah, but one in which the one sitting on the throne and the Lamb replace the temple as the magnet that draws all nations into the orbit of the worship of Yahweh. The whole universe is pictured as being under the lordship of God. Not content rhetorically with identifying simply "everyone" or "all people," this vision encompasses "every tribe and language and people and nation" (5:9; cf. also 7:9; 10:11; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6; 17:15). But it is even larger than that because more than people are involved. "*Every creature* in heaven *and* on earth *and* under the earth *and* in the sea, *and* all that is in them" join in praise of the one seated on the throne and of the Lamb (5:13).[37]

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[35] Sometimes praise and blame are expressed directly, as in the hymns of praise or the funeral celebration of the fall of the whore. Sometimes they are expressed obliquely through the use of names and sobriquets. See Johns, "The Lamb in the Rhetorical Program," 764–5; and Edith M. Humphrey, "On Visions, Arguments and Naming: The Rhetoric of Specificity and Mystery in the Apocalypse" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, San Francisco, November 1997).

[36] Johns, "The Lamb in the Rhetorical Program," 762.

[37] The book's aural nature should be kept in mind here. This was a book intended to be read aloud (1:3). Aurally, repetitions like "tribe and language and people and nation" would have carried a pulse that emphasized the universality of vision's scope. This universal impulse is not a novel contribution of the Apocalypse, however. The repetition of "peoples, nations, and languages" is a pulse within the Book of Daniel, occurring at 3:4, 7, 29; 4:1; 5:19; 6:25; and 7:14. Cf. also 4 Ezra 3:7; 9:3.

But to claim that the Apocalypse teaches universalism requires that one carefully define the term. Vernard Eller discusses this thorny issue in his commentary.[38] Eller concludes that given the ambiguity on this issue in the text, the modern interpreter should leave the theological problem open—or leave it to God. In a similar way, M. Eugene Boring sees the particularism and universalism in the Apocalypse as an intentional dialectic that should not be resolved prematurely.[39] Harrington agrees with Boring that there is tension and paradox in the Apocalypse's treatment of limited vs. universal salvation. For Harrington it is crucial to note that death and evil are destroyed, rather than punished eternally, suggesting that the only eschaton envisioned in the Apocalypse is a positive one.[40]

Eller is correct in saying that *if* the Apocalypse teaches universalism, it is an odd type of universalism. The author does not consider the possibility of salvation apart from Jesus Christ, or apart from justice. There is no cheap grace here. The author certainly cannot be accused of underestimating the power of evil, nor does he undermine the necessity or the urgency of decision. What the author does is leave open what Eller calls "the universalistic possibility."[41]

The Apocalypse does not speak the language of post-modern pluralism. It does not seek to comfort its audience with the acceptability of a broad-minded pluralism. The Apocalypse represents no generic utopian vision that can be accepted or rejected on the basis of one's religious preferences. There is a particularity in its universalism that is quite specific.

If the Apocalypse sounds at points as if all will be saved, it may be expressing the conviction that all are invited on the same basis to drink the water of life freely, and the hope that all will indeed do so. But all will also be judged by the same criterion—the criterion of works (20:12;

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[38] Vernard Eller, *The Most Revealing Book of the Bible: Making Sense Out of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 202–5.

[39] See especially his excursus, "Universal Salvation and Paradoxical Language," in Boring, *Revelation*, 226–31; cf. also M. Eugene Boring, "Revelation 19–21: End Without Closure," *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* Supplementary Issue, no. 3 (1994): 57–84.

[40] See the excursus, "Positive Eschaton Only: Revelation and 'Universal Salvation,'" in Wilfrid J. Harrington, *Revelation*, Sacra Pagina, vol. 16 (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Pr., 1993), 229–35.

[41] Vernard Eller, *The Most Revealing Book*, 204.

22:12).[42] This is indeed the sort of vision that can energize and sustain mission.

The Apocalypse envisions consummation, not escape. Its theology of salvation is significantly different from prophetic remnant theologies. At the final judgment before the great white throne, some will be invited to enter the New Jerusalem freely, while others will be thrown into the lake of fire. The author of the Apocalypse does not conceive of a salvation that does not include judgment. However, the image is not that of a small, beleaguered remnant that has successfully survived by the skin of their teeth. Rather, the saints will participate in a new creation (21:1–2) that is full of the glory of God (21:3–22:5). And they will reign on earth (5:10; 20:4, 6; 22:5).

