

see commentary on 12:6). The persecution she will experience from the dragon will be limited in extent (see 13:5).

Rivers of water are meant to be life-giving (see the 'river containing the water of life' in the new Jerusalem at 22:1), yet the activity of the dragon turns them to destructive use. Here the serpent spewed a river of water out of its mouth after the woman, in order to drown her (the juxtaposition of serpent and woman also evokes the Eden story in Genesis 3). But Mother Earth came to the aid of the woman: the word 'earth' (Greek γῆ) is personified here, suggesting the goddess Ge of Greek mythology (just as Revelation earlier personified Death and Hades: 1:18; 6:8). If this is a legitimate interpretation, it has implications for the generally negative assessment of Revelation's portrayal of women as essentially passive (see Additional Note on The Women of Revelation). It suggests that, although now the domain in which Satan is active, the earth recognises her Creator and can cooperate with his salvific purposes, opening her mouth and swallowing up the river (cf. Exod. 15:12 and Num. 16:32-34, where the earth swallows up God's enemies). The rage of the dragon, like a creature lashing out in fury, is now directed at the rest of the woman's children (lit. 'seed'). These are further defined as those who keep God's commandments and continue the witness of Jesus (see on 1:2), that is Christian witnesses. This hints at ominous things to come for the Church, though Christians who recall the story of Eden will detect a more hopeful strand. Genesis 3:15 foresees enmity between the serpent and the woman, its 'seed' and her 'seed'. Nevertheless, although the serpent will bruise the heel of the woman's offspring, the latter will ultimately strike the serpent's head.

The final verse prepares the reader for what is immediately to follow: it took its stand on the shore of the sea (this is the reading of the best manuscripts; a variant reading, 'I took my stand', involves the addition of just one extra letter in the Greek, and may well be a scribal accommodation to the verb in 13:1, which is in the first person singular. Smalley 2005: 303). The sea is the Abyss, the natural roosting ground of the serpent Leviathan, which will continue to harbour the forces of evil and chaos until its ultimate defeat in the new heavens and new earth (21:1). In the meantime, the audience is prepared for another of its beastly surprises to emerge.

Second Vision: The Monster from the Sea

(13:1-10)

(1) Then I saw a monster ascending out of the sea, with ten horns and seven heads. On its horns were ten diadems, and on each of its heads a name that blasphemes against God. (2) The monster that I saw looked like a leopard, but its feet were like

for they did not love their life even in the face of death (the souls of 6:9-11 may be especially in view, although Revelation looks forward to potential hostility in the future as well as back to what has already occurred: cf. 2:10). Speaking the truth, unmasking evil and falsehood, continuing the witness that Jesus bore: such will continue to bear fruit. This heavenly canticle takes up the mundane struggles of possibly tiny congregations of Asian Christians into a struggle of cosmic and cosmos-changing proportions. Theirs is no localised battle, but part of that great order is re-established over chaos.

At present, however, though the heavens may now be free of satanic activity, the same cannot be said of the earth, where God's people currently find themselves, nor of the sea, from where the newest threat is about to arise (at 13:1). The expulsion from heaven is a reason to celebrate, not simply for the heavens themselves, but also for you who shelter there. This expression directly parallels the negative 'those who make their home on the earth' (i.e. those hostile to God and his Messiah on account of their disordered priorities). It therefore describes not those specifically located in heaven, such as the angels, or the souls under the altar, but those – including those living on earth – whose lives are oriented toward God and who experience his sheltering presence (cf. 11:1; John 1:14). These have good reason to celebrate, for they ultimately belong to that realm from which Satan has been ejected and over which he has no more control (cf. 11:10, where 'those who make their home on the earth' celebrate the deaths of the two witnesses). Earth and sea, however, are warned that the devil has come down in a furious rage, knowing that he has little time left! This echoes the Jewish apocalyptic notion of the 'messianic woes', according to which the approach of the End will see heightened activity on the part of the powers of evil, as their control begins to slip away (probably reflected in Mt. 6:13; cf. Mk 13:20).

