

IAN BOXALL

THE
REVELATION
OF SAINT JOHN

BLACK'S NEW TESTAMENT COMMENTARIES
GENERAL EDITOR: MORNA D. HOOKER

BLACK'S NEW TESTAMENT COMMENTARY
THE REVELATION OF SAINT JOHN

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For William
συγκοινωδός ἐν ἱεροῦ

Part II The Unveiling of the Lamb's Scroll and the Church's Witness (11:19—22:11)

4 SEVEN VISIONS

(11:19—15:4)

Despite the prophetic proclamation of the End following the seventh trumpet, the Apocalypse continues with a new series of visions, focusing particularly upon the Church's witness during the last days. Although (as I shall argue) this section represents the fourth section in a series of six, it also marks the start of the second half of the book, which in many ways revisits the themes of Rev. 1:9—11:18. Here we are reminded of that challenge made by the son of man figure to the seven congregations in chapters 2—3: to be faithful in a world of subtle deception and compromise, of external pressure and threat and the dangers of false prophecy. The character of these threats and dangers will be spelt out in visions of the monsters, unveiled as earthly puppets of the dragon, while the alternative possibility of following the Lamb will run alongside like a subversive thread.

At this point, the structural marker of sevens which has explicitly dominated the first half of the book (the seven messages, seals and trumpets) breaks down, and will not emerge explicitly again until the seven bowl-plagues which commence at 15:5. This might be accounted for by the fact that (after the summary in chapter 11) the contents of the Lamb's scroll are now being revealed in more detail, and that these contents become the determining factor for the following four chapters. However, John is quite capable of sustaining sets of seven without explicitly drawing attention to them (the seven beatitudes, scattered throughout the book from 1:3 onwards, have already been noted, as have the sevenfold occurrences of divine titles such as 'Lord God Almighty'; see on 11:17). Having established such a pattern with three explicit septets, it is not at all unlikely that such a sophisticated text now continues that pattern, though below the surface. The following is a possible outline of what now follows:

1. The woman and the dragon (11:19—12:18)
2. The monster from the sea (13:1—10)
3. The monster from the earth (13:11—18)

4. The Lamb and its followers on Mount Zion (14:1-5)
Interlude: three angels (14:6-13; cf. the eagle with the three woes at 8:13)
 5. The harvest of 'someone like a son of man' (14:14-16)
 6. The grape harvest (14:17-20)
 7. The song of the new Exodus (15:1-4)

First Vision: The Woman and the Dragon (11:19-12:18)

(11:19) Then the sanctuary of God which is in heaven was opened, and the Ark of his Covenant appeared in his sanctuary. There were flashes of lightning, voices, claps of thunder, an earthquake and heavy hail.
 (12:1) And a great sign appeared in heaven, a woman dressed in the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a wreath of twelve stars. (2) She was pregnant, and she cried out in intense labour pains as she prepared to give birth. (3) Then another sign appeared in heaven, a great fiery red dragon, which had seven heads and ten horns. On its heads were seven diadems, (4) and its tail dragged a third of the stars from heaven and threw them to the earth. The dragon stood before the woman, who was on the verge of giving birth, so that it might eat her child up as soon as she gave birth. (5) She gave birth to a male child, the son who would shepherd all the nations with an iron sceptre. But her child was snatched up to God and to his throne, (6) while the woman fled into the wilderness, where a place had been prepared for her by God, so that she might be fed there for one thousand, two hundred and sixty days.
 (7) Then a war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought back, (8) but it was not powerful enough, and they had to wage war with the dragon. The dragon and his angels could no longer keep their place in heaven. (9) It was thrown down, the great dragon, that ancient serpent, who is known as 'Devil' and 'the Satan', the deceiver of the whole world. It was thrown down to the earth, and its angels were thrown down with it. (10) Then I heard a loud voice in heaven saying: 'Now have come the salvation and the power, and the royal rule of our God, and the authority of his Christ! For the accuser of our brothers and sisters has been thrown down, the one who accuses them before our God day and night. (11) These have conquered him as a result of the blood of the Lamb,

and as a result of their witness,
 for they did not love their life even in the face of death.
 (12) Therefore celebrate, you heavens, and you who shelter there!
 But woe to you, earth and sea,
 because the devil has descended to you, knowing that he has little time left!
 (13) Now when the dragon saw that it had been thrown down to the earth, it pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. (14) But the woman was given the two wings of a great eagle, so as to fly into the wilderness to her place, where she was fed, for a time, times and half a time, and protected from the presence of the serpent. (15) The serpent sped a river of water out of its mouth after the woman, to sweep her away. (16) But Mother Earth came to the aid of the woman, opening her mouth and swallowing up the river which the dragon sped out of its mouth. (17) So the dragon became angry with the woman, and went off to wage war with the rest of her children, those who keep God's commandments and continue the witness of Jesus.
 (18) Then it took its stand on the shore of the sea.