Furthermore, although the consummation includes judgment, the saints apparently enjoy no ethnic commonalities. The Lamb is considered worthy to take the scroll in the central scene precisely because he was slaughtered and because he ransomed humanity in all its diversity:

> *You are worthy to take the scroll*
> *and to open its seals,*
> *for you were slaughtered and by your blood you ransomed for God*
> *saints from every tribe and language and people and nation;*
> *you have made them to be a kingdom and priests serving our God,*
> *and they will reign on earth. (Rev. 5:9–10)*

Rhetorically, the universalistic vision serves to empower the vulnerable Christian community in its ethic of nonviolent resistance to a world power that does not recognize the sovereignty of God or of the king of kings.

This universal thrust is thus a universalism of invitation: all are invited to come. The author of the Apocalypse writes as one who is conscious about his audience.[43] The work begins with a blessing on "the one who reads (aloud) the words of the prophecy," and on "those who hear and who keep what is written in it" (1:3). The audience of this work is thus inscribed within the book as readers/hearers to whom the author

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[42] Contra Stephen Goranson, "The Text of Revelation 22.14," *New Testament Studies* 43 (1997): 154–7, there is no anti-Pauline polemic in the Apocalypse on the question of salvation by grace through faith vs. salvation by works.

[43] I use the term "audience" intentionally here to underscore that the book was originally read aloud to a series of churches in worship, not read individually by unconnected individuals.

occasionally makes direct appeals.[44] It is not just Jesus who comes: the thirsty are invited to come as well (22:17).

The Apocalypse is a call to action from beginning to end.[45] Although this call to action is couched in an epideictic rhetoric in which praise of God and of the Lamb is central—along with vituperation against the beasts and the whore of Babylon—the author makes clear that this book is a book of prophecy that is to be "kept" or "observed" (1:3; 22:7, 9). This call to action is buoyed along not only by the admonition to "keep" the words of this prophecy, but also by the invitation to "come."

THE RHETORIC OF COMING IN THE APOCALYPSE

The multivalence of "coming" in the Apocalypse is fascinating. God is presented as the one who was, who is, and who "is to come" (ὁ ἐρχόμενος | *ho erchomenos*) in 1:4, 8; 4:8. God is not limited by time: God owns the future as much as the past and present. So "coming" refers to the future in a general sense (in this connection, cf. also 17:10).[46] But "coming" also refers to the apocalyptic coming of the Son of Man in 1:7; 2:25; 3:3, 11 (where ἔρχομαι | *erchomai* and ἥξω | *hēxō* seem to be used interchangeably). Jesus is presented as one who is "coming with the clouds" in Rev. 1:7, an attribution lifted from Daniel's description of the Son of Man in Dan. 7:13 (cf. also Rev. 16:15). Sometimes this coming is seen as an act of judgment, as in 2:5, 16; sometimes whether in judgment or grace is unclear (2:25).

The coming of the synagogue of Satan to worship at the feet of the Philadelphians is portrayed as an ironic act of judgment (3:9). The coming of the wedding is announced in 19:7. Similarly, plagues will come on Babylon in one day of judgment (18:8, 10). Jesus also threatens to come to the seven churches in judgment (2:5, 16; cf. also 3:10, where the subject is the hour of testing). Other characters in the story come in judgment, such as the four equestrians (6:1, 3, 5, 7), the "great day of their wrath" (6:17), the hour of God's judgment (14:7), the hour of harvest (14:15), angels (8:3; 17:1; 21:9), or the second and third woes (9:12; 11:14, 18).

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[44] These direct appeals include the sevenfold "Let anyone who has an ear hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches" (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). Cf. also Rev 1:1, 3, 9–11; 13:9, 10, 18; 14:12–13; 22:6, 10.

[45] Cf. Boring, *Revelation*, 225.

[46] That some word play is meant by the author's use of ἔρχομαι (*erchomai*) seems likely, since the future participle of εἰμί | *eimi* (ἐσόμενοι | *esomenoi*) was available to the author: "the one who will be"; cf. David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5* (Dallas: Word Bks., 1997), 32.

In the heavenly throne scene in Rev. 5:7, Jesus did not just take the scroll, he "came" (ἦλθεν | *ēlthen*, from ἔρχομαι | *erchomai*) and "took" (εἴληφεν | *eilēphen*, from λαμβάνω | *lambanō*) the scroll. In 15:4 the coming of the nations to worship before the Lord is celebrated in the praise song of Moses and of the Lamb. The coming of the wedding day of the Lamb is celebrated in 19:7.