13-18 Having been oriented by the heavenly canticle, the story of the woman and the dragon is resumed. Hostility towards God's people emerges again (a theme already highlighted by the attack on the two witnesses of 11:1-13), as the dragon pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. The Exodus story, never far from the surface in the Apocalypse, also re-emerges. The two wings of a great eagle, which enables the woman to fly into the wilderness, echo Exod. 19:4, where God bears the people on eagle's wings (cf. Deut. 32:10-14; Isa. 40:31). The theme of divine protection for a time, times and half a time represents a repetition of the divine protection promised by the sealing of the one hundred and forty-four thousand and the measuring of the sanctuary of God (7:1-7; 11:1-2; 184

13:1-10

THE REVELATION OF ST JOHN

(1) Anyone for captivity, goes into captivity;
(2) Let anyone who has an ear, listen!
(3) Now one of this monster's heads looked as if it had been
laughed, fairly wounded, but its fatal wound had been
lethal. The whole earth went after the monster in amazement; (4) people worshipped the dragon, because it had given
authority to the monster; and they worshipped the monster,
saying: 'Who is like the monster? Who can war with it?'
(5) The monster was permitted to utter terrible blasphemous
words; it was given authority to do so for forty-two months.
(6) So it opened its mouth to utter blasphemous words against
God, against God's name and his tabernacle (that is, those
who are sheltered in heaven). (7) It was permitted to wage war
with the holy ones, and to conquer them. It was also given
authority over every tribe and people, language and nation. (8)
All those who make their home on the earth worshipped it –
everyone whose name is not inscribed in the scroll of life of
the Lamb slaughtered since the foundation of the world.

ascending out of the sea, in the person of the Roman procurator of Asia, arriving by ship at the city's harbour to take up his office in the province.

THE REVELATION OF ST JOHN

13:1-10

THE MONSTER FROM THE SEA

his return meant the monster too had recovered from this mortal wound (hence its, *adto*, rather than the feminine *adtr*), which a reference to the 'head' would require: see 13:12, 14). The use of the Nero tradition in chapter 17 will be somewhat different (for argument against Neronian allusions in this verse, see Milne 1953).

It is salutary to remember that the monster is only seen as monstrous by means of apocalyptic insight. To the naked eye, it looks impressive, beneficent and deserving of gratitude. Hence we hear that 'The whole earth went after the monster in amazement (just as at 17:6 John himself is 'amazed' at Babylon). Power may corrupt, and absolute power may corrupt absolutely: but power also entices and seduces. It is a lesson not restricted to John's first audiences, living under the shadow of imperial Rome. The whole earth cannot be the same as Mother Earth (*ty*) at 12:16, for she acts to protect God's people; rather, it refers here to the 'civilised world' of the Roman Empire, or rather that part of Rome's dominion which is orientated to earth rather than to God. The worship of the monster refers to the imperial cult, which far from being imposed from on high seems to have emerged 'from below' within provinces such as Asia (modelled on the local traditional phenomenon of the ruler cult). By the first century CE, all but Thyastra among Revelation's seven cities had temples of the imperial cult, while there is evidence in five for imperial altars and priests (Laodicea and Philadelphia excepted: Thompson 1990: 159). Given its influence on public buildings, statutory, coinage and city festivals, the worship of the emperor, alongside that of the gods, would have pervaded virtually every aspect of life. Non-participation would have been severely frowned upon by the local authorities and probably the local populace. Bold indeed would have been the Christian who attempted to avoid it completely.

The Apocalyptic view is that participation in the worship of the monster is no harmless or empty ritual: rather, those who did so also worshipped the dragon, who is the power behind the throne (cf. 1 Cor. 10:20, where idol worship is regarded as the worship of demons). The monster's seduction and deception is complete, reflected in the acclamation placed on the lips of those taken in: 'Who is like the monster? Who can wage war with it?' This is a cry embedded in the very fabric of cities such as Ephesus and Pergamum, whose architecture, inscriptions and iconography proclaim Rome as the great and invincible empire (though it also manifests itself again and again throughout human history, attached to subsequent powerful and arrogant empires). An ironic contrast is being made with the archangel Michael, whose name means 'Who is like God?' The implied reader, unlike the characters in this vision, will know that Christ's cross has enabled Michael to defeat the dragon and therefore