Many commentators follow the standard chapter divisions and take 11:19 as the conclusion to the seventh trumpet. There are good grounds for making the break a verse earlier, however, as does the Roman Lectionary in its reading for the feast of the Assumption of Our Lady (Rev. 11:19-12:6, 10). The opening of a door in heaven inaugurated the vision of the heavenly liturgy in Revelation 4, accompanied by lightning, voices and thunder from the throne (4:5); the trumpets sequence also began with a liturgical action in the heavenly sanctuary, accompanied by thunder, voices, lightning and an earthquake (8:5; note the 'opening' of the seals and the beginning seems to serve as both the conclusion to the seals and the beginning of the trumpets). It is appropriate that a new section should begin in the same way (the septet of bows at 15:5-8 will also begin with an opening in the heavenly sanctuary).
 After the scene-setting of 11:19 the passage falls neatly into three sections: 12:1-6 begins the story of the woman and the dragon; 12:7-12 recounts the battle between Satan and the archangel Michael in heaven, with a canticle reinterpreting the action in verses 10-12; the story of the woman and the dragon resumes in verses 13-18. No doubt two sources have been combined here (see e.g. Harrington 1993: 129). What is important, however, is not the literary pechistoy of this vision but its present form. John's sandwich technique

intends to kill her. Rescued at Zeus' command by the north wind and aided by Poseidon, she makes her way to the Aegean island of Delos, where she safely gives birth to her children Apollo and Artemis. Her son Apollo subsequently defeats the Python and the threat is over-come. It is unlikely that any inhabitant of Roman Asia, hearing Revelation 12, would not pick up resonances of the Leto-Apollo-Python myth. They may also have detected echoes of the Egyptian version, concerning the birth of Horus to Isis, and the attack on them by Seth-Typhon (A. Y. Collins 1976: 62–63; Van Henten 1994: 501). Isis' cult had already made its mark on Asian cities such as Pergamum and Ephesus. What would be most shocking to the first hearers of Revelation, however, is the way in which John's vision retells and radically subverts such myths.

John first recounts how the sanctuary of God which is heaven 11:19

was opened, and the Ark of his Covenant was seen inside it. The Ark (a wooden box supposedly containing the tablets of the Law: Exod. 25:10) signified the saving if terrifying presence of God with his people, both during the wilderness wanderings and when settled in the land (e.g. Num. 10:33–36; Deut. 10:8; 1 Sam. 4:1–4; 7:1; 1 Kgs 8:6). Located in the Holy of Holies of Solomon's Temple, it became the place of encounter and reconciliation between God and Israel. It disappeared at the Exile, and some Jewish traditions claimed that it had been hidden in a cave on Sinai by the prophet Jeremiah, and would be revealed again with the glory of the Lord and the cloud, in the last days (2 Mac. 2:4–8; cf. 2 Bar. 6:1–9).

When John sees not only the sanctuary opened but also the Ark of the Covenant within it, he is seeing nothing less than the divine Presence. Revelation has been reluctant to describe the Holy God directly (note the absence of anthropomorphisms at 4:2–3), and it exhibits the same reticence here. For John, what is important is that the Holy of Holies now stands open, providing him direct access to the one who dwells there (as if the veil of the Temple has been torn in two from top to bottom: Mk 15:38; though note Rev. 15:8). Just as John's vision of the heavenly visions took their starting point from the first sequence of heavenly visions, so this new sequence finds its orientation in the heavenly Ark. That it is the Ark of his Covenant stresses God's faithfulness to his people (now the Lamb's people of the new Exodus). Signs which once accompanied this present theophany (Exod. 19:16–18; cf. Rev. 4:5; 8:5) accompany this present theophany: flashes of lightning, voices, claps of thunder and an earthquake. There is also heavy hail, a reminder of the salvific Egyptian plagues (Exod. 9:22–26). The God who saved his people out of Egypt and made a covenant with them at Sinai remains

suggests some correlation between the activity of the woman and her offspring, and the defeat of the dragon Satan (for the history of interpretation of Revelation 12, see Prigent 1959).