"Coming" is also seen as an act of the faithful. Thus, in the proleptic scene of paradise, where the great multitude is praising God, who is seated on the throne, and the Lamb, the elder asks who the praisers are and "where have they *come* from?" The answer is that these are the ones "who have *come* out of the great ordeal" (7:13–14). In other words, the faithful are those who have come, who have passed, through martyrdom.

This theme of coming is developed further in Revelation 22. In v. 17 we read,

> *Both the Spirit and the bride say,* "Come" (ἔρχου | *erchou,* from ἔρχομαι).
> *And let everyone who hears say,* "Come" (ἔρχου, from ἔρχομαι).
> *And let everyone who is thirsty,* come (ἐρχέσθω | *erchesthō*, from ἔρχομαι).
> *Let anyone who wishes,* take (λαβέτω | *labetō*, from λαμβάνω) *the water of life freely.*

But to whom are these petitions addressed? Who is being asked to come here? Three suggestions have been made: (a) the unbelieving world; (b) the church; and (c) a combination, with the first two imperatives addressed to Christ and the third to the church.[47]

R. H. Charles, George Eldon Ladd, Robert H. Mounce, and Philip E. Hughes argue for the first interpretation: this is an altar call to the world.[48] Although it may seem as if the first part of the verse is an invitation to Jesus, the first half should be interpreted in light of the second half, which is addressed to "the world," according to Ladd. Charles says that "the Spirit" (τὸ πνεῦμα | *to pneuma*) in the Apocalypse is consistently the Spirit of Christ. It is Christ who speaks in the prophetic oracles to the seven churches (chaps. 2–3), when the audience is encouraged to listen to what the πνεῦμα is saying to the churches. So

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[47] Although Frederick J. Murphy recognizes and discusses the problem, he remains noncommittal: Fredrick J. Murphy, *Fallen Is Babylon: The Revelation to John* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Pr. International, 1998), 439.

[48] Cf. R. H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920), 2:179; George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 294–5; Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, vol. 17 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 395; and Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *The Book of the Revelation: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 240.

whoever is the addressee of the petition, it must be understood that the speakers are "Christ and the church in the heavenly Jerusalem."[49] According to Charles, it is therefore most natural, even without the clarification of the third and fourth petitions, to see the addressee of all four as the "world of men that were still thirsting for life and truth or were willing to accept them."[50]

G. B. Caird prefers the second interpretation: this petition is addressed "not to Christ but to all comers."[51] It is both an invitation to communion and an invitation to join the ranks of the conquerors. G. K. Beale agrees: all three petitions are addressed to the church. In fact, according to Beale, who follows G. H. Lang and Jan Fekkes in this regard, "Isaiah's three imperatives to 'come' are probably the model for the three imperatives to 'come' here in Rev. 22:17."[52] Robert Wall argues for a slightly modified version of the second interpretation: this petition and the entire book are addressed not to the church as such, but specifically to the embattled church, which is being invited to embrace fully the word of the gospel.[53] The last petition is not meant as a word of grace for those who need to be justified; rather, it is a word of grace for those believers who need to be sanctified.[54] If the church generally were the object of this imperative, he says, we would expect the final petition to offer a symbol of comfort, rather than grace, as the reward.

Beasley-Murray argues for the third interpretation: the first two petitions are directed toward Christ, the third to the "hearers of the book," and the fourth to the unbelieving world.[55] Along the same vein,

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[49] Charles, *Revelation*, 2:179.

[50] Ibid., 2:180.

[51] George B. Caird, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine*, 2d ed., Black's New Testament Commentaries (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1984), 286. Cf. also Ray Summers, *Worthy Is the Lamb: An Interpretation of Revelation* (Nashville: Broadman Pr., 1951), 218.

[52] G. K. Beale, *Book of Revelation*, 1149. Although he admits that "this is a difficult issue," Grant R. Osborne ultimately sides with Beale in arguing that Christ is the speaker of all of the invitations to come in Rev. 22:17 (*Revelation*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament [Grand Rapids: Baker Bks., 2002], 793). Leonard L. Thompson agrees that *people* are being invited to come in this verse, not Jesus (*Revelation*, Abingdon New Testament Commentaries [Nashville: Abingdon Pr., 1998], 188).

[53] Robert W. Wall, *Revelation*, New International Bible Commentary, no. 18 (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Pubs., Inc., 1991), 267.

[54] Ibid., 267–8.