3-4 First-century allusions continue in the description of one of the monster's heads, which looked as if it had been slaughtered, fatally wounded (lit. 'slaughtered to death'), but its fatal wound had been healed. The verb *slaughtered* suggests a satanic parody of the slaughtered yet risen Lamb, part of that imperial propaganda which proclaimed the Emperor as Saviour and establisher of universal peace. Such messianic pretensions may also be reflected in the monster's mouth 'like a lion's mouth' (cf. 5:5). The war of words in which Revelation is engaged strikes at the very root of the imperial political machine. The fatal wound (literally 'plague of death') echoes the heavenly plagues of the trumpets and two witnesses (9:18, 20; 11:6), and suggests a divine origin. Direr's woodcut of this scene portrays one of the heads gazing into the sky, where an angel holding a wooden cross prepares to wield the death-blow with his sword. In this interpretation, it is the cross of Christ which delivers the fatal wound (see Smith 2000: 67-71).

But the statement that the monster's fatal wound had been healed almost certainly contains a further allusion to contemporary rumours and legends about the emperor Nero. Echoes of this emperor have already been detected in the Antichrist figure riding on the white horse at the opening of the first seal (see on 6:1-2). Nero's flight from Rome and the mysterious circumstances surrounding his suicide ('by the sword': see also verse 14) led to rumours that he had not died but had gone into hiding, probably beyond the Euphrates, until he could regain the imperial throne (e.g. Tacitus, *Hist.* 2.8; Suet., *Nero* 57), thus spawning a succession of 'pretenders' in 69, 80 and c. 88/89. In Jewish tradition, the terrifying consequences of his return are elaborated with apocalyptic intensity (e.g. *Sib. Or.* 4:119-24, 137-39; 5:28-34; *Asc. Isa.* 4:2-14); it is even suggested in one late first-century tradition that he would return from beyond the grave (Sib. Or. 5:363-73). These diverse traditions also reflect the ambivalence of his memory: popular amongst the Roman populace and well-regarded in the east, not least in Greece and among the Parthians, but offensive to the Roman aristocracy and viewed in more sinister terms by some Roman historians and the Jewish sources (see Bauckham 1992a: 407-23). John's vision draws upon such contemporary associations with that tyrant who was still alive and well, manifested in that monstrous empire of which Nero was such a cruel exemplar. Although it was one of the heads (Nero) which received a fatal blow,

experience even here on earth, and especially during the 'wilderness years' of hostility and persecution, God's tabernacle protection.

Revelation refers here again to the scroll of life (3:5; 17:8; 20:12, 15) 8

or the scroll of life of the Lamb (as here and at 21:27); such heavenly books or scrolls (cf. 20:12) are typical features of apocalypses. This particular scroll seems to be a heavenly ledger of names, according to which judgement will be made, a challenge to the view that humanity's destiny is in the hands of chance. Nevertheless, such a scroll raises theological difficulties, as it seems to suggest some kind of predestination to eternal life. Yet we are not told the grounds on which someone's name is inscribed in that scroll, and the earlier opportunities for repentance challenge the view that being listed on it is predetermined and unrelated to human response (e.g. 2:5, 16, 21; 3:3, 19; 9:20-21; 11:13). All we are told is that it is possible to have one's name removed from it, on the basis of one's infidelity or lack of commitment (see 3:5, where assurance of one's name not being blotted out is dependent on winning the victory; cf. Exod. 32:32-33). The issue is compounded by debate about the phrase since the foundation of the world. It is possible that this should be taken with the verb inscribed, hence suggesting that the names have been in the scroll since the beginning of time (as in the parallel at 17:8). Yet this interpretation may simply be a statement of divine foreknowledge rather than divine will: God knows from the beginning those who will choose him, and those who will choose to reject him. The apocalyptic tradition regularly spoke of pre-existent entities, in the mind of God from the beginning (such as the new Temple, the Torah, and even the Messiah). More likely, however, is that one should take seriously the natural order of the Greek in this verse, according to which the Lamb has been slaughtered since the foundation of the world. In a book which so often presents earthly realities from the perspective of heavenly rather than human time, the decisive salvific act would then be presented from such a perspective.