This chapter provides one of the Apocalypse's richest and most evocative visions, which has left a powerful impression in Western art, from Dürer's woodcut of St Michael slaying the dragon to Velázquez's famous *Immaculate Conception*, which highlights the passage's importance for that Marian doctrine in seventeenth-century Spain. If the metaphor of the kaleidoscope is an appropriate one for understanding Revelation, it is perhaps most so for this particular vision. To grasp its significance, one needs to be aware that it presents a series of interconnecting stories, each of which contributes something significant to the whole. There are echoes of the story of Eve and the serpent, whose head her offspring would eventually bruise (Gen. 3:15); of Israel, pursued into the wilderness by Pharaoh but borne on eagle's wings (Exod. 14:1–31; 19:4; see the likening of Pharaoh to a dragon at Ezek. 29:3; 32:2); of mother Zion, who like a pregnant woman struggles to be rescued from the twisting serpent Leviathan (Isa. 26:16–27:1; cf. Mic. 4:10); of Mary, that faithful Israelite who gave birth to Israel's Messiah; and Satan's opposition to her son's royal rule.

Underlying all these is a much more ancient story, which took different forms throughout the ancient Near East and Mediterranean world: the so-called combat myth. Myths, contrary to popular parlance, are not necessarily untruths but potent stories which may express truth more forcefully and meaningfully than other forms of discourse. Cultural variations of this combat myth can be found throughout the ancient world, describing in different ways the cosmic struggle between the forces of good and evil, order and chaos, rival gods battling for supremacy. Israel had already reworked such traditions to express its conviction that YHWH had defeated the forces of chaos (e.g. Gen. 1:1–2:3; Ps. 74:13–14; Isa. 27:1; 51:9–10), and John is almost certainly drawing on this biblical tradition.

Nevertheless, there are also strong echoes here of pagan forms of the myth (A. Y. Collins 1976: 57–71). Given the geographical location of both author and first recipients of Revelation, the best-known form of this myth would have been that of the birth of Apollo, brother of Artemis and son of Zeus, to the pregnant Leto, Asia confined one of the ancient world's major shrines to Apollo, the oracle of Didyma. Moreover, through Didyma's political dependence on Miletos, its cult would have particularly influenced the imagination of an inhabitant of Patmos, itself a fortress-island of Miletos (see Saffrey 1975 for evidence of thriving cults of both Apollo and Artemis on Patmos in John's day). In this Greek version of the myth, Leto, pregnant by Zeus, is pursued by the dragon Python, who

Eden to new Exodus in Christ. Her labour pains are particularly acute because the dawning of the messianic age brings with it intense tribulation for the people of God (the 'birthpangs' of Mk 13:8 and par.).

This corporate interpretation reflects the earliest patristic exegesis of this passage, the woman as the Church, or God's people of Old and New Covenants (Boxall 1999). This does not render illegitimate the Marian interpretation, which emerged alongside the ecclesial one in the later patristic period and flourished in the Middle Ages. However, it must be regarded as a secondary reading derived from her identification as the heavenly personification of God's people (Le Frois 1954 offers a different, though ultimately unconvincing, reading of the patristic evidence).

Another sign then makes its appearance: a great fiery red dragon 3-4

(which will be explicitly identified with the devil in verse 9). Fiery red was the colour of the second horse, whose rider was allowed to remove peace from the earth, highlighting its association with bloodshed and slaughter (6:4; variants of red, 'purple' and 'scarlet' will be worn by Babylon, who is judged for shedding human blood; 17:4; 18:16; scarlet is also the colour of the monster on which she sits; 17:3). As well as the dragon Python or Seth-Typhon in the stories of the birth of Apollo and Horus, Christian Jews would think of the serpent-like Leviathan, the personification of the waters of chaos (the Hebrew equivalent of the Canaanite Litan; Job 41:1; Ps 74:14; 104:26; Isa. 27:1; 4 Ez. 6:49–52; 2 Bar. 29:4; 1 En. 6:7–9, 24; cf. Rahab in Ps. 89:10). The overall effect on the hearer, however, is as important as any antecedents. Fear of dragons and powers that threaten social order and cohesion is a universal phenomenon, and the mythic quality of this scene brings residual fears to the surface. Like the most terrifying of nightmares, or the darkest of fairy tales, it calls for satisfactory resolution to assure the audience that such a threat can ultimately be overcome.