[55] G. R. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, 2d ed., New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 342. Cf. also John Sweet, *Revelation*, TPI New Testament Commentaries (Philadelphia: Trinity Pr. International, 1990), 137, 139; Jürgen Roloff, *The Revelation of John*, A Continental Commentary, trans. John E. Alsup (Minneapolis: Fortress Pr., 1993), 252–3; and Richard L. Jeske, *Revelation for Today: Images of Hope* (Philadelphia:

Beckwith refers to the shift in the implied addressees as a "sudden turn," and claims that such a sudden shift to directly addressing the audience is also seen in 13:9f. and 14:13f.[56]

The context of v. 17 within the chapter seems to support Beasley-Murray's interpretation. No less than three times in this chapter do we have the assurance of Christ, "Behold, I am coming quickly" (ἰδοὺ ἔρχομαι ταχύ | *idou erchomai tachy*, v. 7; ἰδοὺ ἔρχομαι ταχύ, v. 12; ναί, ἔρχομαι ταχύ | *nai erchomai tachy*, v. 20). The last of these is met with the prophet's answer, ἀμήν, ἔρχου κύριε Ἰησοῦ | *amēn, erchou kyrie Iēsu*, "Amen! Come, Lord Jesus!" (v. 20). The theme of the imminent coming of Christ seems to run through this chapter as a grounding bass note.

The immediate context for v. 17 is set in v. 16, where ἐγώ (*egō*, "I") is repeated twice in reference to Jesus. "I, Jesus, have sent my angel. . . . I myself am the root and offspring of David, the bright morning star." Immediately after that the Spirit and the bride join to say, "Come!" So the most logical character implied in the imperative ἔρχου of v. 17 is Jesus.

In v. 7 we read, "See, I am coming soon!" (ἰδοὺ ἔρχομαι ταχύ). The subject of the verb is Christ. The nearness of Christ's coming is the basis for the macarism that follows: "Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book."[57] Because of the nearness of Christ's coming, the reader/hearer who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book will be blessed. In v. 12 the ideas expressed in v. 7 are repeated. Here again we read, "See, I am coming soon!" (ἰδοὺ ἔρχομαι ταχύ), and again the implication of this nearness is expressed in ethical terms: "My reward is with me, to repay according to everyone's work." Finally, in v. 20, the promised imminent coming of Christ is repeated one more time:

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Fortress Pr., 1983), 123. This interpretation is implied in Boesak, *Comfort and Protest*, 138; Boring, *Revelation*, 225; and Christopher Rowland, *Revelation*, Epworth Commentaries (London: Epworth Pr., 1993), 161. David E. Aune also seems to support this interpretation. For him the problem of the inconsistency of implied referent is at least partially resolved in the recognition that "come" functions here as a transitional catchword. See David E. Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 52c (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1998), 1227.

[56] Isbon T. Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John: Studies in Introduction, with a Critical and Exegetical Commentary* (New York: Macmillan, 1919), 778; cf. also Henry Barclay Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John: The Greek Text with Introduction, Notes, and Indices*, 3d ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1909), 310, who calls this "a remarkable change of reference."

[57] See Virgil P. Cruz, "The Beatitudes of the Apocalypse: Eschatology and Ethics," in *Perspectives on Christology: Essays in Honor of Paul K. Jewett*, edited by Marguerite Shuster and Richard A. Muller (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing Hse., 1991), 269–83, for a succinct argument on how the beatitudes or macarisms reflect the essential unity of eschatology and ethics in the Apocalypse.

"Surely I am coming soon." This time the author bows the knee in invitation to Christ: "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!" (v. 20).

The Spirit and the bride, which is the church, join in one voice to pray, "Come." But this invitation is not just for some distant narrative voice in space and time. The invitation is brought home to the audience in the second line of v. 17 as the author explicitly invites the audience to join in the invitation: "Let everyone who hears say, 'Come.'" As with the first invitation, the object of the invitation is again Christ, but here the audience is invited by the author to join in the invitation. Finally, in the third line of this verse, the invitation shifts dramatically into a direct address to the audience as the author speaks the eschatologically pregnant word of invitation directly to the reader: "And let everyone who is thirsty come."

What is going on here? Is the author attempting to subtly shift the audience's understanding of "coming" from an apocalyptic coming of the Son of Man to a more existential coming of the individual believer? Is John finally showing his hand as he subtly demythologizes Jewish apocalypticism in one small stroke? Probably not.