Indeed, it is the perspective from which Christ's death would have been viewed in Revelation's likely 'theatre of reception', the Eucharist, in which Christ's death is proclaimed until he comes (1 Cor. 11:26). There is a close parallel at 1 Pet. 1:19-20, which speaks of Christ the spotless Lamb being destined 'before the foundation of the world'; similarly, Peter's Pentecost speech envisages Christ's death as according to the plan and foreknowledge of God (Acts 2:23). The slaughter of the Lamb, and its salvific effects, are not some late afterthought, but were central to God's plan from the beginning.

The vision of this terrifying monster concludes with a call to listen, a 9-10

its monstrous offspring. At 11:7 the monster from the Abyss has been foreseen, the one who would wage war with the two witnesses, overcome them and kill them. But the broader canvas presents an alternative victory, achieved not by killing but by being killed. Rome's empire, like Daniel's succession of four monster-empires, may rise but it also ultimately falls.

5-7 The monster's limited reign is described in further detail. The repeated was permitted or was given (ἐδόθη) may still have the dragon as its antecedent, as in verse 2, where it actively gives its authority to the monster. However, it is more likely that John has moved to a succession of divine passives, with God as the implied agent. However powerful the monster appears to be, and however much it threatens the Church, God is ultimately in control and Revelation ultimately rejects a cosmic dualism which would regard the world as hopelessly locked in a battle between two opposing gods or principles of good and evil. God may not actively will the activity of the monster, but God's world is such that it is allowed to function. The empire's arrogance and assumption of divine prerogatives, like its persecution of God's people, is permitted only for the limited period of forty-two months (cf. 11:2-3; 12:6, 14).

Blasphemous words against God and against God's name are relatively clear (see on verse 1); what is meant by the final part of verse 6 is less so. If one follows the *lectio difficilior* (rather than the variant reading, in heaven are synonymous. For this reading there are several possible interpretations. First, these phrases mean the natural inhabitants of heaven and the heavenly tabernacle, Michael and the angels. But it is difficult to see what might be meant by uttering blasphemous words against angels (see Caird 1966: 166). Moreover, similar language has been used elsewhere of God who have already been explicitly those faithful servants of God who have already been witnessed in heaven: the martyrs, now located under the heavenly altar (6:9-11). They are being blasphemed or slandered on a cosmic level, just as their brethren in Smyrna were in localised legal proceedings (2:9). Yet this might be too restrictive, given the parallels in 11:1 and 12:12. Most likely, we should understand this in its broader sense, to refer to all God's faithful who are oriented towards heaven, that is towards God (in contrast to those who make their home on the earth), of κατ'οικονομίαν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, who worship the monster: verse 8; cf. 3:10; 6:10; 8:13; 11:10; 13:12, 14; 14:6; 17:2, 8). They

monster, in the presence of that monster, forcing the earth and those who make their home in it to worship the first monster, whose fatal wound had been healed. (13) It also performed great miraculous signs, even making fire descend from heaven to the earth before people's eyes, (14) and it led astray those who make their home on the earth by the miraculous signs it was permitted to perform in the presence of the monster. It told those who make their home on the earth to make a statue for the monster, which was wounded by the sword but came back to life. (15) It was also permitted to breathe a spirit of life into the statue of the monster, so that the monster's statue could speak. And it was permitted to have all those who refused to worship the monster's statue killed. (16) It forced everyone – the little ones and the great, the rich and poor, freemen and slaves – to receive a branded mark on their right hand or on their forehead, (17) so that no one could buy or sell anything unless they had the branded mark showing the name of the monster or the number of its name. (18) This calls for wisdom! Let the one who has insight figure out the number of the monster, for it is the number of a human being: its number is six hundred and sixty-six.

A second monster now emerges, this time ascending out of the earth, suggesting the male Behemoth, separated at creation from the female Leviathan (e.g. 4 *Ez.* 6:4-7-54; 1 *En.* 60:7-10; 2 *Bar.* 29:4); in Dan. 7:17 the four monsters from the sea (Dan. 7:3) are interpreted as four kings who are said to arise 'from the earth'. The phrase out of the earth suggests a subterranean creature, paralleling the first monster's emergence out of the sea, and the locusts' coming out of the Abyss at 9:3. Nevertheless, it belongs to the realm of human activity, the 'earth' (and possibly more specifically the 'land' of Roman Asia).