The dragon has seven heads. This number derives ultimately from ancient traditions about Leviathan/Litan, which according to the Ugaritic sources has seven heads (Day 1992). However, the symbolic numerology of the Apocalypse gives it an additional significance. Seven is the number of perfection or completion: thus, to humiliate the authority it wields in the political realm (contrast Christ, who wears many diadems: 19:12; cf. the ten diadems of the monster at 13:1). Revelation presents the line separating good from evil as very thin, and many will be seduced by the dragon and the two monsters it spawns (the first monster also has seven heads and ten horns, revealing a striking family resemblance: 13:1; 17:3). But witness. In her story, John sees the sweep of salvation history from

faithful, and is acting to overcome the forces of evil, thus putting the world to rights.

12:1–2 In Isaiah 66:6–9, a voice from the Temple precedes the description of Jerusalem-Zion as a woman in labour. Similarly, John recounts how, after the voices in the heavenly sanctuary, a great sign appeared in heaven, a woman dressed in the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a wreath of twelve stars. The word sign is used throughout this section to describe heavenly portents (also the dragon at 12:3 and the seven angels with the last plagues at 15:1; cf. Mk 8:11; the plural denotes signs worked by the dragon's earthly accomplices, which lead people astray: 13:13–14; 16:14; 19:20). The woman's location in heaven or 'in the sky', and the reference to the heavenly bodies with which she is adorned, may suggest a further astronomical resonance. Some commentators have understood the woman and the dragon which pursues her as the constellations Virgo and Scorpio (Farver 1964; 139–45; Malina and Pilch 2000: 155–57), or her starry wreath as all twelve signs of the zodiac (e.g. Aune 1998a: 681).

While one should not rule out such astronomical echoes, there is a more obvious Old Testament background to the wreath of twelve stars. The stars are signs of the twelve tribes of Israel, eleven of which bow down, along with the sun and moon, before Joseph's star in Gen. 37:9 (cf. *T. Napht.* 5:1–5; see Sg Sgs 6:10, where the bride's appearance is likened to both moon and sun). That she is dressed in and the great multitude dressed in heavenly white: 4:4; 7:9; 13; and the sun denotes her heavenly origin (compare the twenty-four elders who are dressed in a cloud with a face like the sun at 10:1). This initial description may help us wade through the multiple allusions to biblical texts and pagan myths, in order to identify the woman. She is a heavenly figure, crowned with the tribes of Israel. She sums up in herself many of the maternal figures that God's people have known: Eve, Israel, Jerusalem. Like the other women in the visionary section of Revelation (Babylon; the bride of the Lamb), she has a corporate identity. A further clue is provided in verse 2: She was pregnant, and she cried out in intense labour pains as she prepared to give birth. There is a close similarity to Jn 16:20–22, which likens the community of disciples, living through the suffering and glorification of the Son, to a woman in labour (cf. a similar use of the metaphor in 1QH 3). In short, she is the heavenly counterpart of the community of the faithful (and John makes no harsh distinction between Israel and the Church). She represents the community which through a long and often-turbulent history prepared the way for the Messiah's coming and now continues his witness. In her story, John sees the sweep of salvation history from

and comes to share God's throne and therefore God's royal rule. The verb for snatched up is ἡρπάξον, which may be translated 'was captured'. Given the huge popularity of the doctrine of the so-called pre-tribulation 'Rapture', whereby the faithful will be caught up to heaven prior to the great tribulation, it is notable that Christ alone in the whole Apocalypse is said to be 'captured', and only after suffering, while God's people are pursued by the dragon into the wilderness.

For John's first audiences, this story of the male child's rescue from the dragon would also have had reverberations on the contemporary political scene. A number of early emperors, including Nero, who has left his mark on Revelation elsewhere (e.g. 6:2; 9:11; 13:3, 18), presented themselves in the mould of Apollo. According to one contemporary source, Nero's special corps of soldiers, the Augustiani, acclaimed him in the following manner: 'Glorious Caesar! Apollo! Augustus! Unmatched, like Pythios! By thyself we swear, O Caesar, none surpasses you' (Cassius Dio 62.20.5; cited by Van Henten 1994: 506). The story of Leto, Apollo and Python would come to have imperial overtones: the emperor is the Saviour who establishes peace by overcoming the dragon of chaos. With such overtly political connotations, Revelation's vision becomes politically subversive. In John's retelling, the tables are turned. It is Christ, rather than Apollo or any imperial incarnation of that deity, who has won the victory. The arrogant emperor finds himself identified not with the divine Son, but with the destroying dragon. The victim of Rome, crucified under Pontius Pilate, is revealed as the true victor.