Mitchell G. Reddish agrees with the mixed-addressee interpretation. He says, "In contrast to the first two invitations that are issued to Christ, this invitation is addressed to people to come and partake of God's offer of salvation. . . . These words are an 'evangelistic invitation' to everyone who thirsts for God to come and be satisfied. The water of life that provides salvation, wholeness, and healing is God's gift to creation."[58] That the water of life was a symbol of salvation in both the Jewish and Christian literature of Early Judaism is widely acknowledged.[59] This suggests that for John the author, the ultimate purpose in writing his Apocalypse was to call his reader/hearers to salvation—that realm of faithful witness and consistent resistance that elsewhere in the New Testament is called the kingdom of God. And when they do, the kingdom of the world becomes the kingdom of the messiah.[60]

Roloff also agrees with the mixed-addressee interpretation. However, he sees the double invitation as intentional and natural within its liturgical context. The one invitation is the eschatological "maranatha" addressed to Christ. The second is the invitation to the Lord's Supper,

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[58] Mitchell G. Reddish, *Revelation,* Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary (Macon, Ga.: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, Inc., 2001), 429.

[59] For examples drawn from Deutero-Isaiah, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and rabbinic literature, see David E. Aune, *Revelation 17–22,* 1229.

[60] Rev. 11:15; cf. also 1:6, 9; 5:10; 12:10; 16:10; 17:12, 17–18 for other occurrences of βασιλεία (*basileia*).

addressed to the believer. He says: "Precisely this double meaning is . . . intended here. . . . In this cry, which every hearer of the reading of Revelation is to join, the entire fulfillment of salvation, which is promised for the future in 21:1–22:5, is transposed into the personal sphere and brought together with the present coming of Jesus in the Lord's Supper. . . . Thus, John is not content with pointing to a temporally imminent future dawning of salvation (cf. 1:3; 22:10); rather, he indicates where salvation can be discovered and experienced in the present."[61]

The interplay between the *maranatha* cry of the early church and the invitation to the Lord's Supper can be seen in Didache 10:6, where we have a similar phenomenon. There we read,

> *Let grace*[62] ***come*** (ἐλθέτω | *elthetō*)
> *and let this world* ***pass away*** (παρελθέτω | *parelthetō*).
> *Hosanna to the God of David.*
> *If anyone is holy,*
> *let him* ***come*** (ἐρχέσθω | *erchesthō*).[63]
> *If anyone is not,*
> *let him repent.*
> μαρανα θα *(marana tha, "Our Lord,* ***come!****")* *Amen!*

Although the Didache concludes with a short apocalyptic section (chap. 16), the author does not identify himself as living in the last days. As Vielhauer and Strecker have shown, everything is schematized. The author is concise and organized. In other words, even the so-called apocalyptic section of the Didache is concerned not with traditional apocalyptic rhetoric, but with catechism, with church order.[64] Though the topic is eschatology, eschatological urgency is missing from the rhetoric.

It is not as if the eschatological tension is relaxed entirely in the Didache. In commenting on this verse in the Didache, Oscar Cullmann states that "this connection between present and future reality (a

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[61] Roloff, *The Revelation of John*, 252–3. Cf. also Catherine Gunsalus González and Justo L. González, *Revelation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Pr., 1997), 146–7; and Harrington, *Revelation*, 223, 225–6, who hold a similar view on the close relationship between the double meaning in the Apocalypse and the nature of the eucharistic celebration in the early church.

[62] "Grace" here may be a title for Christ. Cf. Cyril C. Richardson, ed. and trans., *Early Christian Fathers*, Library of Christian Classics, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Westminster Pr., 1953), 176, n. 57. Cullmann notes that the Coptic has "the Lord," which he thinks is perhaps original. See Oscar Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament*, rev. ed., trans. Shirley C. Guthrie and Charles A. M. Hall (Philadelphia: Westminster Pr., 1963), 210, n. 2.

[63] Or, "let him keep coming."

[64] Philip Vielhauer, "Apocalypses and Related Subjects," 591.

relationship which was of course lost with the passing of time) represents the peculiar character and greatness of the early Church's worship."[65] The invitation to come to the Lord's Supper is an invitation to "proclaim the Lord's death *until he comes*" (1 Cor. 11:26).