John's description of this second monster anticipates its ability to lead human beings astray (verse 14). First, it has two horns like a lamb's horns (as opposed to the 'ten horns' of the first monster, suggesting its more limited power and its dependence on its predecessor). Hence it is another satanic parody of the slaughtered yet risen Lamb: its lamb-like appearance, without the assistance of apocalyptic insight, could easily lead to a case of mistaken identity, even amongst Christians (cf. 2:20-23). When it opens its mouth, however, it speaks like a dragon. Its ultimate dependence upon Satan, whose words it utters rather than the true words of God, becomes clear.

The twofold function of the second monster is elaborated on in verse 12. First, it acts on behalf of and with the full authority of the

(11) Then I saw another monster ascending out of the earth, which had two horns like a lamb's horns, but which spoke like a dragon. (12) It exercised the full authority of the first

13:11-18) *Third Vision: The Monster from the Earth*

more important as the narrative continues.

to the Apocalypse (Bonhoeffer 1965: 324). Such a call will be all the German churches to become a distinctive community which listened of Nazi dominance in 1930s Germany, Dietrich Bonhoeffer urged the is a call that has resounded across the centuries. Against the backdrop and 17:9 (preceding the explanation of the monster's seven heads). It monster), 14:12 (following the pronouncements of the three angels), calls to attention will occur at 13:18 (in relation to the number of the to foreign powers available to Jews, see A. Y. Collins 1977). Further and even martyrdom, is effective (on the various forms of resistance of Christians, but suggests that perseverance in the face of suffering, John and his fellow-Christians (1:9). It eschews violence on the part normal translation 'endurance' might suggest, is one shared between ones. The virtue of perseverance, a more active attitude than the Finally, there is a call for the faithful perseverance of the holy (βόηφαλα: 1:16; 2:12; 16: 19:15, 21).

death (e.g. 6:4; 13:14), as opposed to the sword of God's word has βόηφαλα: the Apocalypse seems to use μαχαίρα of violent here for 'sword' is μαχαίρα (as in Jer. 15:2; contrast 43:11, which Which ever reading is preferred, it is significant that the word used attempts at clarification, influenced by Jesus' words in Mt. 26:52. variations on 'if anyone kills by the sword', apparently scribal important fifth-century Codex Alexandrinus. Other readings are the minority reading 'Anyone to be killed by a sword, found in the between the two parts of the proverb, suggest that we should prefer calling, so be it. The background in Jeremiah, and the parallelism imprisonment and even martyrdom are required by their prophetic though spiritually protected, cannot be immune from suffering. If strand running through the preceding chapters that God's people, (cf. Jer. 43:11). In its present context, it serves to emphasise the The proverb which begins verse 10 is closely modelled on Jer. 15:2 the voice of the exalted Christ to be interrupting at this point also.

lips of the someone like a son of man, we should perhaps understand the audience, to a saying which requires particular attention. Given the Gospel parallel, and its earlier occurrences in Revelation on the command and serves as a literary device alerting the reader, and therefore Jesus (e.g. Mk 4:9, 23): 'Let anyone who has an ear, listen! The conclusion to the seven messages, and echoes a synoptic saying of

and life of their own, this wider reading of the false prophet's identity is an appealing one.

Being a false prophet as well as a parody of Christ, this monster evidences the appropriate tools of the trade, Jewish and early Christian tradition expected evil eschatological figures as well as good, figures would deceive many by performing miraculous deeds. Mark 13:22 specifically envisages that false messiahs and false prophets would arise in the last days to perform signs and wonders (cf. 2 Thess. 2:9). There were even such traditions associated with the returning Nero (*Sib. Or.* 3:63-67). Revelation's false prophet emulates John's great hero Elijah, by making fire descend from heaven to the earth before people's eyes (1 Kgs 18:38; cf. Rev. 11:5-6). As in the Gospel tradition, the discernment of true and false prophecy is a particularly difficult task: it certainly cannot be decided on the basis of miraculous signs, but is judged more acutely by the fruits which it bears (Mt. 7:15-23; cf. 1 Cor. 14:26-33; *Dial.* 11:3-6).