The woman fled into the wilderness, where a place had been prepared for her by God. Rather than representing the flight of Mary and Joseph into Egypt, the flight of the woman into the wilderness evokes that journey in reverse, out of Egypt at the Exodus (cf. Ezek. 29:3, where Pharaoh is likened to a dragon). It is a reminder that the story of God's people as John witnesses it is the story of a new Exodus. Though the wilderness is often viewed as a place of danger and desolation (hence Babylon is there at 17:3), it is also the place of preparation, where God cared for his people prior to their entering the promised land. The place . . . prepared for her by God echoes the sealing of the one hundred and forty-four thousand, or the measuring of God's sanctuary and its worshippers (7:1–7; 11:1–2). It offers assurance of divine care, though not exemption from suffering. She is fed there (cf. the story of Hagar, Gen. 21:14; 19) for one thousand, two hundred and sixty days (see on 11:2 and 3). The ecclesial interpretation of the woman has sometimes suggested a eucharistic reading of her being fed or 'nourished' (picking up on the relationship between the manna and the eucharistic bread: e.g. John 6). The illustration in the thirteenth-century

however perfect the dragon may appear, this book unveils its true reality as a terrifying serpent, bringing not order but chaos in its wake.

It also has ten horns: the horn is the symbol of power (see on the seven horns of the Lamb at 5:6), and the number suggests that the dragon is powerful indeed. As if to emphasise its power, John tells how its tail dragged a third of the stars from heaven and threw them to the earth. Unlike the one who created the stars, the dragon creates chaos even in the ordered heavens (6:13; cf. Dan. 8:10, where the 'little horn', representing the tyrant Antiochus Epiphanes, throws down some of the stars). John has already witnessed such cosmic collapse in the falling of the burning mountain, the star Wormwood and the angel with the key to the Abyss (8:8, 10; 9:1); here it happens on an even grander scale (though the fact that it is only a third sets limits to this creature's havoc). Like Python in the Apollo myth, or Seth-Typhon in the story of Horus' birth, the dragon stood before the woman, who was on the verge of giving birth, so that it might eat her child up as soon as she gave birth. There is an ironic contrast here with John, who ate up the scroll in order to absorb God's word and pass it on (10:10); the dragon's desire is to eat up the Word of God (19:13) in order that he may be destroyed.

The woman gave birth to a male child, the son who would shepherd all the nations with an iron sceptre. The Greek is literally 'a son, a male', the latter word being effectively redundant: the translation here attempts to retain both by picking up on the significance of God's Son in Psalm 2, which is obviously being evoked, as it was at the seventh trumpet of 11:15–18 (here esp. Ps. 2:9; also Isa. 66:7 LXX). The verb translated shepherd could also mean 'rule', while the iron sceptre may be the shepherd's rod or crook, used for both rescue and reproof. This ambiguity is appropriate for the kingly Lamb, whose action can be experienced either as careful shepherding or terrifying judgement (cf. 2:27; 19:15). Though many commentators have understood the birth to be Christ's historical birth in Bethlehem, and the woman's flight into the wilderness as the flight of the Holy Family into Egypt (Mt. 2:13–18), this is problematic given that the birth is immediately followed by the child being snatched up to God and to his throne. Rather we are hearing, in mythological terms, of the death and resurrection of Christ, by which he became first to be born from the right hand (e.g. Acts 2:33; Rom. 1:4; Heb. 1:3). Psalm 2:7 speaks of the Messiah becoming God's Son on his enthronement, and this is interpreted in terms of Jesus' resurrection at Acts 13:33. By virtue of his death and resurrection, this child overcomes the attacking dragon

Trinity Apocalypse, for example, shows an angel approaching the woman with the host and a chalice (van der Meer 1978: 159).

7–9 Sandwiched between the two parts of the story about the woman and her flight into the wilderness is a description (though not a vision) of a war . . . in heaven between the dragon and the archangel Michael, together with their respective armies of angels. Michael has already appeared at 8:2 among the angels of the Presence, but this is the only place in Revelation where he is explicitly named. In Jewish apocalyptic he is the angelic protector of God's people Israel (e.g. Dan. 10:21; 12:1; *1 En.* 20:5; cf. Jude 9). Cosmic battles between angelic forces are known elsewhere in Jewish tradition (e.g. the eschatological war underlying the Qumran War Scroll, which also involves Michael and his troops as heavenly counterparts to the earthly forces of Israel: 1QM 17). This heavenly war heightens that sense of threat and chaos caused by the dragon's onslaught on the woman and her child, and promises to resolve it. Faced with Michael and his troops, the dragon was not powerful enough to sustain that onslaught. We have already been reminded of the constant threat to God's creative ordering of the cosmos which is posed by the demonic realm of the sea or the Abyss. This threat lurks even in heaven itself, where John has seen 'something like a sea of glass, like crystal' (4:6); it will only be resolved with the destruction of the sea at 21:1.