However, the rhetorical interests of these two writings are quite different. In contrast to the Didache, Revelation 22 leans on tiptoe toward the consummation. This is not a consummation premised on the demise of the present order, or of the ignoring of the present order. Rather, it is a consummation premised on God's judgment of the present order. In a satire addressed to Domitian, the Roman emperor who may have been in power during the writing of the Apocalypse, Martial wrote:

> *Thou, morning star,*
> *Bring on the day!*
> *Come and expel our fears,*
> *Rome begs that Caesar*
> *may soon appear.*[66]

If Revelation 22 is read in light of Martial's satire, the promise of Christ to come soon and the invitation of the author welcoming him take on political significance. The author is saying that Christ, not Caesar, is the morning star.[67] If we stay with a more conservative interpretive strategy, in which we look first to the Hebrew Scriptures and second to the traditions within Early Judaism for the symbolic referents, we see in v. 16 a direct appeal to the messianic traditions developing in Early Judaism.[68] In any case, the invitation to come (ἔρχομαι) and take (λαμβάνω) freely the water of life in v. 17 recalls the scene in chap. 5, where the Lamb came (ἔρχομαι) and took (λαμβάνω) the scroll from the right hand of the one sitting on the throne.

Jesus *acted* in the crucial scene in heaven. Jesus' nonviolent resistance to evil, his "consistent resistance" (Schüssler Fiorenza's apt translation of ὑπομονή | *hypomonē*)[69] led to his execution. The resulting slaughter of Christ is seen in the Apocalypse as the key to his victory and

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[65] Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament*, 211.

[66] Boesak, *Comfort and Protest*, 137. Boesak says he got this from Stauffer. Neither Boesak nor Stauffer is very good about bibliographical specificity.

[67] Morning star was, in Second Temple Judaism, a developing messianic symbol. Cf. Rev. 2:28; Num. 24:17; Isa. 14:12; 60:3; Matt. 2:2, 10; *Testament of Levi* 18:3; *Testament of Judah* 24:1; Cairo Genizah copy of the *Damascus Document* 7.18–20; *Milḥamah* 11.6; y.*Ta'anit* 68d.

[68] To speak of "messianic traditions developing" is already somewhat risky, because these traditions were neither monolithic, nor did they develop in a linear fashion. For a helpful overview of the evidence, see John J. Collins, *The Scepter and the Star: The Messiahs of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Ancient Literature* (New York: Doubleday, 1995).

[69] Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation*, 4, 182.

the image of Christ as vulnerable lamb (ἀρνίον|*arnion*) becomes the central, controlling image of Christ in the Apocalypse.[70] Just as Christ overcame through *his* nonviolent resistance unto death, so are the believers to overcome through *their* nonviolent resistance unto death (cf. esp. 3:21). The victories of both through the same means enable both to sit on God's throne and to reign (cf. 3:21; 5:10; 11:15, 17; 20:4, 6; 22:5). And just as Christ came and took the scroll from the hand of the one seated on the throne (5:7), so the reader is invited at the end of the vision to come and take the water of life freely (22:17).

### Conclusion: The promises and challenges of the Apocalypse

The goal toward which the Apocalypse moves is the vision of the restoration of creation, including the proper worship of God, suggested especially by Trito-Isaiah and Ezekiel. In this final eschatological vision, paradise merges not with some idealized return to the garden, but with a city to which the nations come for healing (cf. Ezek. 47:12; Rev. 5:9). It is therefore forward-looking; it leans toward consummation, but not in an escapist sort of way.

The sovereignty of God is what sustains mission (22:13). The Revelation is a revelation of what God is doing and how God's people are to respond; it is not a program of hope conceived or initiated by humans (22:6). To the extent that this vision is pessimistic, it is a pessimism about humanity's ability to bring this consummation to realization. Only God can do this. Still, the human response is critical. The believing community's role is to resist consistently and nonviolently, to "follow the Lamb wherever he goes" (14:4). Thus, the power of the Apocalypse lies in recalling the traditions of the past (both Jewish and Jewish-Christian) in a way that unleashes the power of eschatology (a vision of the future) for an ethical stance in the present.

This book is an invitation—to the altar of decision, yes, but more fundamentally to a "vision for the church as an alternative community pitted in conflict with the powers that be."[71] It is an invitation to the peace of justice with a profound sense of the underlying moral orderliness of the universe.[72] As such, Revelation represents the biblical high point in the intersection of mission and peace in the New Testament as it envisions life as it ought to be under the lordship of Christ, and calls all comers to that vision.

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[70] Christ is referred to as ἀρνίον 28 times in the Apocalypse—more often than any other title or designation.

[71] Hays, *Moral Vision*, 173.

[72] Ibid., 172.