In what appear to be allusions to the corrupting influence of Asia's emperor cult, as well as the shameful episode of the golden calf (Exod. 32:1-35), the monster from the earth encourages the making of a statue for the monster from the sea. The word used is literally 'image' (Greek *eikōn*), although it almost certainly refers here to a cult statue of the emperor, examples of which would have adorned temples across the empire (the word can also refer to the image of the emperor on coins, which may be significant for verses 16-17). In a shocking parody of the divine action in relation to the two witnesses (11:11). It was also permitted to breathe a spirit of life into the statue of the monster, so that the monster's statue could speak. Steven Scherrer has provided detailed evidence for elaborate boxes associated with pagan cults: statues which were able to 'speak' by a combination of puppetry, subdued lighting and ventriloquism (e.g. Lucian, *Alex.* 12-26). He also hypothesises that lightning machines designed for use in the theatre may have been used in every indication, specifically the imperial cult (Scherrer 1984). There is that it has been permitted to have all those who refused to worship Satan via his minion, rather than just an elaborate trick. The claim that it was permitted to have all those who refused to worship the monster's statue killed may be an allusion to the past martyrdoms under Nero, or, on the other hand, a visionary account of errors yet to come.

Idolatry is subtle, and eventually affects every area of human life, as the worshippers and themselves under a new lordship. Thus those persuaded to worship the monster are forced to receive a branded mark (Greek *χρυσίαν*) on their right hand or on their

Second, it promotes the worship of the first monster among those who make their home in the earth (for this phrase see on 3:10). The Greek construction used suggests a strong element of compulsion. Overshadowed by this monster, and still more by the first monster and the furious dragon, humanity is not free.

With whom should this second monster be identified? There are three main possibilities. The most obvious is that this monster represents the local lackeys of the arrogant empire (in John's eyes incarnated in Rome). This could be specifically the priests of the imperial cult, or, given the interpenetration of religion, culture and politics, the wider local elite who profited from Rome's local dominance and considered it their duty to promote the grateful worship of Rome and her emperors. The emphasis upon worship favours this solution in some form.

A second interpretation emphasises the later description of this monster as the 'false prophet' (16:13; 19:20; 20:10). Some commentators note that, elsewhere in the New Testament, false prophecy is largely an internal problem for the Church (Garrow 1997: 88-91). And elsewhere in Revelation, 'false prophets' have emerged within the seven congregations in the persons of 'Balaam' and 'Jezabel' (2:14, 20). Both renegade Christians have re-emerged here in the person of the second monster. This explanation is appealing insofar as it recognises the extent to which this monster will be associated with false prophecy. On its own, however, it fails to do justice to the wide appeal of the monster to the dominant population outside the churches, or the strong echoes of the imperial cult. 'Balaam' and 'Jezabel' are rather examples of how easily Christians can be implicated in the work of the second monster/false prophet, rather than representing that monster *in toto* (if that were correct, then it would follow that 'Jezabel' is to be equated with Babylon in Revelation 17, for there are also strong similarities between these two). It does serve, however, as an important secondary reading, a potent warning that Christian religion can become false and even demonic, if it loses its ability to speak the prophetic word.

Third, some commentators have opted for a more general interpretation, which picks up on elements of the other two, but avoids the restrictions of either. In the words of Eugene Borning: 'All who support and promote the cultural religion, in or out of the church, however Lamb-like they may appear, are agents of the monster. All propaganda that entices humanity to idolize human empire is an expression of this beastly power that wants to appear Lamb-like' (Borning 1989: 157; see also Smalley 2005: 345f.). Given the way in which Roman allusions have attached themselves to visionary creatures such as Daniel's four monsters, which already had a prehistory

forehead. Although some have suggested that ὁ ἀρχαῖος refers here to the emperor's image on coins (Caird 1966: 173), its location on the right hand and forehead would seem to rule this out. It is probably an allusion to the branded mark or tattoo imposed on slaves or prisoners of war, often made on the forehead, which proclaimed that its recipient now belonged to another. The Jewish John would probably also detect a demonic parody of contemporary Jewish practice, whereby physical characteristics containing words of the *Shema* were bound on the forehead and the left hand (Charles 1920: I, 362). The mark imposed on the worshippers of the monster is the antithesis of the true worship of Israel's One God. Nor does it distinguish between social or economic groupings; all of rebellious humanity is affected: the little ones and the great, the rich and poor, freedmen and slaves. The irony of the last doublet is that freedmen find themselves once again under slavery, though this time of a more pervasive and far-reaching kind.