But here we are confronted with the beginning of that end, for we learn that the dragon and its army could no longer keep their place in heaven (contrast the woman, who has a place prepared for her by God in verse 6). Rather, the dragon was thrown down, like the burning mountain of 8:8, Babylon at 18:21, and the monster and false prophet at 19:20 (the dragon itself will ultimately be thrown into the lake of fire: 20:10). Some tradition of a fall or expulsion of Satan from God's presence, or of rebellious angels like the Watchers of *1 Enoch* 6—9, may well underlie what John now describes (e.g. Isa. 14:12–15; *2 Enoch* 29:3–5(7)), for 'Satan' is revealed as one of the dragons' aliases. The list piles up familiar yet infamous names designed to instil fear and anxiety: the dragon is also that ancient serpent (evoking not only Leviathan but the serpent of Eden, Gen. 3:1), who is known as 'Devil' (the serpent and the devil are identified at Wis. 2:24) and 'the Satan'. The use of the term the Satan evokes its more primitive usage to refer to God's chief prosecutor (Job 1:6ff; Zech. 3:1; cf. Lk. 22:31). Despite this, however, its juxtaposition with other titles highlights its more sinister aspect: it is the deceiver of the whole world ('deceiving' or 'leading astray' being one of the greatest crimes in Revelation: e.g. 2:20; 13:14). The throwing down is not simply out of heaven, where God is now in complete control, but to the earth (contrast the *2 Enoch* passage,

where Satanai and his angels are consigned to flying in the air above the Abyss). Revelation has already told us of the serpent's activity at Pergamum, 'where Satan's throne is' (2:13; cf. 2:9; 3:9); the warning is now broadened to embrace the whole earth.

Yet whatever antecedents underlie this passage, Revelation has 10–12 transformed them into something very different. Here as elsewhere in this book, the canticle proclaimed by a loud voice in heaven provides the interpretative key to the surrounding action, rather like the chorus in a Greek drama (Le Moignan 2000: 85). In a reversal of apocalyptic expectation, the really significant story is not that of Michael and Satan in heaven, or a primeval fall of Satan, but the earthly story of Jesus Christ and his followers. In Lk. 10:18, Jesus connects the fall of Satan like lightning from heaven with the proclamation of God's Kingdom in his own ministry and that of his followers. John 12:27–32 speaks of the 'hour' of Christ's death and resurrection as the definitive time at which the ruler of this world will be thrown out. So also the Apocalypse presents the crucial battle as a hard-won human battle involving Jesus and his faithful witnesses. Picking up again on the enthronement psalm, Psalm 2, the canticle declares: 'Now have come the salvation and the power, and the royal rule of our God, and the authority of his Christ! Truly, the attributes of God are twofold, reflecting the divine number. The defeat of the Evil One coincides with the coming of God's Kingdom (Mt. 6:10, 13; 12:28; 2 Thess. 2:8–10; cf. Rev. 11:15).

Again, the early notion of the Satan as the accuser appears. Echoing the prophecy uttered to the congregation in Smyrna in the prospect of specific hostility and legal action against Christians is raised (he is the accuser of our brothers and sisters). But in the legal processes, they have won the day; victory has been achieved in the decisive battle, even if there are individual skirmishes in which followers of Christ will have to engage. Christ has brought Satan's accusatory role to an end in the throwing down of the accuser. The heavenly voice continues: 'These have conquered him as a result of the blood of the Lamb. The Lamb's blood, that is his sacrificial death, represents the definitive defeat of the hostile powers (cf. Col. 2:15). What to casual bystanders outside Jerusalem would have looked like the execution of just another criminal or rebel, from the perspective of heaven is a glorious victory which has unseated evil itself. But Christ does not stand apart from his people. Nor is martyrdom simply spill blood. The two witnesses of Revelation 11 are a reminder of the continuation of Christ's witness to which the Church is called. Hence they have also conquered him as a result of their witness,