But whatever allusions underlie this description, the branded mark is not a physical mark but a symbolic one. It cannot be seen by the naked eye (any more than the sealing of God's servants), but only in apocalyptic vision. It is the demonic counterpart to those who have the name or seal of God or the Lamb on their foreheads (7:3; 14:1). It is a mark of ownership, a reminder that where your treasure is, there will your heart be also (Mt. 6:21). It marks out those who belong to this earth from those who belong to heaven.

Yet if idolatry is so all-consuming, it will have an inevitable economic aspect too. In John's day, the branded mark revealed a family resemblance between those who possessed it and its presence on imperial coinage. Revelation's earlier reference to the silver denarius (6:6) shows that Roman coins bearing images of and inscriptions to the heads of the monster were well known to the audiences to whom his book was first addressed. Now the monster from the earth takes one further step: the emperor cult, along with the worship of traditional gods, was so thoroughly integrated into the lives of the cities, including their commercial and economic lives, that participation in any aspect necessitated participation in all others: no-one could buy or sell anything unless they had the branded mark showing the name of the monster or the number of its name. There have already been hints of this in the messages to Pergamum and Thyatira, where the extent of Christian participation in the trade guilds and wider civic life seems to be the issue in hand (2:12–29). Revelation utters a warning about the slippery slope that such involvement entailed. It echoes one interpretation of the 'taxes to Caesar' pericope of Mk 12:13–17 and parallels, whereby Jesus, by not possessing an imperial coin himself, shows his opponents implicated in an economic system by which he is untouched.

Additional Note 2: The number of the monster

The branded mark is now accompanied by the number of its name. This wording suggests that some kind of *gematria* is called for (the practice, common in the ancient world, of arriving at a person's number by adding together the numerical equivalent of each letter of their name). That this requires careful reflection is highlighted by another call to attention (cf. 13:10; 14:12, 17:9): This calls for wisdom! The one who has insight is invited to figure out the number of the monster: it is possible that the singular ὁ ἐχθρὸς refers to the reader of the Apocalypse in the liturgical assembly, who would be expected to stop reading at this point and explain the number's significance (cf. 1:3; Neh. 8:8; Mk 13:14). Alternatively, it is an indication that Revelation was not designed to be read only once, but to be reread and carefully studied for its deeper secrets to be unveiled. The number is given: six hundred and sixty-six (a variant reading found in B⁵⁴ and known to Irenaeus (Iren. Adv. Haer. 5.30.1) is 616). What is required is to correlate the number, the monster, and the name of a human being (though the Greek could just mean 'a human number', i.e. an earthly mode of calculation: cf. the similar phrase at 21:17, of the system of measurement used by the angel). The most likely solution, which explains both numbers, is Nero Caesar.

Almost every generation has been fascinated with the invitation of Rev. 13:18 to calculate the number of the monster, or 'the number of the beast'. The number 666 has left a vivid impression on Western culture far beyond the boundaries of the Christian Church. History is littered with now-discredited attempts to uncover the name behind the number. Candidates have included Julian the Apostate, Pope Innocent IV and Pope Benedict XI (the Latin *Innocentius Papa* and the Greek Βενεδίκτος both give the required number, as does the papal title *Vicarius Filii Dei*), Napoleon Bonaparte, and Patritach Nikon of Moscow, scourge of the Russian Old Believers. In more recent times, Adolf Hitler, Ronald Wilson Reagan (whose three names each contains six letters), Bill Gates III and Saddam Hussein have added to the roll-call. Others prefer a less personal solution: the number 666, it is claimed, is hidden in barcodes of the Uniform Product Code System, or in the word COMPUTER itself (according to the numerical alphabet employed by the World Bank). Where all these interpretations fail, of course, is in their untellability either to John himself or to the members of the seven congregations to whom Revelation was first read. However, many of them have correctly recognised that there is a correlation between numbers and letters of the alphabet, such that adding up the